

Critical Analysis and Teachers' Perspectives on Prospect One (Iranian Junior High School English Book)

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Abstract—During educational innovation, textbooks play a crucial role as agents for change because they provide a picture of what the change is going to look like (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). In 2013, following the revision policy of school curricula, the Iranian Ministry of Education renewed English teaching methodology from Reading Method to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and as a result new English book series entitled “English for schools” was published. Following CLT principles, the new series, among other objectives, is trying to promote learners’ communicative competences in English. Considering the crucial role of textbooks in ELT program, this study aimed to investigate that to what extent Prospect 1 (the first volume of the above mentioned series) has the characteristics of a CLT syllabus, and what the strengths and weaknesses of Prospect 1 are. To this end, the textbook was scrutinized with reference to Cunningsworth’s (1995) checklist. The findings revealed that the syllabus has made great progress in language teaching methodology in Iran and has been able to partially satisfy the learners’ and teachers’ needs. However, it has some deficiencies which are the lack of proper recycling of vocabularies, lack of phonetic transcription of new words and use of unauthentic contexts. To gain further insight into teachers’ perception of the book, some English teachers were also interviewed. They believed although the book is a great progress compared to its predecessors, it has some shortcomings which the present study delves into.

Index Terms— Prospect 1, Textbook evaluation, Practicality, Teachers’ perspective

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I. INTRODUCTION

English is used as a medium of communication by one-third of the world’s population. It is regarded as the global language. English is the most popular foreign language taught in over 100 countries (Crystal, 1997). In fact, English is perceived as the passport to global communication and therefore it can increase individual and national prosperity.

Many scholars (Cunningsworth, 1995; Hutchinson & Torres, 1994; Sheldon, 1987; Ur, 1996; to name just a few) emphasize the importance of textbooks in the process of language teaching and learning for both teachers and learners because textbooks are the primary agents conveying knowledge to learners. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) argue that any textbook has a very important and positive part to play in teaching and learning English. They state that textbooks provide the necessary input into classroom lessons through different activities, reading passages and explanations. A textbook, by definition, is “a book specially designed to help language learners to improve their linguistic and communicative abilities” (Sheldon, 1987, p. 143).

No one can deny the remarkable advantages that textbooks can offer the teacher and the students when used in EFL/ESL settings. Obviously, most teachers use textbooks, especially those accompanied with workbooks, helpful teacher manuals and non-print instructional supplements such as audiotapes, CDs and computer-based materials, as their primary teaching resource in providing the context of the lessons and classroom practice. It rarely occurs that language teachers deprive themselves and their students of the merits of textbooks.

O’Neill (1982) enumerates four reasons for the use of textbooks: Firstly, most parts of textbook materials are

appropriate for students' needs, even if they are not especially designed for them. Secondly, they make it possible for students to plan for future learning and also review the previous materials or lessons. Thirdly, textbooks provide students with high quality materials at a reasonable price. Finally, suitable textbooks allow teachers to adapt and modify them to meet the learners' needs and also allow for natural interaction to happen (as cited in Barzegar, 2013). Hutchinson and Torres (1994) argue that textbooks are beneficial for both teachers and learners. Teachers prefer to use a textbook because of its facilitating role. It saves time, gives direction to lessons, guides discussion, and facilitates assigning homework. It also makes teaching "easier, better organized, more convenient", and learning "easier, faster, better". Most of all, the textbook provides "confidence and security" for teachers. Learners see the textbook as a "framework" or "guide" that helps them to organize their learning both inside and outside the classroom. It enables them to learn "better, faster, clearer, easier, more" (p. 318).

Barzegar (2013) suggested that textbooks play a very crucial role in the realm of language teaching and learning. He echoes Davison's (1975) statement that "the next important factor in the second/foreign language classroom after the teacher is a textbook" (p. 1).

Wong (2005), Allwright (1981) and Tomlinson (2003) all insist that textbooks can serve as a tool to motivate and stimulate language learning; therefore, in a learning environment in which learners are motivated and possess a positive outlook towards their learning environment, the speed of language acquisition can be greatly enhanced, making language learning more effective.

With the many advantages that textbooks may have as an essential tool for ELT, there are some researchers and practitioners who do not necessarily accept this view and show a feeling of doubt because they do not agree completely on that. Tomlinson (2003) argues that in spite the fact that textbooks can function as a framework for the learning and teaching process for both students and teachers, no textbook can effectively address individual learning styles, differences of learners, and the requirements of every classroom setting. Sheldon (1988) echoes Allwright's (1981) remark that "the whole business of language learning is far too complex to be satisfactorily catered for by a pre-packaged set of decisions embodied in teaching materials" (p. 238). He also claims that there are both theoretical and practical problems with textbooks. The main idea is "textbooks merely grow from and imitate other textbooks and don't admit the winds of change from research, methodological experiment, or classroom feedback" (p. 239). Cunningsworth (1995) asserts that heavy dependence on textbooks is far from ideal since it reduces the importance of the individual contributions that good teachers make at all levels in the learning process. He emphasizes that the textbook should be "at the service" of teachers and learners and not be their "master" (p. 7). Textbooks often

contain ideologically-oriented values, cultural biases and social stereotypes. "Many studies have demonstrated that racist attitudes, linguistics biases, gender dominance and cultural prejudices constitute part of the unrealistic view of the textbooks" (Ansary & Babaii, 2003).

If one accepts the value of textbooks in English Language Teaching (ELT), then one should be able to trust that they encompass an acceptable level of quality, usefulness, and appropriateness for the context and audience they are designed for. In fact, having a good syllabus is one of the most important steps towards achieving high quality language learning which emphasizes the importance of evaluation of textbooks in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a given textbook.

Tomlinson (2003) defines material evaluation as "a procedure that involves measuring the value (or potential value) of a set of learning materials. It involves making judgments about the effect of materials on the people using them" (P. 15). Many researchers have suggested that it would be best for textbook evaluation schemes to adopt a "leveled" approach in evaluation in which at the first level an "impressionistic" evaluation is conducted and then it is followed by an "in-depth" evaluation.

Cunningsworth's checklist (1995) has helped to provide a good summary of how a leveled evaluation can be conducted. When applying impressionistic approach, we take the literal meaning of the method by quickly looking through the textbook cover to cover, to try and get an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the book. The overview can provide information pertaining to a quick opinion regarding the design and structure of the textbook, such as how attractive the cover is, what peripheral materials come with the textbook and how the book is sequenced. An in-depth evaluation will be done subsequently to provide a detailed evaluation of specific items in each textbook on areas such as how the exercises can cater for the syllabus and learners' needs. An example of an in-depth evaluation can be selecting one or two chapters and looking at the balance of skills and activities contained in each unit (Cunningsworth, 1995).

A number of researchers have also expressed different opinions regarding when a textbook evaluation takes place. There are generally three different stages at which a textbook can be evaluated: pre-use whilst-in-use and after-use. Each stage of evaluation has its own significance. Pre-use evaluation can facilitate textbook selection process by gaining an impression as the potential educational value of the textbook (Tomlinson, 2003). It is especially a quick and useful way for textbook selection if done by experienced teachers (Cunningsworth, 1995). Whilst-in-use evaluations can help to examine the suitability of the textbook while using them or by observing how it is actually being used. It can be more objective than pre-use evaluation because it makes use of measurement rather than prediction. Lastly, post-use evaluation is the most durable type of

evaluation as it can measure the actual effects of materials on the users. It can measure short-term effects such as motivation, impact, achievability and instant learning and also long-term effects such as durable learning and implication (Tomlinson, 2003).

We should be reminded that regardless of the framework applied to evaluate a textbook, and also regardless of the stage at which the textbook is evaluated, the process of textbook selection and evaluation ultimately is a subjective practice. Yet textbook evaluation remains an important process, since through evaluating a textbook, teachers can know the fundamental merits and demerits of the textbook.

Since material evaluation is fundamentally a subjective activity, a large number of textbook evaluation framework researchers, such as Byrd (2001), Cunningsworth (1979, 1984 & 1995), Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979), Ellis (1997), Harmer (1991, 2001), McDonough and Shaw (2003), Sheldon (1988), Skierso (1991), Tomlinson (2003, 2008), Ur (1996), Williams (1983), have used the checklist based approach in helping teachers evaluate ELT textbooks. One major advantage of using the checklist approach is that it can provide a very economic and systematic way to ensure all relevant items are considered for evaluation.

Ansari and Babaii (2002) share the same view with Cunningsworth (1995) and emphasize that to have a more systematic and objective approach to material evaluation, one must use valid and proper checklists. There are various checklists and some different approaches for textbook evaluation. Most of the evaluation models include a very detailed examination of the linguistic context, aims, design, methodology, skills and teacher's book (Pour Ahmad, 2013).

One of the most important researches in EFL/ESL textbook evaluation is Cunningsworth's (1995) checklist, *Choosing your Textbook*, where he lists some guidelines to evaluate textbooks. Cunningsworth's checklist is quite comprehensive, and is made up of eight major categories: aims and approaches, design and organization, language content, skills, topic, methodology, teachers' books, and other practical considerations.

"A textbook is an excellent tool for the performance of the material, an effective reference for learners, a tool or piece of equipment made for a particular purpose, a security device for opinions and activities, a useful manual for novice teachers, and an effective source for displaying the goals of language learning" (Zohrabi, 2012, p. 90).

Because of the importance of textbooks in teaching and learning process, they should be carefully evaluated in order for their strengths and weaknesses to be identified.

In Iran, since 1982, the High School English Textbooks have been "developed on the basis of the tenets of both Reading Methods and Situational Language Teaching" (Foroozandeh, 2011, P. 69) and the ultimate goal of the

system was to train learners who were able to read and comprehend different texts in different fields of study and enjoy their contents; however, in 2013, following the revision policy of school curricula, the Ministry of Education renewed the English textbooks and as a result a new English Book Series under the title of "English for schools" were published. Following the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Method, the new series, among other objectives, is trying to promote learners' communicative proficiency in English through integration and presenting all the four language skills.

Considering the crucial role of textbooks in ELT program, and the vital role of textbooks as an "agents for change" (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994), this study aims to investigate: a) to what extent the newly published book (Prospect 1) has the characteristics of a CLT syllabus, b) What the strengths and weaknesses of this newly prescribed book are and c) How this textbook can be improved in order to be useful both to the students and teachers.

Past experience shows that problems do exist with our teaching materials in Iran (Dahmardeh, 2009; Ghorbani, 2011; Jahangard, 2008; Zohrabi, 2012, to name just a few), yet the necessity of the textbooks cannot be neglected.

As Hutchinson and Torres (1994) argue, during educational innovation, textbooks play a crucial role as agents for change because they act as a vehicle for teacher and learner training. In addition, textbooks provide a picture of what the change is going to look like (emphasis is ours).

This study investigated the validity of Prospect 1 based on Cunningsworth's (1995) criteria. This study is significant because it unearths the strengths and weaknesses of this newly developed syllabus and determines how well this book meets the standards of a good book and provides guidance and feedback for course revisions as well. It may also enhance teachers' personal and professional development by encouraging them to adopt a reflective approach to their own teaching practice. Thus, the results of the study are hoped to benefit English language teachers, learners, and textbook developers to improve their teaching, learning, and designing of textbooks.

A. Research Questions

Q1: To what extent does Prospect 1 enjoy the features of a CLT-based syllabus?

Q2: Does the textbook foster all the four language skills (i.e. Speaking, Listening, Writing and Reading)?

Q3: How do Iranian high school teachers evaluate practicality of Prospect 1?

The first pertinent study carried out by Rasti, Behjat, and Asgarkargar (2015) which evaluated the quality of

Prospect 1. The focus of the study was on the content of the textbook. A questionnaire was also used in the study to elicit the perspectives of 44 English language teachers. The data was subjected to analysis through descriptive statistics. Based on the analyses and responses in the questionnaire related to Prospect 1, the following conclusions were drawn:

1) In general, teachers agree with the shift from the old book toward the newly published book.

2) Practical Considerations including price, accessibility, and recency are the strong points of Prospect 1, while skills receive weak attention instead, and there is little balance and integration between four language skills and no consideration of pronunciation (i.e. Stress and intonation).

3) Teachers believed the newly-published textbook provides a balance of activities, encourages sufficient communicative and meaningful practices.

4) Teachers are also satisfied with subject and content in areas as being relevant to students' needs as an English language learner, being generally realistic, interesting, challenging and motivating. (P. 958)

In another study Bemani and Jahangard (2014), investigated Prospect1 from the viewpoints of 102 teachers within the framework proposed by Litz (2005). They wanted to see what attitudes the teachers had towards Prospect 1 and whether there were any differences between the attitudes of male and female teachers and between that of experienced and inexperienced teachers. The results indicated that the textbook is regarded as partially efficacious in average by the teachers who participated in the study. The findings also showed that almost "the same level of satisfaction existed among the experienced and inexperienced teachers. ...similarly, there did not exist a significant difference between the attitudes of male and female teachers "(Bemani & Jahangard, 2014, P. 210).

Another related study was carried out by Naser-Abadi (2014) aiming to evaluate the authenticity of language components (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation) and the four language skills (writing, reading, listening, speaking) in Prospect1. To this end, he provided seven checklists for three language components and the four language skills. At last, he concluded that the book had some modifications in comparison to its predecessors in terms of authenticity but still has some important deficiencies such as "lack of performance activity types, insufficient and unsatisfactory teacher talking time, and the use of L1 in instruction and few student talking time" (p. 6).

Another study was conducted by Hamidizadeh (2014) in which he evaluated Prospect1 based on the features of content analysis and syllabus design to check its strengths and weaknesses. He also checked the organization and the main content of the book. In the end, he concluded that the main advantages of the book were "the physical

appearance, the available teacher's guide book, the fluency and coherence among the lessons, content organization, and attention to all skills in language learning" (p. 13). The most important weak points of the book were lack of "authenticity, explicitly mentioned objectives of the individual lessons, appropriate supplementary material to the teacher and inappropriate contextual situations" (P. 13).

To probe the features of Prospect 1, Janfeshan and Nosrati (2014) conducted a research in which they used Biocchi's checklist to reveal the positive and negative characteristics of the book. At the same time, they obtained the achieved scores of 160 students in 6 random classes in Kermanshah City (Iran) to examine the practical results of teaching Prospect in real classes. The results of checklist along with practical classroom teaching revealed that the book had a good focus on oral and communicative skills. Since grammar was taught inductively, it promoted students' problem solving spirit. Other advantages of the book included having a work book, audio CD and teachers' guide book. The disadvantages of Prospect 1 based on the results of this research were lack of a story line, no referring back to notions in later units, limited writing activities, ignorance of English culture.

Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2014) evaluated Prospect 1 based on teachers' perceptions and experiences. They interviewed fifteen male and female English junior high school teachers in some cities in Iran, including Gorgan, Tehran, and Ardebil ranging from 2 to 30 years of teaching experience took. A semi-structure interview was conducted to scrutinize the strengths and weaknesses of Prospect 1. The findings of the research revealed some main strength such as: the emphasis is on Communicative Language Teaching approach, the emphasis is on the integration of four skills, and attention is paid to the students' needs. There are some weaknesses which are as follow: letters are not in the right range; each lesson provides three letters, time allocated to the book in syllabus program is not enough, and reading and writing are paid less attention.

The literature review introduced a summary of the research studies on EFL textbook evaluation with emphasis on those studies that evaluated Prospect 1. Since it was the first implementation of Prospect 1, there were a few studies related to its evaluation and most of the studies that evaluated Iranian textbooks investigated the old series. In the light of reviewed literature, it is evident that textbook evaluation is necessary because in many cases the materials did not correspond to the needs of the learners. This study was concerned with the evaluation of the First Grade of Junior High School English Textbooks, English for Schools Series (Prospect1), which was implemented in 2013 by Iranian Ministry of Education.

II. METHODOLOGY

The main aim of this research was to find out whether the claims made by the authors of the book could be substantiated by some of the teachers who were teaching the material. In order to do so, interviews and a critical analysis of the material seemed to be the most prominent method which in turn led the researcher to apply a qualitative method of research.

The first part of the present study scrutinized Prospect 1 against different categories mentioned in Cunningsworth's (1995) checklist. The aim of this part was to investigate to what extent Prospect 1 has the features of a CLT-based syllabus mentioned by Cunningsworth (1995).

The second part consisted of 15 interviews with the teachers who were teaching the book. The aim of this part was to see to what extent objectives claimed by the authors are achievable within the classrooms.

A. Participants

The participants of the study were 15 English teachers who were teaching Prospect 1 in the first grade of junior high school in Khorasan Razavi and Khorasan Shomali, Iran. They were both male (n=8) and female (n=7).

B. Instruments

Materials used in this study included a textbook evaluation checklist by Cunningsworth (1995), Prospect 1 and interview.

In this study, the researcher used Cunningsworth's (1995) checklist, because it is the most accepted and widely used checklist in other studies (Al-Yousef, 2007; Pour Ahamad, 2009).

The researcher also interviewed some of the teachers who were teaching the book since they are optimally positioned to know their learners' needs. Jolly and Bolitho (1998, as cited in Al-yousef, 2007) assert that "teachers understand their own learners best because they understand their needs and their preferred learning styles" (p. 18). These interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into teachers' attitudes toward Prospect 1 and its practicality.

C. The Procedure

The research methodology was descriptive. This study was going to provide qualitative evaluation of Prospect 1. To this end, the researcher conducted a qualitative evaluation based on Cunningsworth's (1995) checklist. This checklist consists of eight major categories: aims and approaches, design and organization, language content, skills, topic, methodology, teachers' books, and other practical considerations. Every category consists of four to seven specific checking items. The researcher

scrutinized Prospect 1 against the eight categories suggested by Cunningsworth's (1995) checklist to see which and to what extent these features are presented in Prospect 1.

In the second phase, the researcher interviewed some of the teachers who were teaching this recently prescribed book to collect their perception on the effectiveness of the program implemented. The interviews were conducted with a selected number of teachers (n=15). The participants were free to choose Farsi or English language in order to respond to the interview questions. The interview questions consisted of 12 open-ended items. The average respond time for each participant was 60 minutes. The open-ended items were intended to elicit the participants' opinions regarding Prospect 1 and how it could be improved in order to fulfill the students' needs and teachers' expectations and also syllabus goals. The interviews were later transcribed and used in the study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Checklist Data Analysis

The checklist-evaluation provided a descriptive analysis of Prospect 1 through an in-depth investigation of its content (including aims and approaches, design and organization, language content, skills, topic, methodology, teachers' books, and other practical considerations). It also clarifies how the results are related to the literature review and previous research results. Therefore, answers to the research questions were extracted from the review of literature and from the findings of the researcher as well as interviews. The checklist analysis investigated Prospect 1 in order to obtain answers for research questions 1 and 2.

Research Question 1: To what extent does Prospect 1 enjoy the features of a CLT-based syllabus?

Research Question 2: Does the textbook foster all the four skills (i.e. Speaking, Listening, Writing and Reading)

Aims and Approaches

With regard to the correspondence between the aims of the textbook and the aims of the teaching program, the results of the study showed that Prospect 1 was based on CLT principles and tried to improve learners' communicative competence through the use of different communicative tasks.

The findings of the present study confirmed the results of other studies on Prospect 1 (Bemani & Jahangard, Hamidzadeh, Janfeshan & Nosrati, Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2014) which all asserted that the book had been successful to promote language learning through teaching communicative functions. For example, Ahmadi and Derakhshan, (2014) concluded that "On the basis of the results obtained from teachers' interviews, most

teachers participated in the study believed that this book provided students and teachers' needs in terms of approaches and methodology and the process of language learning and teaching" (P. 57).

Though the textbook had most features of a CLT-based syllabus, the findings of interviews with English teachers revealed that there were some deficiencies at the level of implementation of the program. The English classes are held once a week for at most 90 minutes every session. In fact, the intended instruction time for English language in educational program in Iran is not sufficient. This deprives learners from receiving sufficient input and exposure. Besides, In CLT the input must be rich; but, in Iran English is taught as a foreign language, therefore English classes are the only situations where the learners deal with English and once-a-week classes do not provide sufficient input for them. This shows that although the textbook has been designed based on CLT principles and it covers most of what is needed to develop communicative competence, it is not suitable for the teaching/learning situation of Iran because the conditions for its implementation are not appropriate.

Design and Organization

With regard to design and organization, the findings of the study revealed that the book enjoyed a functional design in which the communicative functions were selected and sequenced according to their usefulness to the learner therefore the learning process had an immediate practical result and the students could use what they had learned outside the classroom at a relatively early stage. This finding of the study supported the claim made by Ahmadi and Derakhshan, Bemani and Jahangard, and Naser-Abadi (2014) that the language of the textbook was functional, realistic, and, contextualized and was based on learners' needs. Naser-Abadi (2014) stated "The learning process of this book deals with Functional-Notional approach, focusing on what people want to achieve through language using different functions and notions in the form of exponents in different contexts" (P. 6).

In the case of recycling newly taught items and using them in following lessons, the results of the study revealed that learning materials did not occur adequately in next lessons and also the revision parts of the book which came after every two lessons were not as fruitful as they could be. The results of interviews confirm the above statement. This finding was also parallel to Ahmadi and Derakhshan's (2014) findings: "New vocabulary is not sufficiently repeated for reinforcement. The presented words in the lessons of the textbook are not repeated in the other lessons. So, students forget these words very quickly" (P. 51). However, the results of the current study contradicted Hamidzadeh's (2014) finding mentioning that:

Another satisfactory point is the existence of periodic reviews at the end of every two lessons which helps both teachers and the students to evaluate whatever has been covered after every two lessons and to check any need to the remedy classes or exercises to fill the gaps of learning. (P. 11)

The main purpose of a table of content is to allow the reader to quickly browse through it to discover what the book has to offer in terms of content and how they are connected. The most important problem with the map of content of Prospect 1 is that the page numbers are not mentioned, so it is not easy to find your way around the book.

Moreover, there must be a reference section at the end of the book to show the page number where a new word or expression or grammatical structure has been first mentioned but the book lacks this section as well. Instead of reference section, there is only a photo dictionary at the end of the book which classifies new vocabularies based on the lesson they have first occurred in. There are some new vocabularies in some lessons which do not exist in photo dictionary. For example, lady (lesson 4), wear (lesson 5), breakfast, lunch, dinner (lesson 6), etc.

Language Content Grammar

Prospect 1 enjoys an analytic syllabus in teaching grammar. There is no point referring to grammatical issues in the book and in fact the authors have tried to teach grammar through the language functions. Prospect 1 focuses 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 and also promoting the problem-solving spirit of the. The findings of the present study confirmed the findings of Hamidzadeh, Janfeshan and Nosrati, (2014). Hamidzadeh (2014) stated that "considering the level of difficulty in ordering rules and exercises, the inductive grammar teaching in Prospect 1 has led the students toward independency in learning through the strategies" (P. 12).

Vocabulary

The findings showed that vocabulary selection is not only based on their usefulness to satisfy learners' communication needs, but also they follows semantic and situational relations which make learning new words easier. Although the selected vocabulary items may at times move beyond the scope of the lesson, the overall presentation of vocabulary seems acceptable. Contextualized vocabulary is another advantage of Prospect 1. Since the book is based on holistic approach, new vocabularies are used within the context.

Phonology

Phonology is limited to introduction of new letters and their corresponding sound(s). The main shortcoming of this section was the lack of phonetic transcriptions of new words in photo dictionary at the end of book. In fact, the International Phonetic Association (IPA) system is never introduced, while the English textbooks at language institutes begin introducing IPA from beginning levels.

However, a positive aspect of teaching phonology in Prospect 1 is that in it not only the letter is introduced but also different sounds articulated because of that letter are presented as well. For example, the letter "c" can be pronounced as /k/ in "cake" or as /s/ in "rice". This would improve learners' both reading skill and dictation.

Style and Appropriacy

Regarding style and appropriacy, the results of the study showed that since Language is used both in formal situations (school, library ...) and in informal situations (home, school yard ...), learners are exposed to both formal words ("Hello, father, mother") and informal words ("Hi, dad, mum"). By using language differently in different situations, learners are expected to realize that language is used differently in different situations.

Skills

One of the most important features of CLT method is that the four language skills are covered simultaneously from the very beginning of the course. Though it was claimed that the four language skills were covered adequately from the very beginnings, the findings of the present study as well as interviewed teachers' perception, and the findings of other studies asserted that speaking and listening skills have more prominence than reading and writing skills. Speaking and listening are included in the Student Book and are worked on in the class while reading and writing are in the Work Book and are done by students at home.

With regard to skills, the findings are in line with Bemani and Jahangard, Hamidzadeh, Janfeshan and Nosrati, Ahmadi and Derakhshan, 2014; Rasti and Behjat and Asgharkargar (2015) who all believed that though the four language skills were covered in Prospect 1, more emphasis was on listening and speaking skills, with less attention on reading and writing skills. This findings approved Bemani and Jahangard's (2014) state that "the textbook has not considered the four language skills equally and could not meet its objectives regarding the skills" (P. 211).

All these researchers also confirmed that there were activities which integrated different language skills.

One problem with speaking activities is the length of the sentences that the learners are supposed to produce. In some of the conversations there are long statements or

unsmooth wording. Some of the teachers in their interviews referred to this point. One of the teacher said:

Excerpt 1 "...because the students are not yet familiar with sentence structures, when they come to long sentences they can't produce them properly..." (June, 2014)

The interviews also revealed that the teachers were not satisfied with listening materials. They believed the quality of recorded sound is very low. The second problem with listening materials is that they are not as authentic as they can be. For example, no background sound is heard. Pauses, backsliding, correction, etc. which are very common in real-life communications are not used in these conversations. Thirdly, since the students are at the elementary level, the speed of delivery is too fast.

Topic

Regarding the topics, the investigation of the topics presented in Prospect 1 revealed that the book enjoyed a good variety and range of topics. These findings were in line with the findings of Hamidzadeh, Janfeshan and Nosrati (2014).

One of the most important deficiencies of Prospect 1 is the lack of connection between the language and the target culture. Widdowson (1990, as cited in Hamidzadeh, 2014, P. 11) says "authentic materials mean exposure to real language and its use in its own community." In Prospect 1 Iranian people speak English in contexts which are within Iran. This makes the situations unreal and unnatural. There was a consensus among researchers evaluating Prospect 1 that the book needed to be revised in this aspect (Hamidzadeh, Janfeshan & Nosrati, Bemani & Jahangard, Ahmadi & Derakhshan, Naser-Abadi, 2014). Naser-Abadi (2014) stated that "Pictures and visual imagery provided in this book are of lowest level of authenticity possible, being so local. They neither provide any image of the authentic English language society, nor stimulate any sense of familiarity even with Iranian society" (P. 6).

Teaching Methodology

Regarding the methodology, as stated by the syllabus designers, the teaching methodology prescribed by the document is titled as "interactive self-reliance communicative approach" which is claimed to be a "localized version of CLT".

Hutchinson and Torres (1994) regarded textbooks as effective "agents of change" because they provide a picture of what the change is going to look like. In this case, Prospect 1 has functioned as a good agent. The finding of the present study and other related studies (Bemani Jahangard, Hamidzadeh, Janfeshan & Nosrati, Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2014) showed the activities of the textbook under study seem to have partially achieved the communicative value. However, the results of

interviews with teachers who were teaching the book revealed that the book had some deficiencies at the level of implementation. Because of the limited instructional time and unfamiliarity of some teachers with elements of CLT approach, it seemed the book had not been able to achieve its objectives.

One of the positive features of Prospect 1 is learner's empowerment. In fact, they need to carry most loads of learning. They have to induce the grammatical structures or find the meaning of some words; they need to use different language strategies to maintain a conversation. In sum, they have an active role in the teaching/learning process. The teachers who were interviewed all emphasized on this feature.

Since the main aim of the book is developing learners' communicative competence, as mentioned by teachers who participated in the study, through involving the learners in different interactive activities, their communicative abilities were developed. As discovered in the results of the interview with English teachers, the findings of other studies revealed that the book had been partially successful to achieve its goals in this domain (Bemani & Jahangard, Hamidizadeh, Janfeshan & Nosrati, Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2014).

Teachers' Book

Regarding the Teacher's book, the results of interviews and the findings of other studies all confirm that one of the most important advantage of Prospect 1 over the old English book series, Right Path to English, was the inclusion of the teacher's book in the package. On his book "Choosing your Coursebook", Cunningsworth (1995) presents a list of the features of a good teacher's book and the teacher's book of Prospect 1 had most of these features. Most teachers who participated in the present study asserted that teacher's book was very useful and comprehensive. These findings support Hamidizadeh, Ahmadi and Derakhshan, Janfeshan and Nosrati, (2014) who all believed "...there is a guidebook available which introduces the book and the course briefly, gives sufficient advice about the appropriate time for each part and exercise and guides the teachers on how to teach them" (Hamidizade, 2014, P. 11).

Practical Considerations

By "practical considerations", Cunningsworth (1995) means features like package price, its availability, equipment required, and physical appearance of the book. The teachers who were interviewed believed as the government sponsored the package, its price was much lower than its real value. Regarding the availability of the package, they believed by the beginning of the new academic year, the book was available in most book stores, but afterwards the package was not available. These findings were parallel to the results of Bemani and Jahangard's (2014) interviews with English teachers.

Though the teachers were content with the use of colorful pictures in the book, they believed the quality of the pictures was too low and some of the pictures were not clear enough or were misleading.

Excerpt 2 "...in previous book, the pictures were simple drawings but in Prospect, pictures are real and colorful which make the book look good. But there are still two problems with them, first, the quality of the pictures are terribly low and second, while the situations are within Iran, people speak English which make the pictures unnatural..." (June, 2014)

This contradicted Bemani and Jahangard's (2014) findings which revealed "the teachers judged the pictures colorful enough and in the right place" (P. 210).

One of the most important skills which is going to be developed through Prospect series is the listening skill. The package consists of a CD which should be played for the learners; however, the point is that there are few public schools which have language labs. In some rural areas, they do not have even a CD player. One of teachers in his interview said that he had to take his own laptop to school to play the CD. These findings showed the most schools did not have proper equipment to run the program properly.

B. Interview Analysis

The second step consisted of interviews with some English teachers who taught the book. Some relevant parts of the interviews were used in the first part of this chapter. Since teachers directly interact with the learners, they could find out which parts of the material needed modification. These interviews were conducted to find answers to research question 3.

Research Question 3. How do Iranian high school teachers evaluate the practicality of Prospect 1?

After interviewing 15 experienced English teachers (8 teachers from Khorasan Shomali and 7 teachers from Khorasan Razavi) who were teaching Prospect1 and asking their ideas about the new approach, the student book, workbook and teacher's book, positive and negative features of the book and analyzing their responses, the following results were obtained:

Most of the teachers who participated in the study were content with the change in teaching methodology and believed the book to some extent had been able to satisfy communicative needs of the learners and since the learners were able to use language from the beginning, they were motivated to learn more.

Excerpt 3: "The age of Reading Method has long passed and now communication is the most important need of the learners. So, if CLT is performed properly, it can satisfy this need." (June, 2014)

Other strengths of the syllabus in their views were active role of the learners in learning, inclusion of a Teacher's Book and Work Book in the package, the use

of real and colorful pictures and a photo dictionary. One of the teachers said:

Excerpt 4: "Students can hear, read and even see a picture of new words which means different learning styles have been taken into consideration." (June, 2014)

The interviewees declared that the book had some fundamental problems as well. The most important problem that almost all teachers were complaining about was the insufficient instructional time. This time limitation had two different dimensions. On the one hand, the teachers were not able to cover that amount of materials sufficiently during the academic year.

Excerpt 5: "Though at first it seems easy to cover 8 lessons in nine months [academic year], in fact, it is not so. For example, in lesson 3 the students have to learn numbers from one to one hundred which lasts longer than the time allocated in lesson plan." (June, 2014)

On the other hand, since English is taught as a foreign language in Iran and in fact there are few other environments for the students to be exposed and to use the language, English classes are the only environments where the learners are exposed to the English language. Regarding the fact that exposure is one of the effective factors to enhance learning, once-a-week classes do not provide the learners with enough exposure and input

CLT is based on interactive tasks which need direct supervision of the teacher. In Iranian public schools, there are lots of overpopulated classes where the teacher cannot supervise the learners' performances. One of the teacher said:

Excerpt 6: "There are 33 students in my class and it is really difficult for me to check if they are doing the task or just wasting their time." (June, 2014)

The interviews showed that some students, especially in rural areas, had no English background and they did not even know English letters. Therefore, they could not keep up with subject and lost their motivation. On the other hand, some urban students had been studying English in institutes for years and the course was too easy and boring for them. Since the book has been devised for nationwide use, different learners' backgrounds should be taken into consideration.

One of the teacher who was teaching in Mashhad, Iran said:

Excerpt 7: "One of my students has a degree in IELTS and another students in the same class didn't know English letters yet..." (June, 2014)

Teachers play an important role in the process of language teaching; therefore their knowledge must be updated constantly. Most participants of the study stated that because there has been a change in teaching methodology, there must be in-service training classes for them to learn about CLT. An experienced teacher mentioned:

Excerpt 8: "I have been teaching English based on Reading Method for 23 years and I'm not sufficiently aware of CLT techniques, so we need more in-service

classes to get familiar with the best way to teach the book..." (June, 2014)

With regard to inclusion of the four language skills, most of the interviewees believed speaking and listening skills received more attention than reading and writing skills.

Although teachers are satisfied with the way letters are taught, in which the focus is on phonics rather than letters through working on names, they did not like the distribution of teaching letters through the book.

IV. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Textbooks are one of the most essential components of language instruction. In 2013, the Iranian Ministry of Education prescribed a locally produced syllabus entitled "English for Schools". With regard to the important role of textbooks in teaching/learning process and the necessity of textbook evaluation, this study intended to evaluate Prospect 1 (the first volume of the new English book series) based on Cunningsworth's (1995) checklist. As stated by the authors of the series, among other objectives, the most important goal of this new English book series was to develop learners' communicative competence. Therefore, the main aims of the present study were to see to what extent Prospect 1 had been able to change English teaching method in Iran from Reading Method to Communicative Language Teaching in order to develop learners' communicative abilities and how English teachers evaluate its practicality within the classes. To this end, three research questions were posed:

Q1) To what extent does Prospect 1 enjoy the features of a CLT-based syllabus?

Q2) Does the textbook foster all the four skills (i.e. Speaking, Listening, Writing and Reading)? Q3) How do Iranian high school teachers evaluate practicality of Prospect 1?

To answer the first two research questions, the researcher scrutinized Prospect 1 with reference to Cunningsworth's (1995) checklist. To answer the third research question, the researcher interviewed 15 English teachers who were teaching Prospect 1.

To answer the first research question it can be concluded that Prospect 1 is based on CLT approach in which it tries to develop learners' communicative abilities, it covers the four language skills, integrates different language skills, gives an active role to the learners in the process of teaching/learning, teaches the grammar inductively, and uses different communicative tasks to promote learning by doing. However, it has some shortcomings which are lack of proper recycling of vocabularies, and expressions, lack of phonetic transcription of new words and unauthentic contexts.

With regard to the second research question, the findings of the study showed that the four language skills

were included in the syllabus. However, a detailed consideration of the syllabus showed that more emphasis is on speaking and listening skills and less attention is paid to reading and writing skills. This may cause the learners to lag behind in some skills that may be necessary in their future lives. It is also in contrast with objectives of both CLT and Iranian National Syllabus Plan. To remedy this deficiency, some parts of the learning responsibility should be placed on the shoulders of the teacher to assign writing activities or work on short paragraph writing in the classroom or he/she can make use of the dialogues in the textbook 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 so as to solve it. They could possibly refer to the available authentic reading or writing activities on the Net which are proper for elementary stages to be included in the book.

The third research question mostly dealt with implementation of Prospect 1. The findings of this part are mainly based on interviews with English teachers. Interviewing the teacher revealed that though they were satisfied with the change of teaching methodology, they believed Prospect 1 has lots of problems in its implementation which prevented it from achieving its objectives and the most important problem is limited instructional time.

The most important strengths of Prospect 1 were: change in teaching methodology from RM to CLT, covering the four language skills, learners' empowerment, inclusion of a work book and teacher book in the package. The main weaknesses of the book were: lack of logical proportion between instructional hours and the amount of materials to be taught, overpopulated classed which prevented teachers from proper supervision on students' doing their tasks, paying less attention to reading and writing skills, ignorance of the learners' different educational backgrounds, lack of enough equipment like lab or even CD player, and need for in-service classes to promote teachers' knowledge.

A. Implications of the study

The findings of the present study may be used as a guide for revising/modifying Prospect 1. When modifying the book, the following points need to be taken into account:

a) Increasing the educational time from one session a week to at least two sessions a week which increases the amount of exposure and also provides enough time for teacher to cover the tasks properly.

b) The Ministry of Education, as well as syllabus designers of Prospect 1 should take into account the proficiency level of the course, the characteristics of learners, and the degree of preparation of teachers when choosing a CLT syllabus.

c) Adopting a long-term project that aims not only to improve our teachers' performances, but also to acquaint them with the methods of teaching communicative syllabi.

d) Conducting a thorough content analysis in order to determine those tasks that are above learners' level (e.g. pp.10, 16, 22, etc.), are "matching" or "fill in the blanks" and are not common in CLT (e.g. pp. 38, 40, 45, etc.), and hence require modification.

e) Providing supplementary materials (CD players/Flash Cards) to all schools that facilitate language learning and are essential for proper implementation of the program.

f) Devising a plan to develop learners' intercultural competence by including international pictures, names, dates, etc.

g) Paying more attention to reading and writing skills so that the learners do not lag behind in these two skills.

h) Including the IPA system to help the students learn with phonetic symbols which will lead to fluency.

All of the above suggestions have their justifications and need to be implemented.

For the study findings to be conclusive, further large-scale research studies are needed. The effectiveness of an English language textbook depends on learners' motivation towards learning a foreign language, as well as the level of teachers' beliefs about the nature of language and the methodology of teaching. These factors can be evaluated in future research studies.

English for Schools Series have been devised for nationwide use. There are students with different English background throughout the country; further research could be done to evaluate the performance of urban and rural areas in learning English through Prospect series.

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