EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Newly-published English course books under microscope: An exploration of teachers’ views about the Prospect series

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Abstract: With the advent of numerous newly-published English course books, textbook evaluation has turned into a very critical area in English Language Teaching (ELT). This paper aims to evaluate the English textbooks being taught in Iranian Junior high school (Prospect series). In so doing, an evaluation questionnaire was distributed among 27 female and 42 male junior high school teachers. Having collected the survey data, in order to obtain a richer understanding of teachers’ opinions, follow-up interviews were conducted with 11 teachers. The results indicate that although Prospect series can be considered a breakthrough in comparison to the previous English textbooks, they suffer from some critical shortcomings in terms of activities, methodology, topics, design, and insufficiency of teaching hours. Overall, the findings suggested that the textbooks fell short of Iranian teachers’ expectations and need critical improvements to reach their bests. Results of the present study have implications both for English material developers and curriculum planners.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In this study, the researchers carried out a mixed-methods teachers-led evaluation to examine the effectiveness of Iranian junior high school English textbooks. The study was designed to collect Iranian EFL teachers’ views about newly-published Iranian English textbooks in Iran. Taking the findings of the research into consideration, the researchers provided recommendations and implications which can be helpful for curriculum designers and English textbooks authors in Iran and other EFL contexts. Teachers’ views as the most significant users of textbooks, can bring up critical implications which need be carefully collected and considered for future revisions of the textbooks and development of other English textbooks.
Subjects: Program Evaluation; Evaluation/Program Evaluation; Language Teaching & Learning

Keywords: Prospect series; teachers’ view; teaching English; textbook evaluation

1. Introduction

English textbooks are among the most significant constituents of any language programs (Harwood, 2014; McDonough et al., 2013; McGrath, 2013; Tomlinson, 2012). They provide English learners with sufficient input to rehearse and are mostly deemed as reliable sources of ideas extraction for less experienced teachers to plan and teach in their classes (McDonough et al., 2013; Richards, 2001). Similarly, Tomlinson and Masuhara (2017) maintain that English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks are the input providers which enhance the likelihood of learners’ intake and purposeful output.

In Iran, all course books of state schools, including EFL (English as a Foreign Language) course books are developed by the textbook curriculum development and planning department of the Ministry of Education. Owing to a series of criticisms leveled against previous school textbooks (Farhady, 2000; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006), Prospect 1, 2, and 3 being the first three parts of the six-volume series of English for High Schools, have been developed based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles by the Ministry of Education (Alavimoghdam et al., 2013, 2014, 2015) to be utilized as the English course books for junior high school students.

As this course books are new-comers and taught to all Iranian students, naturally they need continual evaluations to reach their best. Also, as Alamri (2008) believes, coursebook evaluation is “an educational necessity because it shows how a textbook can be improved or justified” (p. 3). Additionally, Tomlinson and Masuhara (2017) state that, textbook evaluation is necessary to measure or predict the effects and values of newly published ELT textbooks.

Although some studies attempted to evaluate these textbooks (Abdi et al., 2017; Goodarzi et al., 2020; Kamyabi Gol & Baghaeeeyan, 2015; Namaziandost et al., 2019; Shahmohammadi, 2018), this series lacks a qualitative and quantitative evaluative study exploring teachers’ views about all aspects of the Prospect series such as practical considerations, layout and design, activities, skills, language type, subject and content, and conclusions. Hence, this study was conducted utilizing surveys and interviews in order to grasp an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the Prospect series.

2. Literature review

2.1. Textbook evaluation

ELT Textbooks are developed to link teaching process to learning (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017). McGrath (2013) claims that, ELT textbooks are of prime importance as they establish the learning and teaching direction, provide educational contents, and to some extents, manipulate how the contents should be taught.

Despite the unquestionable merits of textbooks, there are critical issues, which necessitate course book evaluation:

1. Course books do not commonly enjoy a high amount of flexibility and portray the pedagogic, psychological, and linguistic inclinations and preferences of their developers (McDonough et al., 2013)

2. They can embody serious social and cultural predispositions, such as sexism, racism, and stereotyping (Herman, 2007; Mustapha, 2013)

3. They can be too limited and unnatural in presenting different aspects of the target language (Gray, 2016)
(4) They can impede teachers from employing their creativity if they are needed “…to follow the course books sequence to the letter” (Skierso, 1991, p. 432)

(5) The course books can confine the teacher’s role to a mediator who is obliged to teach and practice the imposed materials (Ur, 1997).

Therefore, to avoid such limitations when course books are employed in ELT programs and to check the suitability of textbooks for a setting, a context, or a community of learners, textbook evaluation becomes a necessity. Tomlinson et al. (2001) state that textbook evaluation is “an applied linguistic activity through which teachers, supervisors, administrators, and material developers can make judgments about the effect of the materials on the people using them” (p. 15). Many studies have emphasized that the crucial part played by textbook evaluation ELT process (McDonough et al., 2013; Gray, 2016; McGrath, 2013; Tomlinson, 2012, to name a few).

Many researchers believe that classroom teachers can be considered as the ideal EFL textbook evaluators as they are able to manage, evaluate, and establish the teaching program and textbooks with a look at their class context (McDonough et al., 2013; Tomlinson, 2012). Accordingly, Nunan (1987) states that:

Teachers can design, implement, and evaluate their own curriculum and they see themselves as having primary responsibility for all of the above tasks. Some of them feel that syllabus development should be carried out by experts and government authorities and believe that they were being asked to undertake tasks for which they were not sufficiently trained (p. 8).

On the other hand, Brown (2001) believes that teachers as the direct manipulators of textbooks can guarantee their effectiveness; therefore, it is highly recommended to rely on teachers’ evaluation of the textbooks. Likewise, since textbooks support teachers in all language classrooms, adapting textbooks to their classroom becomes a vital part of teachers’ professional knowledge. Moreover, as teaching textbooks reveals the problems of teaching materials, teachers would be the ones who are thoroughly aware of the drawbacks of textbooks. All the above-mentioned studies delineate that teachers’ judgments are highly valuable and should be embraced in a textbook evaluation program to reach a more exact perspective toward a textbook; an issue which has created the foundation of this study.

2.2. Prospect series textbook evaluation studies
Since the Prospect series is roughly newly published (2013–2015) textbooks, few evaluative studies have examined them. For instance, Sardabi and Koosha (2015) compared the Prospect series with the former English textbooks of Iranian junior high schools. They revealed that even though the Prospect series does not cover up some of the shortfalls and lacks of former textbooks, the new series based on the Communicative Language Teaching syllabus is, to a great extent, a step forward towards constructing an up-to-date series for teaching English in Iranian schools. However, in their study, no internal analysis based on evaluation frameworks was utilized and they just explored six Iranian EFL teachers’ ideas about the Prospect series which do not seem to provide reliable data.

In another study conducted by Zohoorian et al. (2018), the motivational design of Prospect 1 was examined employing Keller’s ARCS model (Keller, 2010) (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction). In their study, the questionnaire was filled out by 384 junior high school students and among the invited students, 11 accepted to attend unstructured interviews. The findings of their study showed that the students did not have a high amount of motivation to use this textbook for learning English. It was also found that, while Confidence and Relevance were the areas in which Prospect 1 was effective, the students’ Satisfaction and Attention showed to be undesirable.

Besides, Goodarzi et al. (2020) utilizing a CLT model examined Cognitive, Communicative, and Creative potentials of Prospect series. They found that while the textbooks aimed to follow the CLT approach, they were not successful in fulfilling communicative, cognitive, and creative potentials
adequately and some crucial elements of CLT, for example, strategy instruction, use of authentic materials, and skills integration were neglected. Moreover, their results indicated that the emphasis on Iranian culture has damaged the sociocultural aspects of CLT.

Similarly, Namazian-Doost et al. (2019) carried out a study on the Prospects in which they examined the utilized speech acts of Directives, Assertives, Commissives, Declaratives and Expressives in the textbooks. In so doing, all the speech acts included in conversations of this series were extracted and counted based on Searle’s (1976) speech acts model. Their results suggested that Assertives and Declaratives were, respectively, the most and the least frequent speech acts in the Prospects. They also found that the speech acts did not enjoy an equal distribution in this series. Much similar to Goodarzi et al. (2020), although this study added valuable data to the literature, teachers’ views about all aspects of the Prospect series such as practical considerations, layout and design, activities, skills, language type, subject and content, and conclusions, were absent in the data collection procedure.

Much similar to the present study, Shahmohammadi (2018) utilized a questionnaire derived from the literature to evaluate the Prospect series from teachers’ points of views. To do so, 34 teachers from Azerbaijan provinces in Iran filled out the questionnaire. Furthermore, 8 teachers from the same provinces attended unstructured interviews to express their views regarding the strength and weak points of the series. The results of her study revealed that pronunciation, task and activities are the sections of the Prospects which require improvements and revisions. This study is valuable in this area; however, it lacks some considerations in course book evaluations studies. Firstly, some issues are not included in the employed questionnaire, such as cultural biasedness, topics, accessibility, price, and teachers’ overall views. Secondly, the number of the teachers filled out the questionnaire does not seem to be adequate to represent the population. Thirdly, no theme extraction procedure was utilized in this study, and consequently, no clear themes and inter-coder reliability were reported. Finally, in her study, although the questionnaire employed was developed based on the literature, any reliability and validity measures were not reported for the instruments.

All in all, available literature lacks comprehensive mixed-method research evaluating the Prospect series collecting data from teachers’ viewpoints. Meanwhile, all the studies examining Iranian Junior high school English textbooks failed to evaluate all three volumes of the Prospect series together. Hence, this study was carried out to examine the Prospect series based on teachers’ views through Litz’s questionnaires (2005) and interviews. In so doing, the following research questions were proposed to guide the study;

1. What are the English teachers’ views about the Prospect series being taught in secondary schools?

2. How do the teachers explain their views toward the Prospect series?

3. Method
To triangulate the data as well as taking into consideration the purpose of the present research, the researchers adopted a mixed methods explanatory design (Creswell et al., 2003). To answer the research questions, the study applied a sequential explanatory model which is identified by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data (Bryman et al., 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). In this model, typically the quantitative data are primary, and the integration of the quantitative and qualitative methods in interpreting the data is essential. Our primary quantitative data were extracted through questionnaires and the supporting qualitative data came from follow-up interviews.

3.1. Participants
Owing to practical reasons, the teachers participating in this study were not randomly selected, so the convenience sampling as a non-probability sampling was applied (Ary et al., 2018). In this
regards, except for three teachers from other provinces of Iran who filled out the questionnaire and took part in online interviews (two from Markazi and one from Khuzestan), all the other participants of the study taught at state schools in Lorestan (a province in the west of Iran).

A sample of 69 teachers with 13 years of teaching experience in average participated in the study and filled out the questionnaires. The participants of the study were all public sector teachers with different university degrees (B.A., M.A., and Ph.D.) who were teaching or had taught at least one year in junior high schools.

After gathering all the questionnaires from the participants, the teachers were asked to participate in the interviews and nine male and two female teachers accepted the invitation. The participants were selected from those teachers who managed to complete the questionnaire of the study. The demographic information of the participants who completed the questionnaire is presented in Tables 1 and 2. (Pseudonyms are used in the study).

### 3.2. Instrumentations

#### 3.2.1. Questionnaire

To gather quantitative data from the participants, a 40-item questionnaire was utilized which was prepared by Litz (2005) (Appendix A) at Sung Kyun Kwan University in South Korea. As the questionnaire explored issues which provided information about all aspects of the Prospects including the practical considerations (e.g., price, accessories, and methodology), layout and design, activities, skills, cultural considerations, subjects and topics, and employed language

| Gender | Education level | Teaching Experience | Total |
|--------|-----------------|---------------------|-------|
| Female | Male            | B.A | M.A. | Ph.D. | 1–10 | 11–20 | 21–30 |       |
| Survey | 27              | 42  | 48   | 19    | 2    | 32    | 24    | 13    | 69   |
| Interview | 2              | 9   | 7    | 3     | 1    | 3     | 8     | -     | 11   |

| Particpants | Gender | Education level | Teaching Experience | Interview Date |
|-------------|--------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Ahmad       | "      | "              | "                   | 7/2/2018        |
| Alireza     | "      | "              | "                   | 7/2/2018        |
| Farzad      | "      | "              | "                   | 7/15/2018       |
| Massomeh    | "      | "              | "                   | 8/20/2018       |
| Davood      | "      | "              | "                   | 8/4/2018        |
| Hossein     | "      | "              | "                   | 8/16/2018       |
| Abbas       | "      | "              | "                   | 8/23/2018       |
| Mahdi       | "      | "              | "                   | 8/3/2018        |
| Zahra       | "      | "              | "                   | 8/9/2018        |
| Reza        | "      | "              | "                   | 9/2/2018        |
| Mohammadm   | "      | "              | "                   | 9/2/2018        |
varieties, it was expected to draw significantly beneficial information about teachers’ views and concerns which may have otherwise remained unnoticed. Although the original questionnaires were semantic differential scales but in the present study, for the sake of convenience and easiness of answering from the eye of the participants, it was converted into a Likert type; hence, the participants were requested to select among “strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree”.

Moreover, in line with recommendation of Saris and Gallhofer (2014), to ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument prior to the main study, the questionnaire was analyzed and got adapted to the context of the study in the field by two experts in ELT, and then, it was also piloted with a sample of 20 teachers from the same population to check the reliability and validity of the instrument. No significant problem was detected during the pilot study and an acceptable Cronbach’s Alpha reliability index of 0.80 was obtained from the gather data (Table 3).

3.2.2. Interviews
After the distribution of questionnaires, the teachers who were willing to have an interview with one of the researchers were inquired of their general ideas about Prospect series. The questions were mainly based on the items included in the questionnaire (Appendix B).

3.3. Data collection procedure
The textbook evaluation for the present study involved two phases; in the first phase, teachers evaluated the Prospect series by filling out questionnaires; and in the second phase, 11 teachers attended follow-up interviews.

Initially, the original questionnaire developed by Litz (2005) was distributed among the teachers of Prospect series. Then, the gathered data were fed into SPSS to be analyzed.

Secondly, the teachers who were willing to take part in a set of follow-up interviews, in which the participants were asked to elaborate on their selected items, were guided by the researchers to explain their own experiences with the intended textbooks. The interviews were administered in Persian to eschew any possible misunderstanding, and on average, each interview lasted for about 25 minutes. Drawing upon guidelines provided in Berg (2001), Cohen et al. (2000), and Seidman (2006), all interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English by the researchers to extract and report their themes. Further, to analyze the results of the interviews, a three-stage process of open coding, axial coding, and labeling were adopted by two coders (the researchers) (Merriam, 2009). Firstly, 55 meaning statements were extracted from the transcriptions, and then based on their relevance, they were categorized into 5 main themes. Finally, in order to check the reliability of this coding procedure, in accordance with Viera and Garrett (2005), inter-coder Cronbach’s Kappa was calculated and showed the high agreement of 0.640 between coders (Table 4).

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Teachers’ opinions toward the Prospect series
To examine the teachers’ views toward the Prospect series, a piloted and validated questionnaire originally developed by Litz (2005) was employed together with follow-up interviews with some teachers. The following sections provide results regarding the overall attitudes of the teachers

| Table 3. Reliability of the questionnaire |
|------------------------------------------|
| Cronbach’s Alpha                        | N of Items |
| .804                                    | 40         |
toward the Prospect series obtained from descriptive analysis along with the frequency-based results of the questionnaire and extracted themes of interviews. After descriptive analysis (Appendix C), 11 items with means inclined toward one end of the agreement and disagreement continuum or beyond the uncertainty area (less than 2 or more than 4) were considered to be significant among the teachers’ opinions (Table 5).

### Table 4. Inter-coder Cronbach’s kappa of teachers’ interviews

| Measure of Agreement | Value | Asymptotic Standardized Error | Approximate T | Approximate Significance |
|----------------------|-------|-------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Kappa                | .640  | .092                          | 6.509         | .000                     |
| N of Valid Cases     | 55    |                               |               |                          |

### Table 5. Descriptive statistics of teachers’ opinions about the Prospect series

| Questions                                                                 | N | Mini. | Max. | Mean  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|-------|------|-------|
| 1. The price of the textbook is reasonable.                               | 69| 1     | 4    | 1.97* |
| 2. The textbook is easily accessible.                                     | 69| 1     | 5    | 1.75* |
| 13. The materials objectives are apparent to both the teacher and student.| 69| 1     | 5    | 4.16* |
| 14. The textbook provides a balance of activities                         | 69| 1     | 5    | 4.14* |
| 25. The practice of individual skills is integrated into the practice of other skills. | 69| 1     | 5    | 4.28* |
| 26. The language used in the textbook is authentic—i.e. like real-life English. | 69| 1     | 5    | 4.22* |
| 28. The progression of grammar points and vocabulary items is appropriate. | 69| 2     | 5    | 4.43* |
| 32. The subject and content of the textbook are relevant to my students’ needs as an English language learner(s). | 69| 1     | 5    | 4.06* |
| 33. The subject and content of the textbook are generally realistic.       | 69| 1     | 5    | 4.14* |

(Continued)
To check the direction of the significant relations, the frequencies of chosen options were calculated and are displayed in Table 6.

According to Table 6, around 80 percent of the teacher participants in item 1 and 2 asserted that the Prospects have reasonable prices and are easily accessible. The reasonability of the prices might be rooted in the issue that Iran’s Educational System has its own publication center which receives a budget from the government to purchase its needed paper. Moreover, recently all coursebooks published by the Educational System are distributed among the students by school staff. Accordingly, the government indirectly helps the students buy their coursebooks for lower prices and directly hand them out to the students; however, Ali, one of teachers who participated in this study, believed that,

The coursebooks are not given to the teachers and if we need them, we have to borrow them from our graduated students.

Conversely, Ahmad alleged that,

I use the online PDF files of the Prospects which are much more comfortable than the hard copies.

| Questions                                                                 | N | Mini. | Max. | Mean  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-------|------|-------|
| 36. The materials are not culturally biased and they do not portray any negative stereotypes. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 4.17* |
| 40. I would choose to teach this textbook again.                          | 69 | 1     | 5    | 4.19* |

Table 5. (Continued)

| Questions                                                                 | N | Mini. | Max. | Mean  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-------|------|-------|
| Valid N                                                                   | 69 |       |      |       |
The ease of access and the reasonability of the prices of the Prospects have also been confirmed in other studies such as, Asadi et al. (2016) and Torki and Chalak (2017).

It can be observed that the series' lack of clear objectives was an item with which teachers evidently disagreed (70%). Accordingly, Hossein, a teacher having 18 year of teaching experience from Doroud, asserted that,

... in Prospect 1, there is a kind of confusion among students whether they should learn how to write, speak, or just see the given sentence examples in practice sections of the book Davood, a teacher having taught English for 8 years added,

... as the alphabet letters are introduced gradually in Prospect 1, how I can ask my students to practice the sentences in which there are letters to which they are totally strange?

Davood’s claims here can be rooted in the fact that, the students he worked with were not familiar with English letters, as in deprived areas of Lorestan province students normally do not go to English classes before the formal instruction begins for them at schools. In this regard, for such students, Prospect 1 can be considered as the first English textbook they engage with; therefore, it should be more adapted to the needs of beginner English learners.

On the other hand, the above-mentioned ambiguities caused the students to embark on their first language to flee from the intolerable pressure of facing new learning materials and write Persian equivalents of the pronunciation of English sentences and words. Teachers generally ask students not to write down Persian translations in their course books; however, their efforts remain futile as the large number of students in each class and limited teaching hours per week prevent the teachers from creating the needed connections between the English materials and the students. Moreover, what adds more fuel to this fire is lack of access to the Internet or bilingual dictionaries for all Iranian students.

This haphazard presentation of new lessons in this series continued to the point that, not only are Prospect 2 and 3 deprived of grammatical explanations, they are also careless about the information loads of the introduced grammatical structures. For example, the various grammatical points and structures such as, “to be verbs”, “yes/no and Wh-questions”, “simple present/post”, “can”, “there is/are”, “subject/object pronouns”, “possessive adjectives” and “adverbs” are presented intensively in these two text books. Meanwhile, this showed to be an approved issue by teachers in item 28 (Table 6), as around 74% of them did not consent to the progression of grammatical and vocabulary in the Prospect series. This finding highly correlates with Asadi et al. (2016) and Kaffash et al. (2018).

The teachers also believed that the series was not so successful in providing a balance of activities as only 18% of them agreed that this parity exists (Table 6). According to Pinter (2006, p. 55), “learning to speak fluently and accurately is one of the greatest challenges for all language learners”, and this challenge exacerbates when textbooks are underprivileged in terms of various fluency and accuracy activities. Ahmad also believed that,

Most of the activities in the series are guided and do not invoke creativity.

Assigning a part in the Prospects to rehearse fixed phrases orally, entitled “Practice”, sheds more light on the overlooked basis of creativity in the Prospects. Although in some sections such as “Role Play”, it has been tried to encourage students to have spontaneous conversations in pairs, lack of needed instructions in these sections and students’ limited grammatical and vocabulary knowledge at that level, hinder them from making an acceptable connection with such activities. This
issue was also notified in Kansir and Mahammadifard (2015) encouraging the author to add more activities which evoke learners’ creativity.

Apparently, this series was also unsuccessful in integrating skills in activities (item 25); however, Littlewood and William (1981) declare that one of the key principles of communicative pedagogy is to teach skills in an integrated manner. In addition, Nunan (1989) argues skills integration to be an important feature of language learning, which appeals to interaction, task continuity, real-world focus, language and learning focus and task outcomes. In this regard, Reza mentioned that,

... some activities of the Prospect series are just labeled as speaking, listening, and writing with the least instruction of how they should be implemented to develop students’ all three skills simultaneously.

Listing the names of language skills on the top of activities (Figure 1) is indicative of authors’ negligence in creating activities with measured integration of skills in the Prospects.

In some sections, such as “Listening, Reading, and Writing”, the students need to listen to audios and fill out the tables or blanks; however, students’ reading and writing activities are confined to reading the words in those tables and filling out the blanks with one word or a name.

This inadequacy in terms of skills integration correlates favorably with Ghorbani (2011) and Golpour (2012) who acknowledge, that the activities included in this series are not conductive to improving skills.

Furthermore, the teachers did not show any enthusiasm about the realistic aspects of the subject and content of this series in items 26 and 33 (only around 15% agreed). This is while Porter and Roberts (1981) and Tomlinson (2012) remark that realistic language presentations are needed to enhance learners’ engagement with the textbooks. It can be seen that the developers of the series have seemingly failed to consider EFL context of Iran, so that other cultures/societies, native speakers of English, and realia are absent and ignored all over the textbooks.

On the other hand, in order to introduce realistic language, one might think of presenting national elements via a foreign language; however, Zahra, a junior high school teacher, critiqued that,

... in this series, we have a lot of characters whose names are asked from the students, but some names do not ring a bell even to me.

This shows that they were not so successful even in depicting the Iranian culture, while 73% of teachers (item 36) admitted that this series is culturally biased. Apparently, while the textbooks do not portray any significant negative stereotypes, they insisted on familiarizing Iranian ideological stereotypes such religious and political faces. In some measure, authors may not be to blame in this regard, as stipulated in Fundamental Evolution Document of Education and Pedagogy (Iran’s...
Ministry of Education, 2018), teaching and learning foreign languages should be aimed at bolstering and spreading “Iranian-Islamic identity” (p. 30); hence this emphasis on depicting ideological domestic stereotypes can be justifiable. This focusing on depicting Iranian-Islamic culture as the leading culture in these textbooks is also alleged in Asakereh et al. (2019), Gholami Pasand and Ghasemi (2018) and Goodarzi et al. (2020).

Finally, in spite of the fact that many scholars have warned about the consequential attitudes of teachers toward textbooks (e.g., Cunningsworth, 1995; Nunan, 2003), in item 32, 68% of the teachers confirmed that the subjects and the content of this series do not meet their students' needs, and 73% of the teachers who participated in the study would not choose them (item 40), if they themselves could select their own teaching materials. This lack of enthusiasm of the participants in this study toward the Prospects can lead to disconnections between the teachers and the course books which can negatively affect students’ language-learning experience. This finding appears to be well substantiated and supported by other similar studies such as Alipour et al. (2016) and Rahimpour and Hashemi (2011), and in contrast with Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2014) study which showed a very positive attitude toward the Prospect series.

4.2. Interview themes
Along with the obtained results from the survey, some themes which were not included in the questionnaire were extracted from the follow-up interviews with the teachers.

4.2.1. Modification of pictures
Although Weninger and Kiss (2013) point out that “images ... need to be used as icons or symbols of things in their own right, as the explicit focus of attention in a meaningful pedagogic task” (p.710–11), most teachers interviewed believed that the pictures included in the series are not eye-catching and meaningful to the students. In this regard, Mahdi believed that,

... the pictures of the series are not interesting for the students, not even for me ... I think they should be changed to convey more sensible meanings.

Moreover, in some cases in which the vocabulary items or expressions are familiarized by pictures; they do not clearly associate with the intended meanings (Appendix D). Hence, revisions regarding the visual aspects of this series seem to be required; an issue which concurs well with Sardobi and Koosha (2015).

4.2.2. Lack of learning strategies
There is much evidence advocating that effective strategy use can be of great benefits to language learners (Cohen, 2011; Graham, 2007; Grenfell & Harris, 1999; Macaro, 2001; Martínez-Adrián et al., 2019; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990); however, the language-learning strategies regarding all skills are missing in this series. Accordingly, Masoomeh asserted that,

All over these three textbooks, no activities can be found practicing or pointing out any language learning strategies.

As language-learning strategies aim to “enhance comprehension, learning, or retention of new information” (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 1) and they are linked with enhancing learner autonomy, they are a significant concern in modern classrooms (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987), and their absence, simultaneously, would engender learning problems and postpone or even expunges students’ autonomy.

4.2.3. Suitability of the Prospect series for students’ level
When starting with the Prospect series, it is a necessary presupposition for teachers to keep in mind that the students are fresh English learners with no learning background; however, it seems,
in some cases, this issue was relatively neglected, as in early pages of P1, this conversation in Figure 2 can be found.

This conversation includes many new words, expressions, and questions which might not a very defendable activity for the students who have not experienced any English classes before. In this regard, Farzad critiqued that,

These coursebooks are great, but for the students learning English in private institutions.

Ali added,

I think these textbooks just encourage parents to register their children at private institutions, as they see their children are far away from the textbooks and other students learning English privately.

In this regard, Asadi et al. (2016, p. 297) claimed that “students usually resort to private language institutes to achieve their goals.” However, if we think of an ELT program as effective, it should reveal its effectiveness where the students have not experienced or are not experiencing learning English; otherwise being as a complementary language-learning program alongside the private language institutions, which is not fine-tuned to beginners’ level, seems not to be a breakthrough in the status quo of teaching English in Iran. Hence, adapting this series to learners’ levels and needs seems to be a high priority measure to be taken by the authors of the Prospects and the curriculum planners of Iran’s Educational System.

4.2.4. Remote regions and the Prospect series
The teachers explained that whenever a new plan is going to be implemented within the national scope in the educational system, all the schools and students who are going to be affected, should be taken into account. Mohammad suggested that,

... before developing any national-wide course book, the author should travel to all parts of a country to ensure that their future course book is going to be adapted to all contexts and students involved.

According to the National Curriculum (Iran’s Ministry of Education, 2011), “… along with emphasizing on common features, curricular and educational plans should consider all differences rooted in
geographical and contextual circumstances” (p. 10); an issue which has observably been besmirched in developing the Prospects.

One thing that most teachers complained about was lack multimedia equipment in the schools in deprived areas in Iran where students do not have multimedia devices at home and the only chance for them to listen to the audios of the course books is at school.

According to Zarrabi and Brown (2015, p. 3491), in their analysis of English language teaching and learning in Iran stipulate that, a “one-for-all recipe” is becoming a prevalent trend in course book development in Iran; however, in this way, plenty of students and contexts are neglected. In the context where the study has been carried out, there are many deprived areas in which students do not have access to any multimedia devices or the Internet; hence developing textbooks in accordance with available resources to the students from privileged cities such as Tehran, may be in contrast with government’s goals in terms of provision of equal access to education for all Iranian students (Iran’s Ministry of Education, 2011). Confirming this finding, Asadi et al. (2016) criticized that “in the design and development of the new textbook … [deprived] regions were not taken into consideration.” Therefore, more attention is called to be paid to consider all parts of Iran whether privileged, semi-privileged, or deprived (Maftoon et al., 2010) in developing ELT course books in Iran.

4.2.5. Insufficiency of teaching hours
The teachers interviewed also explained that, due to the fact that the Prospects are being taught 1 hour and 30 minutes a week, even if the Prospect series is highly efficient course books, the results will not be satisfying. This lends support to some other studies exploring the Prospect series such as Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2014) and Ahour and Golpour (2016). In this regard, Akbari (2015) argues that:

As classes are crowded, most of the students do not have enough practice in English and do not overcome language learning problems and are not proficient enough to communicate in the foreign language. Because in the limited hours of instruction, they normally could not have the chance of learning English especially the most favored skills of listening and speaking. (p. 398)

Therefore, considering the present time assigned to teaching English in the crowded classes, perhaps no course book is able to fit through and be effective; a point which can be clearly observed in this statement by Abbas,

... although sometimes we are under pressure of time to teach, we just have to be monitors of these crowded classes.

Furthermore, Kennedy and Kennedy (1996) shared a similar view as they believed it is a tough task to overcome all of what occurs in class when the number of students exceeds a certain limit. Apparently, a serious issue has been neglected by the curriculum planners of Iran’s educational system which might lead to irreparable problems, such as detaching students from learning context, spoiling their English learning motivation, and consequently, bringing about educational failures.

5. Conclusion and implications
The results of the present study indicate that although Prospect series can be considered a progress in comparison to the former junior high school English textbooks, they are subjected to some critical drawbacks in terms of activities, methodology, topics, design, and insufficiency of teaching hours. These results shed light on teachers’ views toward the Prospect series, and as a result, will be of great help for the authors of this series in order to take some measures to improve the quality of this series. Furthermore, this research will provide assistance to the future of Iran’s English textbook development; however, some critical issues need to be kept in mind.
Firstly, it is faulty to compare the new English textbooks of Iranian educational system with the former ones, since the new series is alleged to be created based on recent achievements in English course book development. Hence, although this series absolutely outclasses the old ones; they need critical modifications regarding the reviewed issues in the present and other similar studies. Secondly, teachers’ and learners’ insights, as the direct users of the textbooks, are valuable and should be culled and observed in textbook modifications and revisions. Thirdly, due to the fact that the students are going to learn an international language, it would be propitious to familiarize them with other cultures to perceive the international sense of English. Finally, the curriculum planners of the educational system need to extend the teaching hours of the Prospect series (at least 2 sessions a week) to bolster the English teachers in making the best use of the suggested textbooks by the educational system.

It is obvious that this research may have limitations. The first is that, if direct class observation, as a beneficiary data collection instrument, is utilized, complementary results will be obtained about this series. The second is that if the number of teachers interviewed increases, clearly more valuable themes will be extracted. These limitations highlight the evidence of the difficulty of collecting data according to the scope of the study.

This study could be illuminating for future textbook evaluation research in some ways. Firstly, in developing any nationwide English textbooks in any EFL contexts, users’ needs and expectations should be carefully collected and taken into consideration. The users’ involvement in the textbook development process can offer valuable recommendations which may be left unnoticed by the textbook developers. Moreover, this research can be of great help for English teachers in Iran and other EFL contexts to evaluate the teaching materials. Finally, it is expected that the findings of this research and similar evaluation studies could be utilized as a benchmark for textbook development organizations in Iran and other EFL contexts when publishing EFL textbooks, particularly textbooks for elementary English learners.

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Appendix A. Teachers’ evaluation form

Teachers textbook evaluation form

1. Male or Female: ... ... 2. University Degree: ... ... ... ... 3. Age: ... ... ... ... 4. Years of teaching experience: ... ... ... ...

The following statements evaluate your views on the Prospect series. Fronting each statement a five place rating scale for each textbook, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Please circle the one that most closely reflects your views at the present time. If you were in strong agreement with this statement, then you would put a circle around SA, where, SA = strongly agree
A = agree U = uncertain D = disagree SD = strongly disagree

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|   | (SA) | (A) | (U) | (D) | (SD) |
|---|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. | The price of the textbook is reasonable. |   |   |   |   |
| 2. | The textbook is easily accessible. |   |   |   |   |
| 3. | The textbook is a recent publication. |   |   |   |   |
| 4. | A teacher’s guide, workbook, and audio-tapes accompany the textbook. |   |   |   |   |
| 5. | The author’s views on language and methodology are comparable to mine. |   |   |   |   |
| 6. | The textbook includes a detailed overview of the functions, structures and vocabulary that will be taught in each unit. |   |   |   |   |
| 7. | The layout and design is appropriate and clear. |   |   |   |   |
| 8. | The textbook is organized effectively. |   |   |   |   |
| 9. | An adequate vocabulary list or glossary is included. |   |   |   |   |
| 10. | Adequate review sections and exercises are included. |   |   |   |   |
| 11. | An adequate set of evaluation quizzes or testing suggestions is included. |   |   |   |   |
| 12. | The teacher’s book contains guidance about how the textbook can be used to the utmost advantage. |   |   |   |   |

(Continued)
13. The materials objectives are apparent to both the teacher and student.

14. The textbook provides a balance of activities.

15. The activities encourage sufficient communicative and meaningful practice.

16. The activities incorporate individual, pair and group work.

17. The grammar points and vocabulary items are introduced in motivating and realistic contexts.

18. The activities promote creative, original and independent responses.

19. The tasks are conducive to the internalization of newly introduced language.

20. The textbook’s activities can be modified or supplemented easily.

21. The materials include and focus on the skills that my students need to practice.
22. The materials provide an appropriate balance of the four language skills.

23. The textbook pays attention to sub-skills—i.e. listening for gist, note-taking, skimming for information, etc.

24. The textbook highlights and practices natural pronunciation (i.e.—stress and intonation).

25. The practice of individual skills is integrated into the practice of other skills.

26. The language used in the textbook is authentic—i.e. like real-life English.

27. The language used is at the right level for my students’ current English ability.

28. The progression of grammar points and vocabulary items is appropriate.

29. The grammar points are presented with brief and easy examples and explanations.

(Continued)
|   | (SA) | (A) | (U) | (D) | (SD) |
|---|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 30. The language functions exemplify English that my students will be likely to use. | | | | | |
| 31. The language represents a diverse range of registers and accents. | | | | | |
| 32. The subject and content of the textbook are relevant to my students' needs as an English language learner(s). | | | | | |
| 33. The subject and content of the textbook are generally realistic. | | | | | |
| 34. The subject and content of the textbook are interesting, challenging and motivation | | | | | |
| 35. There is sufficient variety in the subject and content of the textbook. | | | | | |
| 36. The materials are not culturally biased and they do not portray any negative stereotypes. | | | | | |
| 37. The textbook is appropriate for the language-learning aims of my institution. | | | | | |
| 38. The textbook is suitable for small-medium, homogeneous, co-ed. Classes of university students. | | | | | |
Appendix B. Interview questions

1. What do you generally think about the appearance of the Prospect series? Their layout and design, prices, availability, and supplementary materials?

2. What do you think about the practicality and authenticity of the included tasks and activities?

3. Can this series improve the learners' English language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and their integration) and sub-skills (grammar and vocabulary) and fulfill their needs? (If yes or no, how?)

4. What do you think about the content and the subjects of the series?

5. If you were free to choose an English course book for your students, would you choose this series? (If yes or no, why?)

Appendix C.

### Table C1. Descriptive statistics of teachers' opinions about the Prospect series

| Questions                                                                 | N   | Mini. | Max. | Mean  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-------|------|-------|
| 1. The price of the textbook is reasonable.                               | 69  | 1     | 4    | 1.86* |
| 2. The textbook is easily accessible.                                     | 69  | 1     | 5    | 1.75* |
| 3. The textbook is a recent publication.                                  | 69  | 1     | 5    | 2.84  |
| 4. A teacher's guide, workbook, and audio-tapes accompany the textbook.   | 69  | 1     | 4    | 2.65  |
| 5. The author's views on language and methodology are comparable to mine. | 69  | 1     | 5    | 3.88  |

(Continued)
| Questions                                                                 | N  | Mini. | Max. | Mean  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-------|------|-------|
| 6. The textbook includes a detailed overview of the functions, structures and vocabulary that will be taught in each unit. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.84  |
| 7. The layout and design is appropriate and clear.                      | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.75  |
| 8. The textbook is organized effectively.                               | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.86  |
| 9. An adequate vocabulary list or glossary is included.                 | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.52  |
| 10. Adequate review sections and exercises are included.                | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.59  |
| 11. An adequate set of evaluation quizzes or testing suggestions is included. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.84  |
| 12. The teacher’s book contains guidance about how the textbook can be used to the utmost advantage. | 69 | 2     | 5    | 3.88  |
| 13. The materials objectives are apparent to both the teacher and student. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 4.16* |
| 14. The textbook provides a balance of activities                      | 69 | 1     | 5    | 4.14* |
| 15. The activities encourage sufficient communicative and meaningful practice. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.68  |
| 16. The activities incorporate individual, pair and group work.         | 69 | 2     | 5    | 3.59  |
| 17. The grammar points and vocabulary items are introduced in motivating and realistic contexts. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.81  |
| Questions                                                                 | N | Mini. | Max. | Mean |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|-------|------|------|
| 18. The activities promote creative, original and independent responses. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.71 |
| 19. The tasks are conducive to the internalization of newly introduced language. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.86 |
| 20. The textbook’s activities can be modified or supplemented easily. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.81 |
| 21. The materials include and focus on the skills that my students need to practice. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.78 |
| 22. The materials provide an appropriate balance of the four language skills. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.68 |
| 23. The textbook pays attention to sub-skills—i.e. listening for gist, note-taking, skimming for information, etc. | 69 | 2     | 5    | 3.74 |
| 24. The textbook highlights and practices natural pronunciation (i.e. —stress and intonation). | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.72 |
| 25. The practice of individual skills is integrated into the practice of other skills. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 4.28*|
| 26. The language used in the textbook is authentic—i.e. like real-life English. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 4.22*|
| 27. The language used is at the right level for my students’ current English ability. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.70 |
| 28. The progression of grammar points and vocabulary items is appropriate. | 69 | 2     | 5    | 4.43*|

(Continued)
| Questions                                                                 | N  | Mini. | Max. | Mean |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-------|------|------|
| 29. The grammar points are presented with brief and easy examples and explanations. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.75 |
| 30. The language functions exemplify English that my students will be likely to use. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.70 |
| 31. The language represents a diverse range of registers and accents.     | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.91 |
| 32. The subject and content of the textbook are relevant to my students’ needs as an English language learner(s). | 69 | 1     | 5    | 4.06*|
| 33. The subject and content of the textbook are generally realistic.      | 69 | 1     | 5    | 4.14*|
| 34. The subject and content of the textbook are interesting, challenging and motivation | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.78 |
| 35. There is sufficient variety in the subject and content of the textbook. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.59 |
| 36. The materials are not culturally biased and they do not portray any negative stereotypes. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 4.17*|
| 37. The textbook is appropriate for the language-learning aims of my institution. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.97 |
| 38. The textbook is suitable for small-medium, homogeneous, co-ed. Classes of university students. | 69 | 1     | 5    | 3.94 |

(Continued)
### Questions

| Questions                                                                 | N   | Mini. | Max. | Mean |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-------|------|------|
| 39. The textbook raises my students’ interest in further English language study. | 69  | 1     | 5    | 3.81 |
| 40. I would choose to teach this textbook again.                          | 69  | 1     | 5    | 4.19*|
| Valid N (listwise)                                                        | 69  |       |      |      |
### Appendix D. Prospects’ photo dictionary

| English       | Persian     |
|---------------|-------------|
| shopkeeper    | quince      |
| street        | call        |
| cooking       | She had a heart attack. |
| watch a quiz show | use IT |
| help charity  | bake a cake |
| summer        | store       |
