



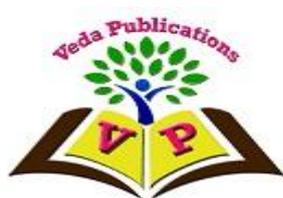
THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE IRANIAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS "PROSPECT 1 AND 2" FROM TEACHERS' ATTITUDE

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ABSTRACT



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Teachers' perceptions and experiences play indispensable roles in the process of book evaluation. With regard to various textbook evaluations on Iranian textbooks and no evaluations on the newly-developed textbook, this paper aims to evaluate the Iranian junior high school new textbooks "Prospect 1 and 2" based on teachers' attitudes and experiences. To do so, ten male and female English junior high school teachers in some cities in Iran, including Semnan and Mahdishahr ranging from 10 to 15 years of teaching experience took part in this study. A structured interview was conducted to scrutinize the strengths and weaknesses of Prospect 1 and 2. The findings of the research revealed some main strengths such as the emphasis on Communicative Language Teaching approach, the emphasis on the integration of four skills, attention to the students' needs, as well as some major weaknesses such as time allocated to the book in curriculum program which is not enough, reading and writing are paid less attention. Further, some practical implications are presented which are on the basis of the results of this study and might be of use to the teachers, syllabus designers and materials developers.

Keywords: *Textbook Evaluation; Teachers' Attitudes; Prospect 1 and 2; CLT*

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INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are the base of the curriculum and syllabus in most of our classes. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) suggest that a textbook is an almost universal element of English language teaching. No teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook. These important issues about textbooks show that attention must be

paid to the quality and appropriateness of widely used textbooks because a bad textbook can impede proper teaching and learning of English.

Jahangard (2007) has offered several reasons for textbook evaluation. He suggests that the selection of an ELT textbook often signals an important administrative and educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial or



even political investment. A thorough evaluation would enable the managerial and teaching staff of a specific institution or organization to discriminate between all of the available textbooks on the market.

Moreover, it would provide a sense of familiarity with a book's content thus assisting educators in identifying the particular strengths and weaknesses in textbooks already in use. One additional reason for textbook evaluation is that it can be very useful in teacher development and professional growth. Further, Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) maintain that textbook evaluation helps teachers move beyond impressionistic assessments and it helps them to acquire useful, accurate, systematic, and contextual insights into the overall nature of textbook material.

In Iran several projects have been carried out to evaluate textbooks, among which Razmjoo (2007) conducted a comparative study of the first two books of Right Path to English and Books one and two of the Graded English series based on Tucker's model. The result of the study indicated that there were no significant differences between the two series. This was because it could be claimed that the two series represented the structural syllabus and design.

Seddigh, Akbari and Shirvan (2014) have also evaluated Prospect 1 that have been used in the Iranian high school introduced by ministry of education of Iran in 2013. In this research all of the teachers claimed that the newly published book is much better than the old high school books. Furthermore, they mentioned some disadvantages, grammar and writing are not taken into consideration, no pronunciation practice is involved. English is supplied through Persian culture to name mostly mentioned ones. Prospect 1 is very simple and boring to students who have studied English beforehand.

Moreover, Kamyabigol and Baghaeeyan (2014) have evaluated Prospect 1 that have been used in the Iranian high school. The findings of the study revealed that the curriculum had been able to integrate the four language skills, increase student-student and student-teacher interaction, promote pair and group work. However, the dialogue and

contexts lacked authenticity, recordings were artificial, new words were not reviewed in the following lesson, there was no phonetic transcription for the new word. The teachers believed although the book was a great progress comparing to its predecessors, it had some shortcomings which the article delved into.

In this regard, Ghorbani (2011) evaluated the previous textbook being used in Iranian senior high schools based on a new checklist created by the researcher. On the basis of the findings of the study, the textbook is ideal in physical qualities like paper quality, binding, printing, etc. But there is not a balance among four language skills. There are no audio CDs and student's and teacher's guides as reference materials. The design of the book is structural-based. The book lacks various communicative tasks and information gap activities. The speaking activities are limited to question-answer types using the pair works and communicative activities such as group work, role play, simulation, etc. are ignored skills.

Riazi and Aryasholouh (2007) have also studied the four high school English textbooks focusing on the consciousness-raising aspect of vocabulary exercises. They found that of all exercises in the four books, only one percent of them could be categorized as consciousness-raising. They also found that the exercises mainly concentrated on individual words with no emphasis on fixed expressions, lexical collocations and grammatical collocations. They concluded that students were mainly dealing with meanings of individual words and not with how words were used with other words or in what combinations.

In the realm of teachers' attitudes, Riasati and Zare (2010) conducted a study on the EFL teachers' attitude on the textbook "New interchange". They investigated this to find out the appropriateness of the series and were interested to find out that whether or not teachers were satisfied with the series then searched teachers' perception of the weakness and strength of the series. To this end, thirty five EFL teachers both male and female with several years of teaching experience of the series participated and the model



which was used for the research was the questionnaire prepared by Litz (2000). With respect to the results, the teachers were satisfied with the subject and the content of the series. At the end, Riassati and Zare (2010) list some shortcomings of the textbooks:

1. Lack of supplementary teaching materials;
2. Some items and subjects within the series were not primarily based on Iranian learners' culture;
3. Some elements of series were beyond the linguistic capability of the learners;
4. Several testing exercises;
5. Series did not pay enough attention to writing skills therefore, learners did not receive practice in this section;
6. Inappropriate number of teacher's manual.

With regard to the strength and weakness of Iranian EFL text books, Moghtadi (2014) intended to review EFL Iranian textbooks and worked on evaluating four high school textbooks in order to compare and find out the strengths and weaknesses of Iranian EFL high school textbooks from completely different views. The findings showed that there were many visible differences between the learners' desires, and the materials of the textbooks.

This study not only can help to enrich the literature by providing an empirical post-use evaluation study, but it can also help to provide a perspective as the strengths and weakness of prospect textbooks. The evaluation results can help to enhance the effectiveness of the use of the textbook by helping teachers to understand what areas of the textbook need further modification, or to what extent adaptation of other new teaching materials in necessary. The present study tries to consider teachers' ideas in its material evaluation. So, it can be said that this research is a beneficial study for textbooks writers and educational systems in improving their educational standards.

It is to be noted that Prospect 1 and 2 for seventh and eighth grades are new textbooks which have been taught in 2013 and 2014. As English Language teachers, the researchers noticed that

many teachers faced many problems in dealing with these textbooks. Some of them believed that these textbooks are beyond students' level. Furthermore, the researchers noticed that many students are not able to write the words and this may be due to the nature of the textbook. So, this study adopted a critical analysis into the "Prospect 1 and 2" textbooks to find out points of weakness and strength. Therefore, this textbook was studied in terms of its quality as an educational material to give real recommendations for improvements and development.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Is there any difference between teachers' point of view about Prospect 1 and 2 in terms of appearance, content, language skills, language elements, activities, objectives, supplementary materials?

NULL HYPOTHESIS

There is no difference between teachers' point of view about Prospect 1 and 2 in terms of appearance, content, language skills, language elements, activities, objectives, supplementary materials.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

The interviews were carried out on 10 male and female teachers teaching at the junior high schools in some cities in Iran, namely Semnan and Mahdishahr. The age of the participants varied between 25 to 50 years old. The participants were free to choose Persian or English language in order to respond to the interview questions.

MATERIALS

The material for this study was the locally produced English language textbook used in Iranian junior high school. The researchers selected book one of Prospect series "Prospect 1 and 2" (Alavi, Ananisarab, ForozandehShahraki, Ghorbani, Khadir Sharabian & Kheirabadi, 2013, 2014) in order to attain the aim of the study. The textbook includes workbook, student book, audio CD and teacher's guide.

INSTRUMENT

The instrument used in this study was the semi-structured interview which was asked from



fifteen junior high school English language teachers in Semnan and Mahdshahr. The amount of time required to respond to the open-ended items was approximately 15 to 20 minutes. In accordance with what has already been mentioned, the following interview question is proposed:

What are the strengths and weaknesses of Prospect 1 and 2 with regard to teachers' perceptions?

PROCEDURE

The researchers performed an interview with ten teachers. The researchers selected all the participants from some junior secondary schools in Iran. About 15 teachers were chosen to take part in this interview. But only ten teachers accepted to do this.

The designed structured interview pertaining to the objectives of this research with the teachers were recorded, transcribed and translated into English. The teachers expressed their ideas about the textbooks in accordance with the

objectives of the textbook. The interviews lasted between 15 to 20 minutes and were conducted both in the teachers' mother tongue (Persian) and English although most respondents preferred to use Persian.

DATA ANALYSIS

SPSS statistics was employed for the data analysis. The raw results obtained from the questionnaire were statically analyzed to provide the answers for the questions. Through descriptive statistics, percentages of each question and chi square were determined. SPSS statistics determined relative percentage of any single items in comparison with other items. In other words, these statistics show the relative importance of every single evaluative item.

RESULTS

RESULT OF TEACHERS' POINT OF VIEW

In order to test the equality of the chi square of teachers' point of view about Prospect 1 and 2 with respect to the 7 main categories of the study, the Chi-square test was conducted.

The results are tabulated below.

Table 1: Chi- square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3744.209a	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	2784.568	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	1725.602	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	2720		

a. 2 cells (8.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .75.

Table 1 shows that the teachers' point of view towards the seventh and eighth grades English Language Textbooks for Iranian high Schools with respect to the 7 main categories. The results of chi square (chi-square=3744.209, $p < 0.5$) indicated that no differences observed in Table 1 were statistically significant. Thus it can be concluded that null hypothesis can be rejected, as there were not any significant differences between the teachers' point of view towards Prospect 1 and 2.

RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWEES' RESPONSES

According to Table 2 the teachers' view in the interviews, the new textbooks follow the latest method of teaching and based on communicative language teaching approach. It means that most of

participants (66%) in this interview had positive perception toward the new books Prospect 1 and 2. They believed that Prospect 1 focused on listening and speaking skills and it has less attention to reading and writing skills.

Table 2: Strength and Weakness of Interview

Strength	No	Percent
1. Teacher's book is useful.	4	66%
2. Method of teaching based on CLT.	4	66%
3. Integration of four skills.	3	50%
4. Colourful picture can be successful.	1	16%
5. Supplementary more effectively.	1	16%



6. Role play, group work.	3	50%
Weakness		
7. Time allocated not enough.	1	16%
8. Reading and writing less paid attention.	1	16%

The results showed that in prospect 1 and 2, the majority of teachers (66%) are satisfied with the teacher's book, language skills from teachers' point of view regarding the components in the interviews. On the other hand, the above table shows that in Prospect 1 and 2, some of the teachers (16%) support that new textbooks contain supplementary material and this helps the teacher teach more effectively. They believed that colourful picture can be successful. Based on the teachers' viewpoints, the subject and content of the textbooks are relevant to the students' interest, needs, and concerns. There are sufficient variety in the subject and content of the textbooks.

As table 2 shows, with regard to the activities of the textbooks, half of the teachers indicated that the classroom activities are in form of pair and group work. The tasks and activities in these books encourage students to participate in tasks as much as possible. In most of the tasks of these books, the students are required to respond orally or initiate the conversation. It is in line with the principle of communicative approach. In Prospect 1 and 2 regarding tasks and activities there is an emphasis on the meaning as the basis for learning, since the learners can understand the task through meaning; it is a very important criterion in implementing any activity to notice the meaning of the task. Among tasks and activities of these books, most of the tasks require the learner to participate in the task through pair/group working, this cooperation in doing tasks train the students to cooperate with other person in real life situation.

Prospect 1 and 2 try to provide tasks and activities in such a way that relate to the needs of learners both in the personal life and social interaction. In these books, in contrast to previous English text books, the role of teacher is considered as co-operator, co-worker and assistant of the learner. The teacher is not considered as supreme

person in class that he is the only source of knowledge and impose stress on the learner; instead, the class is both teacher and student centered. The results of this study showed that the emphases of Prospect 1 and 2 are on promoting communicative skills through providing learners with variety of socio-cultural information. The teachers mentioned that the tasks are more communicative and more practical than before; they also advocated the inclusion of pair works in the textbook though some of them believed there are no considerable grammar exercises in the textbook. Students use language in role play and group work.

The majority of the participant (66%) supported the method of teaching in Prospect 1 and 2 based on CLT. The main aim of these books is to prepare the learners to learn English language for communicative purposes. The inclusion of all four skills and maintaining a balance in presenting them can certainly have an impact on the learners' overall competence in English. Regarding the fact that the textbooks have not paid enough attention to the skills of reading and writing based on the results, it seems vital that teachers try to include these two skills in the classroom for the students. They also presented some weaknesses for these books which are as follows: most of the teachers do not support the time allocated to the curriculum program saying that it is not enough. The textbooks do not pay enough attention to the reading and writing skill.

Prospect 1 and 2 were analyzed and interpreted on the basis of the question which exists in the interview. As stated by the teachers and in accordance with the data, these books are acceptable from the perspective of teachers. They declared that the textbooks were successful in speaking and listening skills because the books are communicative based. It reveals that they have positive perceptions on these books. A large number of teachers believed that the new textbooks were useful to provide students' need.

DISCUSSION

According to teachers' viewpoints in the interviews, the new textbooks follow the latest method of teaching and they are based on communicative language teaching approach. It



means that most of participants in this study had positive perception toward the new books "Prospect1 and 2". They believed that the book focused on listening and speaking skills and it has less attention to writing. In line with teachers' perceptions of teacher's book, language components, language skills, tasks, activities and exercises, Prospect1 is more satisfactory from teachers' point of view regarding the components in the interviews.

The findings of this research question are in parallel with other researchers and confirm the literature which is related to textbooks evaluation in Iranian high school. Jahangard (2007) evaluated four EFL textbooks that have been used in the Iranian high schools by the Ministry of Education. He discussed the merits and demerits of the textbooks with reference to 13 common criteria extracted from different materials evaluation checklists. The results of the study indicated that book four had better features in comparison with the three other textbooks (which needed huge revisions and modifications).

This finding can be closely related to Razmjoo (2007) conducted a comparative study of the first two books of Right Path to English and Books one and two of the Graded English series based on Tucker's model. The result of the study indicated that there are no significant differences between the two series. This is because it can be claimed that the two series represent the structural syllabus and design.

CONCLUSION

According to the points mentioned in this research, it is tried to analyze and check some of the strong points and the weak points of the new English books (Prospect 1 and 2) for junior secondary students of Iranian public schools. As the findings of this study revealed, there are much more advantages than disadvantages in "English Textbooks Prospect 1 and 2". Based on the universal features, these books have some advantages. There are teacher's guidebook available to the teachers and claimed that it is useful and facilitate the objectives of teaching the textbooks.

Beside the good and appropriate physical make-up of these books, the use of colorful pictures, authentic language, practical exercises and dialogues,

and speaking and listening activities are a number of positive points regarding the textbooks under the study; The other issue concerns the representation of the skills in the textbook. The inclusion of all four skills and maintaining a balance in presenting them can certainly have an impact on the learners overall competence in English. The main aim of these books are to prepare the learners to learn English language for communicative purpose, so in designing the tasks and activities of this book, the role of learner considered as an active or center role for each task and activity.

In these books, in contrast to previous English books, the primary attention is on meaning rather than form or structural rules. It is an important progress in promoting learners communicative competence, through providing meaningful and understandable tasks and activities. Prospect 1 and 2 tries to provide tasks and activities in such a way that relate to the needs of learners both in personal life and social interaction.

There are also sufficient variety in the subjects and contents of the textbooks. They are exercises and activities involve and encourage sufficient communicative and meaningful practice. The other positive point about the Prospects are these books induce teachers to adopt a learner-centered approach. There are opportunities for role-play and engaging the whole person through personalizing the information. The exercises focus on meaningful communication and student- student or student- teacher interaction. In fact Prospect 1 and 2 focus on form rather than forms, moving from whole to part and encouraging inductive grammar teaching. This approach to teaching grammar is very effective in developing both accuracy and fluency in learners.

The presented some weaknesses for these books which are as follows: time allocated to the books in curriculum program are not enough; Regarding the fact that these textbooks have not paid enough attention to the skills of reading and writing based on the results, it seems vital that teachers try to include these two skills in the classroom for the students. The teacher can assign writing activities or work on short paragraph writing in the classroom or he/she can make use of the dialogues in the



textbooks as a reading source to fill the gap in this area. Moreover, the authors and publishers should consider this lack in the textbook and try to devise a way as to solve it. They are hopefully expected that this research paper could be useful enough to the teachers and authorities of these books (Prospect 1 and 2) as descriptive analysis of the good or bad points of the books in organizing the other books of Prospect for Iranian public schools and students.

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

The researcher makes some delimitations in the research:

1. The participants in the present study were the teachers (males and females) teaching prospect 1 and 2 for seventh and eighth grade at high schools.
2. The setting of conducting the present study was high schools in Semnan.

There were some limitations as follows:

1. The teachers who attended in the present study were mostly from high schools in Semnan and Mahdishahr. But it must be mentioned that, because of their limited numbers, some of them accepted this request and some of them did not accept it.
2. Not all the high school participated in this study. The present study was carried mostly in high schools from Semnan and Mahdishahr.
3. The results may not be generalized for teachers of other grades and other textbooks. This study was concerned with evaluating the seventh and eighth grades high school textbooks.

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