Learners on the Move: A Mixed Methods Evaluation of Iranian EFL Textbooks[1]

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Abstract

With the advent of new English textbooks, course book evaluation has become an indispensable ingredient in all English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts. Thus, the present study aimed to contribute to this area in the Iranian context by evaluating newly published junior high school (13 to 15 years old) course books (the *Prospect* series) and examining their weaknesses and strengths from students' points of view. In so doing, this study employed Litz's (2005) questionnaire to examine 417 junior high school students' perspectives. Also, nine students took part in follow-up interviews to elaborate their perspectives about the strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks. The results of the questionnaire showed that students believed that this series requires some modifications regarding the design and lay-out, authenticity in activities, diversity of registers and accents, variety of subjects and content, and cultural presentation. In addition, the students asserted in the interviews that there are some other problems with the textbooks in terms of the selected topics, accessibility and quality of the multimedia materials, organization of the content, and the learning goals that are set. Iranian EFL instruction relies on the *Prospect* series, and all Iranian junior high school students are taught using these books. The improvements suggested by the students in this study can facilitate development of English course books to better support learners' goals in the future.

Resumen

La evaluación de libros de texto se ha convertido en un ingrediente indispensable en todos los contextos de enseñanza del idioma inglés (EIL). Por lo tanto, el presente estudio tuvo como objetivo contribuir a esta área en el contexto iraní mediante la evaluación de la serie de libros de texto Prospect, recién publicados para uso en la escuela secundaria (de 13 a 15 años). Se examinan sus debilidades y fortalezas desde el punto de vista de los estudiantes. Para hacerlo, este estudio empleó el cuestionario de Litz (2005) para examinar las perspectivas de 417 estudiantes de secundaria. Además, nueve estudiantes participaron en entrevistas de seguimiento para desarrollar sus perspectivas sobre las fortalezas y debilidades de los libros de texto. Los resultados del cuestionario mostraron que los estudiantes creen que esta serie requiere algunas modificaciones en cuanto al diseño y maquetación, autenticidad en las actividades, diversidad de registros y acentos, variedad de temas y contenidos y presentación cultural. Además, los estudiantes afirmaron en las entrevistas que existen algunos otros problemas con los libros de texto en cuanto a los temas seleccionados, la accesibilidad y calidad de los materiales multimedia, la organización de los contenidos y las metas de aprendizaje que se establecen. La instrucción iraní de inglés como lengua extranjera se basa en la serie Prospect, y todos los estudiantes de secundaria iraníes aprenden a utilizar estos libros. Las mejoras sugeridas por los estudiantes en este estudio pueden facilitar el desarrollo de libros de texto de inglés para apoyar mejor los objetivos de los estudiantes en el futuro.

Introduction

Tomlinson and Masuhara (2017) maintain that English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks provide input and enhance the likelihood of learners' intake and purposeful output. In other words, textbooks can be considered as the major information-provider for teachers and learners. Moreover, textbooks can help teachers achieve their goals and facilitate learning. However, all textbooks need to be evaluated in order to obtain a better understanding of their efficiency and usability (Dickins & Germaniem, 2014).

In Iran, textbook evaluation studies have examined users' perspectives about their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks. However, these studies had mainly investigated the formerly-taught English textbooks of Iranian high schools (Riazi & Aryashokouh, 2007). The *Prospect* series are newly-published English textbooks in Iran, and they have been examined by only a small number of researchers (Goodarzi et al., 2020b; Khansir & Mahammadifard, 2015; Torki & Chalak, 2017; Shahmohammadi, 2018). While many scholars (e.g., Anderson, 1989; McDonough et al., 2017) have pinpointed the great importance of the learners' views, studies evaluating the *Prospect* series (Asadi et al., 2016; Goodarzi et al, 2020b; Shahmohammadi, 2018), they only collected teachers' views.

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Literature Review

Textbooks and Textbook Evaluation

According to Sheldon (1988), textbooks are "the visible heart of any ELT program" (p. 237), and they have significant advantages for their users. Although it is undeniable that textbooks contribute to teaching and learning, they might not be flexible enough to be the only instructional materials. Since the 1970s, learner-centered movements have created a new perspective toward textbooks in which the aims and objectives are adapted to the learners' preferences. In this regard, textbooks must be selected carefully so that they reflect the needs of both the learners and the teaching program (Cunningsworth, 1995).

In addition, English textbook design should align with professional, financial, and even political investments of educational systems and the target users (Sheldon, 1988). In the Iranian context, the educational system selects and prescribes all textbooks in Iranian schools. Comprehensive evaluations of these textbooks, then, might allow the educational officials to classify the accessible textbooks and make wise choices regarding textbook selections. Such evaluations could also assist teachers in recognizing the pitfalls of certain exercises and ultimately using the book effectively for their own pedagogical purposes.

Learners' Views and Textbook Evaluation

Previous studies indicated that textbook authors and publishers should consider the learners' views in textbook evaluation (Anderson, 1989; McDonough et al., 2017). In this regard, McDonough et al. (2017) criticize studies in which the researchers collect teachers' perceptions of learners' needs, as they may not reflect the learners' actual needs. Kumaravadivelu (1991) views this issue as "dramatic mismatches" (p. 106) existing between teacher and learner perceptions.

Furthermore, Preedy (2001) introduces four reasons to involve learners in the process of course book evaluation. First, learners hold different views about textbooks from teachers and other stakeholders. Therefore, learners can make comments on textbooks based on their own experiences and provide constructive feedback. Second, involving learners in evaluating the process results in learners' self-efficacy. This sense of efficacy enhances their motivation in using these materials and can increase their commitment to learning (Preedy, 2001). Third, there is much theoretical support that any differences between learners' and teachers' perceptions about learning and learning materials would bring indispensable obstacles in terms of setting language learning goals and objectives in language classes (Emelyanova & Voronina, 2014; Van, 2011; Winne & Marx, 1982). Lastly, evaluating course textbooks engages learner reflection and autonomy, helping students take responsibility for their own learning. Therefore, the evaluation of newly-developed course books such as the Prospect English series by the students seems to be essential to reach an efficient language learning system in Iran.

Evaluation of the Prospect Series

Prospect 1, 2, and 3 (2013, 2014, 2015) were developed by the Curriculum and Textbooks Development Office of the Iranian Ministry of Education as English textbooks for junior high school students. The editor-in-chief of these textbooks was Seyed Behnam Alavi Moghadam. The textbooks were published by Iran's educational system publication center, and the first textbook of this series was published and introduced in 2013.

In an attempt to evaluate these textbooks, Torki and Chalak (2017) collected high school teachers' and students' perspectives toward *Prospect* 1 and *Prospect* 2. The data collection procedures of this study included a questionnaire with 45 questions that was administered to 50 English teachers (20 males and 30 females) with teaching experiences ranging from 20 to 28 years as well as 30 male and 70 female high school students. Also, the teachers and leaners were interviewed to explore their attitudes toward Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and its implementation in Iranian high school English textbooks. The data analysis shows that most teachers believe that 80 percent of CLT principles are being practiced in Prospect 1 and 2; however, they reported that some changes to activities and layout are needed to improve their quality.

Yet, some methodological issues are critical to discuss. For example, the participants in the study claimed to be elementary and intermediate English learners, while the target learners of *Prospect* 1 and 2 are elementary English learners only.

In Khansir and Mahammadifard's (2015) study, four English teachers completed the Littlejohn (2011) Checklist to evaluate *Prospect* 1. The results showed that the *Prospect* 1 has not achieved its predefined objectives in assisting learners to gain communicative skills in English. Moreover, they believe that some sections did not match the target learners' beginning level of English proficiency. This may produce problems for learners in terms of understanding English instructions of the textbook activities. Although this study was successful in reporting different aspects and features of *Prospect* 1, it can't be considered generalizable since its conclusions rely on just four teachers' views.

Goodarzi et al. (2020b) employed a CLT model to investigate the *Prospect* series in terms of Cognitive, Communicative, and Creative potentials. Their results indicated that, despite the fact that the series was set to be in line with CLT approach, the CLT-based potentials were not effectively fulfilled. They also reported that indispensable components of CLT such as language learning strategies, authenticity of the content, and the integration of language skills were not appropriately considered. Moreover, they showed that the emphasis only on Iranian culture reduced the authenticity of the materials, a significant consideration in CLT. Their study added much information to the literature about the *Prospects*; however, they did not collect the users' views about this series.

 In another study, Shahmohammadi (2018) employed a questionnaire to evaluate the *Prospect* series from teachers' points of view. In so doing, thirty-four teachers were asked to fill out the questionnaire, and 8 teachers took part in interviews to discuss their opinions about the series. Her study reveals that pronunciation, tasks and activities are the main parts of the *Prospect* books in need of improvements and revisions. Although in this study, valuable information about the *Prospect* series was added to the literature, it lacks some important elements. First, some issues are not included in the employed questionnaire, such as cultural bias , topics, accessibility, price, and teachers' overall views. Second, the number of the teachers who filled out the questionnaire does not seem to be adequate to represent the population. Third, 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, reliability and validity measures were not reported for the instruments.

Although the reviewed studies and other similar studies (Asadi, et al., 2016; Salehi & Amini, 2016), attempted to evaluate these course books separately, the studies do not report the learners' perspectives.

Evaluation Framework of the Study

Textbook evaluation can be considered as "a complex matter, as there are many variables, which may affect the success or failure of a textbook in a particular course of instruction" (Takrousta et al., 2020, p. 4). One of these variables is finding the appropriate evaluation criteria, since the appropriate criteria may depend on the language learning environment. In some situations, the textbook evaluation is conducted before utilizing the textbooks, while in others it is employed to check the strengths and weaknesses of a textbook after use (Takrousta et al., 2020). Ellis (1997), in his approach, introduces retrospective evaluation which is conducted while a textbook is being taught (whilst-use evaluation) or after it has been taught (post-use evaluation). Such evaluations provide useful information for educational planners and teachers as they determine whether the textbook is adapted to their students' needs and teaching context.

Therefore, embarking on Ellis's (1997) framework of textbook evaluation for retrospective evaluation, this study utilized Litz's (2005) English course book evaluation questionnaires (2005) and follow-up interviews to examine quantitative and qualitative learners' perceptions about the Prospect series. To do so, two research questions guided the study:

1. *What are the English learners' views about the Prospect series according to Litz's questionnaire?*
2. *How do the learners explain their views toward the Prospect Series?*

Methodology

Design of the Study

To answer the research questions, the study employed a sequential explanatory design, gathering and analyzing quantitative data followed by adding and analyzing qualitative data (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). In this design, typically the quantitative data is primary, and the supplementary qualitative data can strengthen the quantitative results (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The quantitative data were obtained from questionnaires, and the follow-up qualitative data were gathered through interviews.

Participants

Due to practical reasons, a convenience sampling was utilized (Ary et al., 2018). All the participants were studying at state junior high schools in a where the researchers lived and worked.

Participants	Gender		Learning English at Private Institute		Age	Total
	Female	Male	Yes	No		
7th Graders	28	111	91	49	12-13	139
8th Graders	28	114	85	56	13-14	142
9th Graders	29	107	103	33	14-15	136
Interviewees	5	4	7	2	12-15	9

Table 1: Demographic information of the students participating in the study

A sample of 417 students participated in the study and filled out the questionnaires. The students' sample included 139 7th graders, 142 8th graders, and 136 9th graders who were learning English in 5 public schools in the Lorestan province in the west of Iran. Also, besides studying English at public schools, 279 of the participants were taking English classes in private English institutes. Before collecting students' responses, the researchers orally explained the aims of study to the students and clarified that the unwilling students can refuse their request to fill out the questionnaire.

When the students completed the questionnaires, 9 students agreed to participate in follow-up interviews. The demographic information of the participants who completed the questionnaire and attended the interviews along with the interview dates are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 (All names and places are pseudonyms).

Participants	Gender		Learning English at Private Institute		Grade	Age	Interview Date
	Female	Male	Yes	No			
Ali		*	*		9	15	Feb.2019
Mohammed Hossein		*	*		8	14	Feb.2019
Asal	*		*		9	15	Feb.2019
Maryam	*		*		7	13	Feb.2019
Samira	*		*		7	13	March.2019
Zahra	*		*		8	14	March.2019
Sina		*	*		8	14	March.2019
Mohsen		*		*	9	15	April.2019
Hasti	*			*	9	15	April.2019

Table 2: Demographic information of the students participating in the interviews

Instruments

Questionnaire

To gather quantitative data from the participants, a 20-item questionnaire was utilized which was developed by Litz (2005) (Appendix 1) at Sung Kyun Kwan University in South Korea. The questionnaire explored issues about course books' practical considerations (e.g., price, accessories, and methodology), layout and design, activities, skills, cultural considerations, subjects and topics, and employed language varieties, in order to draw significant information about students' views and concerns which may have otherwise remained unnoticed. Although the original questionnaire used semantic differential scales, in the present study it was converted into a Likert type in order to keep it simple for participants to answer; hence, the participants were able to show their views about the each item by selecting among "strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree" in the areas of practical considerations, layout and design, activities, skills, language type, subject and content, and conclusions. The questionnaire was translated into Persian for administration in this context.

Reliability of the Instrument

Before conducting the main study, the questionnaire was analyzed and approved by two experts in the field and it was piloted with a sample of 20 students from the same population to measure Cronbach's Alpha reliability index. After conducting the pilot study, the results were fed into the SPSS software and the internal reliability of the students' questionnaire showed a high reliability of 0.816 (Table 3).

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.816	20

Table 3: Reliability of students' questionnaire

Additionally, in order to check the reliability of the coding procedure, inter-coder Cronbach's Kappa was calculated and showed the Substantial agreement of 0.640 (Table 4).

Value	Standardized Error	Approximate T	Significance
.640	.092	6.509	.000
55			

Table 4: Inter-Coder Cronbach's Kappa

Interviews

At the second stage, among the participants who filled out the questionnaire, 9 students agreed to take part in follow-up semi-structured interviews. As asserted by scholars (Jansen & Stoop, 2001; Schleicher et al., 2002; Yau, 2003), semi-structured interviews enjoy a high level of validity and reliability in qualitative studies. As a qualitative instrument, the interviews were employed to support the gathered data from the questionnaires; therefore, the students were asked to explain the logic behind their choices (see interview questions in Appendix 2). The interviews were administered in Persian and lasted for about 25 minutes.

Data Collection Procedures

Collecting views of the students about the *Prospect* series (questionnaires and interviews) took around 3 months from February to April 2019. First, the translated questionnaire (Litz, 2005) was distributed among the students of the *Prospect* series. Before the students filled out the questionnaires, and to ensure their understanding of the statements in the questionnaire, the researcher explained general terms such as, authenticity, accent, register, language skills and cultural bias. The researchers provided needed explanations about the items when the participants were filling out the questionnaire.

Second, students gradually participated in interviews over two months within intervals of roughly two to five days after completion of the questionnaire.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data gathered at the first stage of retrospective evaluation for students' views about the *Prospects* (questionnaires) were carefully fed into SPSS as numbers from 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 for "strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree", respectively. Then, the means of questionnaire items were calculated and the items which showed to have means less than 2 and more than 4 (beyond the undecided area) were considered as sensitive. Next, the percentages of each selected options were calculated and reported for each item.

At the second phase, drawing upon guidelines proposed by Seidman (2006), all interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English by the researcher 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 to extract and report the main themes of the interviews. At the stage of open coding, all interview transcriptions were divided into students' discrete quotations which were grouped as possible theme-generating segmentations. Then, to reveal the potential themes at the axial coding stage, the thematic connections between the students' discrete quotations were identified. At last, to generate the main themes of the interviews, two or three sub-categories were combined to form four main themes: "topics", "multimedia materials", "organizational drawbacks of the *Prospects*", and "misperception of the goals." Each theme was the head label of two or three other sub themes.

Results

The Questionnaire

Having collected the required data, the researcher reported the data on a Likert scale through descriptive analysis to show any significant relation (Mean beyond the uncertainty area: less than 2.5 and more than

3.5) among the selected items by the participants. Apparently, ten items (marked by an asterisk) generated sensitive answers (Table 4.13). To identify the direction of the sensitivity, frequencies of those items were checked and are illustrated in Table 5.

Questions	N	Mini.	Max.	Mean
1. The price of the textbook is reasonable.	417	1	4	1.87*
2. The textbook is easily accessible.	417	1	5	1.66*
3. The layout and design is appropriate and clear.	417	1	5	4.07*
4. The textbook is organized effectively.	417	1	5	3.02
5. The activities incorporate individual, pair and group work.	417	1	5	4.16*
6. The grammar points and vocabulary items are introduced in motivating and realistic contexts.	417	1	5	3.42
7. The activities promote creative, original and independent responses.	417	1	5	3.07
8. The materials include and focus on the skills that I need to practice.	417	1	5	3.17
9. The materials provide an appropriate balance of the four language skills.	417	1	5	3.12
10. The language used in the textbook is authentic - i.e. like real-life English.	417	1	5	4.04*
11. The language used is at the right level for my current English ability.	417	1	5	3.12
12. The progression of grammar points and vocabulary items is appropriate.	417	1	5	3.18
13. The grammar points are presented with brief and easy examples and explanations.	417	1	5	3.10
14. The language functions exemplify English that I will be likely to use.	417	1	5	3.13
15. The language represents a diverse range of registers and accents.	417	1	5	4.10*
16. The subject and content of the textbook is relevant to my needs as an English language learner.	417	1	5	4.03*
17. The subject and content of the textbook are generally realistic.	417	1	5	4.12*
18. The subject and content of the textbook are interesting, challenging and motivation	417	1	5	3.08
19. There is sufficient variety in the subject and content of the textbook.	417	1	5	4.14*
20. The materials are not culturally biased and they do not portray any negative stereotypes.	417	1	5	4.09*

Valid N (listwise)

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of students' opinions about the Prospect Series

The following table (Table 6) illustrates that while the first two items related to the accessibility and reasonability of the price of the textbooks incline toward the agreement area with the percentage of around 50, more than 70 percent of the students displayed a lack of enthusiasm toward the layout and the design of the series.

Questions	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Q1	129	31%	228	55%	45	10%	15	4%	0	0%
Q 2	187	45%	199	47%	19	5%	9	2%	3	1%
Q 3	5	1%	46	10%	48	12%	122	32%	186	45%
Q 5	10	2%	43	10%	24	6%	135	33%	205	49%
Q 10	10	2%	44	11%	33	8%	162	39%	168	40%
Q 15	2	1%	42	10%	46	11%	149	35%	178	43%
Q 16	3	1%	29	7%	61	14%	183	44%	141	34%
Q 17	5	1%	28	7%	37	8%	187	46%	160	38%
Q 19	5	1%	37	9%	35	8%	158	38%	182	44%
Q 20	8	2%	47	11%	35	9%	136	32%	191	46%

Table 6: Frequency of the Students' chosen items

The fifth item investigates whether the activities included in the course books incorporate individual, pair, or group work. As Table 6 illustrates, around 80% of the participants of the study asserted that the textbooks

were not successful in offering various kinds of pair and group activities. Based on this table, the subject and content of the *Prospect* series, as well as other controversial areas, could not meet students' perceived language needs and did not appear to be realistic and diverse. Moreover, most students believed that the *Prospects* may have held a biased view toward cultures or portrayed stereotypes.

The Interviews

The analysis of the interviews led to the extraction of some substantial themes regarding the EFL learners' views about the *Prospect* series. It is important to mention that the students' responses were translated from Persian to English.

Topics

As was discussed in previous sections, each unit of the *Prospect* series has a specific topic, such as health, hobbies, and cities. Such topics seemed to be of high interest among the interviewed students. However, they believed that the topics included are not sufficiently and appropriately discussed in the textbooks and are confined to some rigid series of questions and answers. Another concerning issue regarding the topics was that the number of topic-related vocabulary items was limited to an average of 8-10. Maybe, what the learners expect is to know more about the topics, such as Iranian New Year celebrations in Lesson 3 of *Prospect* 3 (Figure 1), rather than to be introduced to a couple of questions and answers without any pictures and contextualization.

Figure 1: Practice 1, Lesson 3 of Prospect 3

Accordingly, Zarha, an eighth grader, mentioned, "We have interesting topics in our English books, but we don't know how to talk about them…we can just pose the memorized questions and produce the memorized answers".

Multimedia materials

Furthermore, the students claimed that the listening parts of the *Prospects* are not played in the classrooms, as plenty of Iranian high schools are not equipped with multimedia player devices, such as computers and speakers. Samira, a seventh grade student, explained:

> Our school did not give us the audio CD of our book, and our school does not have any speakers, so we have to listen to the audio on our teachers' smartphone with a very low volume which is totally hard to listen to.

Having no access to the audio files would impede the students from practicing many activities in the textbooks at home, such as "Conversations", "Practice 1 and 2", and "Listening and Reading", and confine their learning opportunities to their classes when their teachers are available. Thus, as the textbooks were claimed to include multimedia supplementary materials, making sure that the target students of any textbooks are provided with the materials of the textbooks should be considered as an important process in stabilizing nation-wide textbooks, such as the *Prospects*.

Also, some students complained that the level of the audio files does not sufficiently suit their English proficiency. In this regard, Hasti, an eighth grader, criticized that:

> At first, I thought I was the only student that has problems understanding the speakers, but later I heard from one of my friends who has been taking English classes for about 5 years that she couldn't understand many parts of the audios.

Organizational drawbacks of the Prospects

During the interviews, the students also mentioned some pitfalls in the organization of the *Prospect* books. First, the students believed that the alphabet should be taught at the beginning of *Prospect 1*. Maryam, a seventh grader, claimed that "For learning questions and answers in English, we should be able to read them, but as we gradually learn alphabets from Lesson 1 to Lesson 8, we should just memorize what our teacher says". Ali, a ninth grader, also mentioned "our teacher asks us to memorize the conversations, come in front of the class, and play all the roles". Further, he added,

> *I think conversations should be transferred to the second part of each unit because when we have conversations as the first part in each unit, we have not learned the vocabulary and grammar used in the conversation, so memorization can be the best solution.*

Apparently, for some students, the memorization of unknown English sentences has turned into a way to cope with their lack of linguistic knowledge, and for some others, a difficult task. This may engender a situation in which students, in a parrot-like manner, would treat English words and utterances that are not fully learned.

Misperception of the goals

Additionally, putting the *Prospect* books at the center of discussion with the interviewed junior high school students revealed that there are some misconceptions regarding the specified goals of the textbooks. For example, Zahra, a ninth grader, mentioned that,

> *I am really confused about what we are supposed to learn…for example, our teacher asks us to take roles of the conversation and answer oral questions, but our final exam is totally different from our classroom procedure, as we should answer a list of grammar and vocabulary questions.*

While 12 points out 20 on the final exams are assigned to a written exam, in the *Prospect* books, much attention has been paid to the spoken skills. Therefore, the students sometimes misunderstand the goals of the textbooks and have problems with their written final exams. Moreover, Ali, a ninth grader, *added,* "There are a few writing exercises included in our book, but in our final exam the only thing we should do is to write". In the same way, Maryam, a seventh grader, believed that, "most part of our classes is allotted to repeating questions and answers, we do not recognize English words and we cannot write properly".

Also, Mohammad Hossein, an eighth grader, believes that, "my teacher cannot speak English, he just teaches English grammar, how can he teach us speaking it?". These quotations depict the incoherence and vagueness of language learning goals for the students.

Discussion

The results of the questionnaire showed that participants believed that this series required some modifications regarding the design and lay-out, authenticity in activities, diversity of registers and accents, variety of subjects and content, and cultural presentation. According to the interview results, the students asserted that there were some other problems with the textbooks in terms of the selected topics, accessibility and quality of the multimedia materials, organizational problems of the content, and the setting of the learning goals. The results of the present study are perhaps more important in Iran than other EFL contexts because Iranian teachers do not have the autonomy needed to create the required modifications in textbooks, and they also do not have the freedom to incorporate their own activities in classes. Therefore, this study's results necessitate that the Iranian educational system's officials to contemplate the needed revisions.

On the other hand, as the result of the study offered, the prices of the English series are reasonable. The low prices of the textbooks might be rooted in the issue that Iran's educational system has its own publication center that receives a budget from the government to purchase its needed paper. Moreover, recently all textbooks published by the Educational System are distributed among the students by school staff. Accordingly, the government indirectly helps the students buy their textbooks for lower prices and directly hands them out to the students. However, an unsuitable textbook design can bring about negative impacts on students' learning and motivation and may result in ineffectiveness of the material (Harp & Mayer, 1997). Increasing the design quality of the Prospects is highly recommended to improve the appearance and aesthetic features of the books.

On the other hand, while the students who took part in the study agreed that the series lacked sufficient pair and group activities, Anderson and Lynch (1988) emphasized that cooperative group or pair work

enhanced cooperation and cohesiveness among learners, and Pica and Doughty (1985) have emphasized the positive role of group and pair work in creating a linguistic environment to support language learning. Therefore, the books should be revised to include more pair and group activities.

Additionally, the students believed that the materials used in the course book were not authentic and did not include various accents and registers. As Widdowson (1978) states, authenticity is "a characteristic of the relationship between the passage and the reader and it has to do with appropriate response" (p. 80). Hence, if the readers (the students) do not consider this series authentic, authenticity is violated. Furthermore, Field (2002) stresses the importance of authentic communicative EFL and ESL materials. Sardabi and Koosha (2015) also reported that this series can lack authenticity.

Although needs analysis has been given considerable attention in developing a particular course or course book (Genesee, 2001; Hutchison & Waters, 1989), its absence in the Prospect series might be deemed as one of the most critical non-attending requisites which leads to misconnections between the students and the subject and content of the course book. This lack of attention to providing opportunities for more authentic and needs-satisfying use of the language in this series was also reported by other researchers (e.g., Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006; Yarmohammadi, 2002). An example of this is the portrayal of Iranian martyrs in the textbooks and inclusion of some unfamiliar faces in the textbooks have highlighted the excessive attempts of the authors to show their adherence to Iranian-Islamic culture. However, language learning is deemed to be a deep social event requiring the incorporation of the elements of the target language culture. In addition, although Kumaravadivelu (2006) believes that the main concern of language classes should be teaching intercultural communicative competence, which highlights the critical role of cultural awareness in language classes. Due to the Islamic governing system in Iran, the teachers teaching at public schools seem not be as free as they should in representing and comparing cultural values of other societies. On the other hand, Kramsch (2013) argued that learning about a culture does not necessarily result in an obligation to behave consistently with conventions of the target culture. However, as stated in Goodarzi & Weisi (2020a, p. 17), "authors may not be to blame in this regard, as stipulated in Fundamental Evolution Document of Education and Pedagogy (2018), teaching and learning foreign languages should be aimed at bolstering and spreading Iranian-Islamic identity; hence this emphasis on depicting ideological domestic stereotypes can be justifiable". This emphasis on Iranian-Islamic culture in this series is also confirmed in Goodarzi et al. (2020b).

Taking the selected topics into consideration, it is clear that the authors were successful in choosing some topics that students found interesting. However, the mismatch between selection and implementation might be nested in Garton and Graves's (2014) claim that although textbook authors often allege that the topics in English textbooks are selected and elaborated according to the surveys examining students' needs and views on the topics, there is a wide incongruity between the results of those studies and their implementation in textbook. Similarly, Khansir and Mahammadifard (2015) reported that the variety considered in choosing topics is appreciable, though, they were not presented in a way to be "motivating and intellectually engaging" (p. 429).

Listening and multimedia materials in CLT-led classrooms in EFL contexts play integral parts in helping the learners have direct exposure to the target language. Advocating the significance of listening in language learning, Rost (2013) points out that listening is critical in ELT because it provides input for learners. Exposure to sufficient input is essential for learning.

On the other hand, as Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) put it when describing pronunciation instruction, students' first language "has been instilled as a part of their habit and it is difficult for them to produce new language" (p. 16). The lack of multimedia devices at schools makes it more difficult for students to develop their pronunciation, as the teachers become the only pronunciation model; therefore, according to what was mentioned in previous sections, teachers are also required to be involved with continual in-service courses to develop their English proficiency.

Students also complained about another problem they have with the listening parts, which is the intelligibility of the audios. Although an effort was made to include different accents in the audios, some speakers throughout the series have personal accents that impede students' understanding. Hence, with regards to enhancing the students' intelligibility, the audios' pace should be adapted to students' level, and they should employ speakers with clearer voices. This issue is in contrast with Sardabi and Koosha (2015) who concluded

that audio included in this series are of great merit to the textbooks, as the quality of the audios showed not to be satisfactory enough.

Communicative language learning requires more than memorization (Larsen-Freeman, 2000); enhancing students' involvement with textbooks can minimize the use of pure memorization and help students learn to communicate meaning in the L2.

The students also showed concerns and ambiguities about the required outcomes and assigned goals in the Prospects because students were bewildered whether they needed to learn oral skills or get involved with grammar questions in their final exams. This finding aligns with Asadi et al. (2016), who found that goals in the Prospects are not fully comprehended by their users. Further, Torki and Chalak (2017) found that "[there is a demand for an] striking a balance between communication (listening and speaking) and literacy skills (reading and writing)" (p. 297).

In this regard, Leavy et al. (2007) claim that misconceptions regarding the goals of each course will bring about irreparable damages to students' learning motivation; hence, students should be wholly aware of the overall goals of the course. Therefore, a very meticulous balance between oral and written skills in the curriculum is needed to increase the students' understanding of what they are expected to learn.

Conclusion

Although this series can be considered an improvement when compared with the formerly-taught English series at Iranian high schools, the results of this research revealed that some critical revisions are needed to improve the included activities, the methodological perspectives, the introduced topics, the lay-out, and the assigned teaching hours for this series. These results shed light on students' views toward the *Prospect* series, and the authors of this series should incorporate students' views in order to improve the quality of this series. Furthermore, this research can support Iran's English textbook development in the future. As Tomlinson (2012) believes, textbook evaluation serves to give feedback to textbook developers and curriculum planners regarding their newly-published English course books. Evaluations, such as the present study, provide useful information to make revisions and modifications as needed. Thus, the purpose of the study was to collect as much informative data as possible to elicit suggestions for necessary modifications in *Prospects*.

This study found that revisions are needed in three areas. First, more authentic materials should be included, to help enhance learners' interaction and motivation toward learning English. Second, simple grammar instruction should be included, especially in *Prospect* 1 and *Prospect* 2, to increase learners' awareness of English and help them learn to make their own sentences. Finally, more communicative activities along with more relevant topics would be helpful to boost the students' motivation.

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Appendix 1

Students' Textbook Evaluation Form

1. Male or Female: …………….   2. Student Grade: ……………   3. Age:……….

4. Do you go to English classes held in private institutes? Yes O No O

The following statements evaluate your views on the *Prospect* series. Fronting each statement a five place rating scale, 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

	(SA)	(A)	(U)	(D)	(SD)
1. The price of the textbook is reasonable.					
2. The textbook is easily accessible.					
3. The layout and design is appropriate and clear.					
4. The textbook is organized effectively.					
5. The activities incorporate individual, pair and group work.					
6. The grammar points and vocabulary items are introduced in motivating and realistic contexts.					
7. The activities promote creative, original and independent responses.					
8. The materials include and focus on the skills that I need to practice.					
9. The materials provide an appropriate balance of the four language skills.					
10. The language used in the textbook is authentic - i.e., like real-life English.					
11. The language used is at the right level for my current English ability.					
12. The progression of grammar points and vocabulary items is appropriate.					
13. The grammar points are presented with brief and easy examples and explanations.					
14. The language functions exemplify English that I will be likely to use.					
15. The language represents a diverse range of registers and accents.					
16. The subject and content of the textbook are relevant to my needs as an English language learner.					
17. The subject and content of the textbook are generally realistic.					
18. The subject and content of the textbook are interesting, challenging and motivation					
19. There is sufficient variety in the subject and content of the textbook.					
20. The textbooks are not culturally-biased and do not portray negative stereotypes.					

Appendix B

Semi-Structured 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?