Comparative Textbook Evaluation: Representation of Learning Objectives in Locally and Internationally Published ELT Textbooks

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Abstract

The present study evaluated the learning objectives represented in the recent Iranian nationwide ELT textbooks, i.e. Prospect and Vision series, and compared them to those in the internationally-published textbook of Four Corners. To this end, Bloom's revised taxonomy of learning objectives was utilized as the analytical framework to scrutinize the tasks and exercises of the textbooks using a researcher-made coding scheme based on the taxonomy and investigate the extent to which they represent lower-order thinking skills (LOTS) (i.e. remembering, understanding, and applying) and higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) (i.e. analyzing, evaluating, and creating). Intercoder reliability procedure was carried out to ensure the consistency of the scheme (Phi-coefficient = .89). Results of chi-square analysis revealed that the Four Corners series dealt with LOTS and HOTS significantly more and above Prospect and Vision series. Furthermore, while the Prospect and Vision series portrayed a completely imbalanced view towards LOTS and HOTS, Four Corners provided a somehow balanced representation in the tasks and exercises. The findings make ELT teachers aware of the cognitive levels in the textbooks and recommend them to add supplementary materials when needed. Moreover, the results point to the significance of modifying the cognitive load of the Prospect and Vision series.

Keywords: Textbook evaluation, learning objectives, Bloom's revised taxonomy, Prospect & Vision series, Four Corners series

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INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are considered as one of the utmost important and inseparable components in the language teaching process. Their value is to the extent that they have been nominated as the "visible heart of any ELT program" (Sheldon, 1988, p. 237), and the significant source of input for language learners in EFL contexts (Mishan & Timmis, 2015). Although the value of textbooks during the history of materials development has been questioned by some scholars (Allwright, 1981; Baleghizadeh & Motahed, 2010; Garton & Graves, 2014; Ndura, 2004; Richards, 2001), textbooks still play a major role in all classrooms in general and foreign language classrooms in particular. Among the reasons behind textbooks survival in educational systems we can refer to their cost-effectiveness (Tomlinson, 2012), their role as a teaching roadmap (Grant, 1987), and as security/confidence providers for students (Cunningsworth, 1995). In addition, textbooks, as the directors of students' mental procedures (Mishan & Timmis, 2015; Tomlinson, 2012; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018), could facilitate and accelerate the learning process.

Among the myriads of ELT materials, nation-wide textbooks play a crucial role in language learning and teaching of a country, especially the ones with a centralized educational system like Iran in which teachers are not allowed to choose the textbooks as the core materials in the classroom. Quite recently, ELT textbook development in Iran has undergone drastic changes to meet students' proficiency needs (Foroozandeh & Forouzani, 2015) which resulted in the introduction of *Prospect* and *Vision* series to the English language teaching program of Iranian schools, as the public sector of education. The importance of such locally-developed textbooks becomes apparent when one considers the fact that in Iranian educational system English teachers have no role to play in choosing their materials based on their target students' needs, especially their cognitive needs, and therefore, they should employ prescribed textbooks provided by policymakers and curriculum designers (Ostovar Namaghi, 2006). This

means that the same textbook is utilized for various learners with myriads of learning and cognitive needs around the country. With this respect, measuring students' intellectual processes at work in the prescribed materials which directs learners' mental procedures (Mishan & Timmis, 2015; Tomlinson, 2012; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018) becomes paramount. As Tomlinson (2011) asserted "materials should maximize learning potential by encouraging *intellectual*, aesthetic and emotional involvement" (p. 21, emphasis added) and continued that materials which make "analytic, creative, evaluative […] demands on processing capacity can lead to deeper and more durable learning" (p. 21). In this regard, evaluating textbooks in terms of cognitive development tasks necessitates utilizing a model of analyzing intellectual activities designed in ELT textbooks.

The major model describing the levels of cognitive development is Bloom's (1956) revised taxonomy by Anderson, Krathwohl, Airasian, Cruikshank et al. (2001) developed to measure educational objectives and highlighted the hierarchical structure of cognitive levels represented in educational materials which seems to be a more dynamic model for classifying learners' intellectual processes in acquiring and using knowledge (Hanna, 2007; Razmjoo & Kazempourfard, 2012; Susandari, Warsono, & Faridi, 2019; Wu & Pei, 2018). This taxonomy and its revised version have not become the focus of evaluating the *Prospect* and *Vision* series until recently. Thus far, the evaluation of these textbooks has been centered on general checklist-based evaluation (e.g., Ahour & Golpour, 2013; Koosha & Sardabi, 2015), representation of grammatical perspectives (Mirzaei & Taheri, 2015), and critical analysis of content and images (e.g., Alavinia & Zein-ol-Abedini, 2015; Dabbagh, 2016). Quite recently, Bloom's taxonomy has attracted the attention of materials evaluation researchers including Nabizadeh (2014), Amiri (2018), Masoudi Gargari (2018), and Aghahi (2018) most of which found a high representation of lower-order thinking skills (LOTS) in comparison to higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) in the locally-developed *Prospec*t and *Vision* series. However, international and

local ELT textbooks might represent these cognitive skills differently possibly due to the dissimilarity in their audience learners and the targeted educational settings. The present study seeks to comparatively evaluate nationally and internationally published ELT textbooks (i.e., the *Prospect* and *Vision* series versus the *Four Corners* series) via applying Bloom's revised taxonomy to investigate the representation of cognitive levels in tasks and activities of the two series.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A large and growing body of literature, after Amerian (1987), as a pioneer in materials evaluation in Iran, has evaluated local and international materials. In this section, some of the more recent studies which were conducted on evaluating the selected material for the current study are reviewed with a focus on the studies dealt with evaluating intellectual level representation in ELT textbooks.

Studies on Evaluating the Prospect and Vision Series

Since the publication of the *Prospect* and *Vision* series, there has been a myriad of studies analyzing this series from different perspectives. Traditionally, several scholars examined the *Prospect* series through some questionnaires and checklists. These studies mostly focused on teachers' (e.g., Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2015; Nourbaran, 2017; Shabani & Safari, 2017), learners' (Goodarzi Parsa, 2018), or both teachers' and learners' (Kafash Farkhad, 2017; Khodabandeh & Mobini, 2018) viewpoints about the textbooks and critical analysis of images depicted in the textbooks (Dabbagh, 2016).

At the same time, on the other side of the discipline, another trend in examining *Prospect* and *Vision* series emerged in response to the criticisms against checklists for textbook analysis (see Tomlinson, 2012). Hence, some researchers (e.g., Asadi, Kiany, Akbari, & Ghafar Samar, 2016; Mohammadi, 2016) tried to scrutinize these materials using Stufflebeam's

(2002) CIPP (context, input, process, & product) model and Hillard's (2014) intercultural perspective framework. This line of research continued through the lens of learners' cognitive development. For example, Nabizadeh (2014) conducted a comparative study between *Right Path to English 1*, the previous generation of ELT textbooks developed for the public sector in Iran, and *Prospect 1* to investigate the content of those series in terms of Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001). Results manifested that the selected textbooks mainly developed LOTS while HOTS development was neglected.

In a more recent study, Amiri (2018) analyzed vertical alignment of *Prospect* series in terms of Bloom's revised taxonomy with the aid of Zamani's (2012) checklist of intended curriculum objectives designed based on Bloom's revised taxonomy and Porter, Smithson, Blank, and Zeindner's (2007) alignment index (PAI). PAI's value is a degree that ranges from zero (no alignment) to 1 (perfect alignment) that gauges the alignment among the lessons and each pair of books in the series. The results revealed that LOTS were more frequent in the distribution pattern of educational objectives. Moreover, a significant harmony was also observed among the content of series regarding the PAI results.

Masoudi Gargari (2018), through scrutinizing both the students' book and the workbook of *Vision 1*, observed that *applying*, *remembering*, and *understanding* were the most prevalent cognitive levels in this textbook. She also reported a thorough absence of *evaluating* and *creating* levels in the series. Her results showed that just 0.6% of activities have dealt with HOTS (i.e. analyzing). Also, Aghahi (2018), in her analysis of *Vision 1 & 2* identified that these textbooks were not consistent with the cognitive dimension of Bloom's taxonomy. She also found that *remembering*, *applying*, and *understanding* were the most privileged cognitive levels utilized in these textbooks.

Studies on Evaluating the Four Corners Series

Like many other international ELT textbooks, the *Four Corners* series have

been evaluated by ELT scholars from different perspectives, including gender representation (Rezaei & Sojoodi, 2015; Roohani, 2014) and intertextuality representation perspective (Vahdani & Ghazi Mir Saeed, 2015). However, only two studies have been conducted thus far with regard to evaluating this series based on intellectual development.

Modell (2014) designed a sixteen-item questionnaire and inquired about the effectiveness of *Four Corners* series for freshman English students of Asia University. The findings revealed that although this material provided a variety of engaging topics and gave a bulk of speaking and listening opportunities to learners, some teachers employed supplementary materials to meet students' needs. This implies that *Four Corners* could not meet the needs of the targeted learners in Modell's study.

Concerning intellectual development, Roohani, Taheri, and Poorzangeneh (2013) examined *Four Corners 2* and *Four Corners 3* via the application of Bloom's revised taxonomy. They have found that *remembering* and *understanding* processes are more prevalent in these textbooks. However, *creating* processes constituted the lowest percentage in the textbooks. These researchers concluded that LOTS were more frequently represented than HOTS. Therefore, the textbooks failed to engage learners with high levels of creativity which are the prerequisites of self-ruling language learning.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The studies conducted on *Prospect*, *Vision*, and *Four Corners* series reviewed above clarify some advantages and disadvantages of these textbook series. However, as can be seen, very few studies dealt with analyzing the intellectual and cognitive levels of tasks and activities in these series, especially in the comparative format between nation-wide and internationally published textbooks. Due to dearth of comparative textbook evaluation studies in this respect, the current study investigates comparatively the representation of the cognitive skill categories in

Prospect and Vision series (taught at Iranian schools in the public sector) and *Four Corners* (taught at many private English teaching institutes in Iran) as locally and internationally developed ELT textbooks, respectively.

In light of the above-mentioned studies on evaluating EFL/ELT textbooks the present study probed the following research questions:

1. Which levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy are more prevalent in Iranian locally published ELT textbooks, i.e., the *Prospect* and *Vision* series, in comparison to those in an internationally published one, i.e., the *Four Corners* series?

2. How are the representation of lower-order and higher-order thinking skills in Iranian locally published materials, i.e., the *Prospect* and *Vision* series, different from that in an internationally published one, i.e., the *Four Corners* series?

METHOD

Corpus

This study was conducted on two different English teaching textbook series, namely *Prospect* and *Vision* series, and *Four Corner* series. The former series is nation-wide English textbooks composed of non-native speaker authors in the Ministry of Education of Iran. The latter series is internationally used textbooks, developed by native speaker authors. The rationale behind choosing these two series was that they are both being used in the Iranian education system as the core ELT textbooks; while *Prospect* and *Vision* series are being utilized in all public schools in Iran, the *Four Corners* series is most prevalent in private English institutes in this country.

Prospect and Vision Series

Prospect and *Vision* series, as new series of Iranian EFL textbooks, introduced into junior and senior high schools of Iran as core educational materials in 2013. This series was designed and developed by several

Iranian ELT scholars and was published by the Organization for Educational Research and Planning (OERP) of the Ministry of Education of Iran. This series package includes student's books, workbooks, teacher's books, Audio CDs, and teacher's flashcards among which student's books of this series were employed by the researchers as the target corpus of the present study. *Prospect* series includes 3 books each of which consists of 6 to 8 lessons. The lessons open with a conversation that has a specific function and theme and continue with some key language vocabulary and expressions related to the theme and function of each lesson along with conversation practices, phonetic rules, and lesson reviews at the end of every two or three lessons. Following the *Prospect* series in primary high schools, with a major focus on listening and speaking skills, the *Vision* series are introduced to secondary high schools. Turning its focal point to reading and writing skills, this series seeks to complete the natural cycle of language acquisition, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing. At the time of conducting the present study, only *Vision 1* was published and therefore, the other two volumes of this series were not included in the corpus. It is worth noting that, the series' authors did not mention any international standard (e.g., Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)) to describe the language proficiency of learners from beginning to the end of series. The reason behind selecting these series is that since newly published Iranian nation-wide ELT textbooks deal with a large number of learners and had national publication coverage, they deserve more attention for evaluation to examine their proportion in learners' cognitive development and training critical-thinker students.

Four Corners Series

With regards to conducting a comparative study, *Four Corners* series, books 1, 2, 3, & 4 authored by Richards and Bohlke (2012) which were published by Cambridge University Press were selected. Being developed from basic to upper-intermediate levels, these series are composed of the following

components: student's book with self-study CD-ROM, class audio CDs, workbooks, teacher's book with assessment audio CDs, DVDs including videos prepared for each unit, and class ware presentation software for classroom activities. For this study, only the student's books were selected as the corpus. Each of the 12 units of the student's book consists of four two-page lessons with an integrated framework of various language components based on CEFR. More specifically, each unit opens with an introductory page that introduces the topic and objectives of the unit. The first two-page lesson includes topic advancement, vocabulary building, and contextually-introduced grammar. The lesson ends with a speaking activity in which students apply what they have learned in a variety of situations. The second lesson is a functional grammar-free lesson that focuses on communication strategies. This division is devoted to listening and speaking activities to arm students with different expressions to be used in actual communication. Afterward, some pronunciation issues are introduced through the lesson to help learners sound more like native speakers. The third lesson, like the first one, introduces some new vocabulary and grammar points accompanied by a series of activities. The last two-page lessons are skills lesson, which deals with reading, writing, speaking, and listening and particularly focuses on reading and writing. At the end of the units is a wrap-up page that had a quick review of what the students learned and then some extension activities which take the students out of the classroom into the real world. Furthermore, some additional, open-ended speaking activities are prepared for each unit as the appendix of the books. These activities allow students to put what they have learned into practice in a more natural communicative context. The reason to select this series was its widespread use in Iranian private ELT institutes and therefore can be a good counterpart in private sector institutes for nation-wide materials used in public sector schools.

Analytical Framework: Bloom's Revised Taxonomy

To unveil the cognitive levels presented in *Prospect* and *Vision* series in comparison with those in the *Four Corner* series, Blooms' revised taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001) was applied to tasks and activities within student's book of the selected textbook series.

Benjamin S. Bloom and colleagues undertook one of the early attempts for developing a framework to classify levels of intellectual behavior in the learning process (Anderson, 2005). This taxonomy was a one-dimensional hierarchy in six major categories which were stated as a *noun* and arranged from simple (concrete) to complex (abstract). The hierarchy is structured from bottom to the top with the following labels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. It should not be left overlooked that the first three levels of this taxonomy entail lower-order thinking skills (LOTS), while the last three levels represent higher-order thinking skills (HOTS).

Four decades later on, Anderson et al. (2001) attempted to revise Bloom's taxonomy to ensure its relevance for twenty-first-century teachers and students. The revised taxonomy brought forth a two-dimensional table in which the horizontal axis representing a modified version of Bloom's taxonomy in *verb forms* and the vertical axis containing four types of knowledge (see Table 1). The change of nouns into verbs was due to the idea that verbs could better represent actions involved in the thinking process (Anderson et al., 2001). Also, in comparison to the old taxonomy, the last two categories, i.e. *synthesis* and *evaluation*, were interchanged and relabeled as *evaluating* and *creating*, respectively.

The first level of the taxonomy which is labeled as *remembering* is considered as the lowest level of the cognitive domain. It entails remembering learned materials from long-term memory by recognizing and recalling data. As Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan, and Brown (2012) pointed to this issue, "the student is not expected to transform or manipulate knowledge, but merely to remember it in the same form as it was presented"

(p. 68). It may include recalling information from mind for recognizing, listing, describing, retrieving, naming, finding, etc. The second level of the taxonomy is known as *understanding* which determines students' ability to grasp the meaning of instructional messages and explain the ideas and concepts. In this level, learners construct meaning from oral, written, and graphic messages via interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, and explaining. Representation of this step could be a transformation of information from one form to another, material interpretation through explaining and summarizing, or future trends estimation like predicting consequences or effects of a process. This level goes one step beyond the first one and also is considered as one of the LOTS. *Applying* is the third level of the taxonomy which deals with learners' ability to carry out learned material from familiar situations to new and concrete situations. As Orlich et al. (2012) exemplify, in this level "student[s] typically [are] given an unfamiliar problem and must apply the appropriate principle or method to it without being told to do so" (p. 70). This level requires higher levels of understanding than the former ones. At the fourth level, i.e. *analyzing,* which is considered as a kind of HOTS, students can break down materials into the constituent parts and relate the parts/components to each other and the overall structure. In other words, in this level learners are "looking beneath the surface and discovering how different parts interact" (Orlich et al., 2012, p.71). In the next level, which is labeled as *evaluating,* students can critically judge the value of materials based on some standards. This cognitive hierarchy contains the whole former categories plus conscious value judgments based on some internal or external criterion. The last level of this taxonomy, which locates at the highest level, is named *creating*. At this level, students can produce a novel whole and make an original product by generating new ideas and putting the elements together.

Table 1: The framework of Bloom's revised taxonomy (Taken from Anderson et al., 2001, p. 28)

The Knowledge Dimension	The Cognitive Process Dimension					
	Remembering	Understanding	Applying	Analyzing	Evaluating	Creating
Factual Knowledge						
Conceptual Knowledge						
Procedural Knowledge						
Meta-Cognitive Knowledge						

The "knowledge dimension", as the second dimension of the revised taxonomy, also entails four main categories: factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive knowledge which are located in the vertical axis of the revised taxonomy. The first three categories of the vertical dimension were those three main categories of knowledge in the original framework which are reorganized by the scholars to represent "types of knowledge" instead of "content". The fourth and new category, i.e., metacognitive knowledge, which was not widely recognized at the time of the original framework, is about cognition in general as well as knowledge of one's cognition which demonstrates the importance of students' awareness toward how they think and operate (Anderson, 2005; Krathwohl, 2002). For more information about the details of this dimension see Table 2.

Table 2: Major categories and subcategories of knowledge dimension based on Anderson et al. (2001)

Concrete Knowledge			Abstract Knowledge
Factual	Conceptual	Procedural	Metacognitive
Knowledge of terminology	Knowledge of classifications and categories	Knowledge of subject-specific skills and algorithms	Strategic knowledge
Knowledge of specific details and elements	Knowledge of principles and generalizations	Knowledge of subject-specific techniques and methods	Knowledge about cognitive tasks, including appropriate contextual and conditional knowledge
	Knowledge of theories, models, and structures	Knowledge of criteria for determining when to use appropriate procedures	Self-knowledge

Coding Scheme

The researchers designed a coding scheme to codify, classify, and analyze the materials. To this end, the definitions and key verbs of each category in Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001) were carefully studied and put into separate levels. The resulting coding scheme represented a two-dimensional framework to identify kinds of knowledge to be learned by students (knowledge dimension) and the kind of learning process which is expected from students (cognitive process dimension) (See Table 3).

To ensure the consistency of the content of the textbooks, inter-coder reliability was estimated. In this regard, randomly ten complete units from *Four Corners* series (equivalent to 20.83% of the total lessons) and five complete lessons from *Prospect* and *Vision* series (equivalent to 20% of the total lessons) were evaluated and coded twice by the two researchers. Results of Phi-coefficient analysis revealed the inter-coder reliability of .89.

Table 3: Coding scheme sample

Code name	Code meaning
A 1	Remembering factual knowledge
A 2	Remembering conceptual knowledge
A 3	Remembering procedural knowledge
A 4	Remembering metacognitive knowledge
B 1	Understanding factual knowledge
B 2	Understanding conceptual knowledge
B 3	Understanding procedural knowledge
B 4	Understanding metacognitive knowledge
C 1	Applying factual knowledge
C 2	Applying conceptual knowledge
C 3	Applying procedural knowledge
C 4	Applying metacognitive knowledge
D 0	Analyzing by using facts, concepts, principles, or procedures
D 4	Analyzing metacognitive knowledge
E 0	Evaluating by using facts, concepts, principles, or procedures
E 4	Evaluating metacognitive knowledge
F 0	Creating by using facts, concepts, principles, or procedures
F 4	Creating metacognitive knowledge

Data Collection Procedure

To gather the qualitative data, three units from each textbook series of *Four Corners*, three lessons from the *Prospect* series, and two lessons from the *Vision* series were selected randomly. All in all, twelve units from *Four Corners* series (25% of the total *Four Corners* data) and eleven lessons from *Prospect* and *Vision* series (44% of total *Prospect* and *Vision* data) were chosen for the present study.

Data Analysis

The content of the selected units/lessons was carefully scrutinized by the researchers. First, the verbs used in the tasks/activities/exercises were collected and coded based on cognitive levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy defined and exemplified in the coding scheme. Since the cognitive level of tasks/activities/exercises does not depend only on the utilized verbs, the

cognitive process which is demanded from the learners was taken into consideration. The next step was the calculation of the frequency and percentages of the occurrences of each level of cognitive skills in each textbook. Afterward, the results obtained from each textbook were compared with those of the others. Finally, to determine whether there was a significant pattern in the occurrence of different levels of cognitive skills in the selected textbooks, Chi-square tests were run.

RESULTS

Prevalent Levels of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy Presented in Prospect, Vision, and Four Corners Series

In response to the first research question, data analyses yielded the following results:

Table 4 illustrates the distribution of cognitive levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy in the *Prospect* and *Vision* series. The results yield that levels B2 (29.12%), C4 (16.76%), A1 (11.76%), C2 (11.18%), C3 (9.71%), and A2 (7.35%) are more prevalent.

The results obtained from the coding process of the learning objectives of Bloom's revised taxonomy for *Four Corners* series are set out in Table 5. It is apparent from this Table that in this series, unlike what was observed in the case for *Prospect* and *Vision Series,* almost all levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy are prevalent except for A3, B3, and B4. As can be seen, A1 (21.14%), B2 (13.87%), D0 (13.04%), and E0 (9.07%) are more frequent in this series.

Table 4: Representation of cognitive levels in *Prospect* and *Vision* series (f/%)

Cognitive Level Code	Prospect 1	Prospect 2	Prospect 3	Vision 1	Total
A1	14 (21.21)	7 (10.60)	6 (6)	13 (12.04)	40 (11.76)
A2	0 (0)	0 (0)	10 (10)	15 (13.89)	25 (7.35)
A3	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
A4	0 (05)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
B1	1 (1.51)	3 (4.55)	3 (3)	4 (3.71)	11 (3.24)
B2	15 (22.73)	20 (30.30)	24 (24)	40 (37.03)	99 (29.12)
B 3	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (1)	6 (5.56)	7 (2.06)
B4	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
C1	2 (3.03)	2 (3.03)	0 (0)	2 (1.85)	6 (1.76)
C2	8 (12.12)	8 (12.12)	8 (8)	14 (12.96)	38 (11.18)
C3	9 (13.64)	6 (9.09)	8 (8)	10 (9.26)	33 (9.71)
C4	17 (25.76)	13 (19.7)	27 (27)	0 (0)	57 (16.76)
D0	0 (0)	3 (4.55)	10 (10)	4 (3.70)	17 (5)
D4	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
E0	0 (0)	2 (3.03)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (.59)
E4	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
F0	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
F4	0 (0)	2 (3.03)	3 (3)	0 (0)	5 (1.47)
Total	66 (100)	66 (100)	100 (100)	108 (100)	340 (100)

To gain a better understanding of the distribution of cognitive levels, Table 6 conducts a thorough comparison among the selected materials. An interesting point in this Table is the decrease in the frequency of particular cognitive levels despite the assumed increase in the proficiency level of learners from *Prospect* to *Vision* series. As can be seen in Table 6, although activities related to *understanding* (i.e. B1-B4) and *remembering* (i.e. A1-A4) were more apparent in this series, *applying* (i.e. C1-C4) activities decreased radically. Also, in the *Vision 1* textbook, in comparison to the *Prospect* series, it was observed that the frequency of the activities identified under the *analyzing* category dropped dramatically and also *evaluating* and *creating* tasks were disregarded.

Table 5: Representation of cognitive levels in *Four Corners* Series (f/%)

Cognitive Level Code	FCᵃ1	FCᵃ2	FCᵃ3	FCᵃ4	Total
A1	54 (19.49)	56 (22.49)	53 (20.0)	64 (22.54)	227 (21.14)
A2	4 (1.44)	1 (0.40)	4 (1.52)	3 (1.06)	12 (1.12)
A3	0 (0)	1 (.40)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (.09)
A4	8 (2.89)	6 (2.41)	1 (.38)	6 (2.11)	21 (1.96)
B1	7 (2.53)	10 (4.02)	5 (1.89)	12 (4.23)	34 (3.17)
B2	37 (13.36)	37 (14.86)	40 (15.15)	35 (12.32)	149 (13.87)
B 3	0 (0)	2 (.80)	4 (1.52)	3 (1.06)	9 (.84)
B4	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (.38)	0 (0)	1 (.09)
C1	10 (3.61)	4 (1.61)	6 (2.27)	6 (2.11)	26 (2.42)
C2	9 (3.25)	15 (6.02)	9 (3.41)	7 (2.46)	40 (3.72)
C3	17 (6.14)	18 (7.23)	9 (3.41)	8 (2.82)	52 (4.84)
C4	16 (5.78)	16 (6.43)	18 (6.82)	14 (4.93)	64 (5.96)
D0	33 (11.91)	28 (11.24)	43 (16.29)	36 (12.68)	140 (13.04)
D4	6 (2.16)	4 (1.61)	2 (0.76)	5 (1.76)	17 (1.58)
E0	24 (8.67)	16 (6.43)	31 (11.74)	26 (9.15)	97 (9.03)
E4	24 (8.67)	15 (6.02)	16 (6.06)	30 (10.56)	85 (7.91)
F0	22 (7.94)	9 (3.61)	14 (5.30)	19 (6.69)	64 (5.96)
F4	6 (2.16)	11 (4.42)	8 (3.03)	10 (3.52)	35 (3.26)
Total	277 (100)	249 (100)	264 (100)	284 (100)	1074 (100)

ᵃ: Four Corners

Table 6: Distribution of the cognitive levels among the three-textbook series

Cognitive Level Code	Prospect	Vision	Four Corners
A1	27	13	227
A2	10	15	12
A3	0	0	1
A4	0	0	21
B1	7	4	34
B2	59	40	149
B 3	1	6	9
B4	0	0	1
C1	4	2	26
C2	24	14	40
C3	23	10	52
C4	57	0	64
D0	13	4	140
D4	0	0	17
E0	2	0	97
E4	0	0	85

F0	0	0	64
F4	5	0	35

Representation of LOTS and HOTS in Prospect, Vision, and Four Corners series

As it is enumerated in Table 7, LOTS (i.e., A1-C4) were represented in 92.94% of the tasks, exercises, and activities of *Prospect* and *Vision* series while only 7.06% of them utilized HOTS (i.e. D0-F4) based on Bloom's revised taxonomy. That is, this series has a completely imbalanced view toward LOTS and HOTS with almost complete ignorance of HOTS. This is while, *Four Corners* textbooks provide a balanced representation regarding LOTS and HOTS in tasks, activities, and exercises. More specifically, in 59.22% and 40.78% of the tasks, activities, and exercises the focus was on LOTS and HOTS, respectively.

Table 7: The cumulative frequency of LOTS and HOTS in *Prospect* and *Vision* series and *Four Corners* series textbooks (f/%)

Textbook	LOTS	HOTS	Total
Prospect 1	66 (100)	0 (0)	66 (100)
Prospect 2	59 (89.40)	7 (10.60)	66 (100)
Prospect 3	87 (87)	13 (13)	100 (100)
Vision 1	104 (96.30)	4 (3.70)	108 (100)
Four Corners1	162 (58.48)	115 (41.52)	277 (100)
Four Corners 2	166 (66.66)	83 (33.34)	249 (100)
Four Corners 3	150 (56.82)	114 (43.18)	264 (100)
Four Corners 4	158 (55.64)	126 (44.36)	284 (100)

Results of Chi-square Analysis

To check whether the observed differences in frequencies reported above were significant, a set of Chi-square tests were run.

At first, the sums of frequencies of all levels in LOTS (i.e. A1-C4) were compared to the sums of frequencies of all levels in HOTS (i.e. D0-F4) across *Prospect*, *Vision*, and *Four Corners* series. Results revealed a significance difference in the observed frequencies ($p=$ .000, $p <$ .01). This

shows that the *Four Corners* series deals with lower-order and higher-order thinking skills significantly more and above *Prospect* and *Vision* series do (see Table 8).

Table 8: Chi-square test for *Four Corners* and *Prospect* and *Vision* series in terms of all levels of LOTS and HOTS

	Value	Df	Significance[a]
Pearson Chi-Square	135.510	1	.000
Likelihood Ratio	161.170	1	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	133.416	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	1414		

   [a]: 2-tailed, with .01 as the level of significance

To check if a balanced representation of LOTS and HOTS is represented in *Four Corners*, *Prospect*, and *Vision* series, Chi-square tests were run to check the significance of the difference in the observed frequencies. As the results revealed, no significant difference was found among the observed frequencies of *Four Corners* series ($p = .048$, $p > .01$) (see Table 9). This shows that this series denotes a balanced view toward lower-order and higher-order thinking skills presented in tasks, exercises, and activities, quite unlike what *Prospect* and *Vision* series does ($p = .004$, $p < .01$) (see Table 10).

Table 9: Chi-square test for *Four Corners* series in terms of LOTS and HOTS

	Value	Df	Significance[a]
Pearson Chi-Square	7.923	3	.048
Likelihood Ratio	8.042	3	.045
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.809	1	.179
N of Valid Cases	1074		

   [a]: 2-tailed, with .01 as the level of significance

Table 10: Chi-square test for *Prospect and Vision* series in terms of LOTS and HOTS

	Value	Df	Significance[a]
Pearson Chi-Square	13.512	3	.004
Likelihood Ratio	17.371	3	.001

Linear-by-Linear Association	.413	1	.521
N of Valid Cases	340		

ᵃ: 2-tailed, with .01 as the level of significance

DISCUSSION

This study is set out to determine the extent to which two textbook series, i.e., *Prospect* and *Vision* that are taught in Iranian schools at the public sector and *Four Corners* that is widely used in Iranian ELT institutes at the private sector in Iranian ELT education system cover cognitive levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001).

Concerning the formulated research questions which sought to find the most prevalent levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy and the representation of LOTS and HOTS in the selected ELT textbooks, this study revealed the following results. First, this study did not detect any evidence for codes A3, A4, B4, D4, E4, and F0 in *Prospect* and *Vision* series. The observed frequencies revealed that the role of metacognitive strategies is taken for granted in comparison with that observed in the *Four Corners* series. This finding in this study mirrors those of the previous studies including Gordani (2010), Nabizadeh (2014), and Aghahi (2018).

Second, a high prevalence of *applying* (i.e. C1-C4) and *understanding* (i.e. B1-B4) in the *Prospect* series was unveiled. In this regard, it can be argued that since the junior students are supposedly new into the English language, the authors of the textbooks set some easy-to-follow drills and activities for learners which justifies the prevalent representation of LOTS in this series. The results further support the idea of Amin (2004) who believed that the low proficiency level in English acts as a cognitive barrier for learners and thus prevents them from reaching the upper levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy. More specifically put, in *Prospect 1* the major attention paid to the first three levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy which encompasses LOTS, including *remembering*, *understanding*, and *applying* while HOTS was cast off by the authors. The focal point in *Prospect 2*, however, revolved around LOTS with a definite increase in *understanding* and a little decrease in *remembering* and *applying*, which leads to the

gradual emergence of HOTS, i.e. *analyzing*, *evaluating*, *and creating*. In *Prospect 3*, there is a growth in *analyzing* that comes from a decrease in *remembering* and *understanding* tasks. It is worth mentioning that *evaluating* activities and tasks are dismissed in this textbook. Due to learners' poor competence, it seems natural that the first three textbooks developed for Iranian high schools have mostly dealt with applying some clear-cut drills through understanding the rules of conversation. However, this shortage of HOTS might result in learners' inability to become autonomous in the process of language learning (Roohani et al., 2013). Regarding *Vision 1* also, data analysis yields a high percentage of textbooks activities devoted to LOTS, while HOTS have not received any substantial contribution. This little contribution in HOTS was shown to be corresponded to *analyzing* category whereas *evaluating* and *creating* categories were missing.

The aforementioned results are in agreement with Riazi and Mosallanejad (2010), and Gordani (2010) who observed similar occurrence patterns of LOTS and HOTS in the former Iranian local ELT textbooks for schools, namely *Right Path to English*. This shows that nearly no change was occurred from the old to the new generation of ELT textbooks in the public sector in Iran regarding the representation of LOTS and HOTS in tasks and activities. In addition, this finding can be discussed in light of the learning initiator in this series. Since these are not the learners who initiate tasks in *Prospect* and *Vision* series, it seems quite natural that learner involvement is limited to LOTS as Zare Asl (2007), Razmjoo and Kazempourfard (2012), Masoudi Gargari (2018), and Aghahi (2018) also reached this conclusion. In this regard, though, the output of such textbooks will not be learners with critical thinking abilities who could take responsibility for their own future language learning experience.

The significant decrease in HOTS in *Vision 1* despite the increase in targeted learners' proficiency level as a result of three years of English instruction at schools intensifies the disregard of HOTS in the textbook. This observation can be explained in light of the main focus of *Vision 1* on

reading and writing skills. Since reading comprehension exercises and grammar-related activities have more proportion in *Vision 1*, it is justifiable that *understanding* which is concerned with explaining the concepts and ideas and *remembering* that is concerned with data recall from long-term memory was mostly developed in *Vision 1*. Similarly, the expectation of covering HOTS in higher levels of *Four Corners* series was not met and no upward trend in increasing HOTS and decreasing LOTS was observed in this series. This result is in contradiction with Razmjoo and Kazempourfard (2012) in evaluating *Interchange* textbook series, as another textbook in use in the private sector ELT institutes in Iran, which reports the increase in HOTS and decrease in LOTS percentage.

Quite contrary to the observed representation pattern of LOTS and HOTS in *Prospect* and *Vision* series, a fairly consistent distribution (LOTS ($\approx$60%) and HOTS ($\approx$ 40%)) in all volumes of *Four Corners* series was revealed. Scrutinizing this series reveals that they followed a predetermined pattern in cognitive level inclusion, hence the results were fairly consistent across different volumes of the textbook series. This finding is in agreement with Roohani et al.'s (2013) results which recorded the dominance of LOTS over HOTS across a consistent distribution of educational objectives. Despite this consistent pattern, a decrease in LOTS and accordingly an increase in HOTS were observed in *Four Corners 3 & 4* which are in line with Roohani et al. (2013) who claimed this increase in higher levels are due to the preparation of students to become independent in the process of language acquisition. However, the targeted learners of *Vision 1* were deprived of this independent learning due to the increase of LOTS at the expense of an increase in HOTS in the transition from *Prospect* series to *Vision 1*.

Furthermore, the results obtained from the *Four Corners* series reflect the argumentation of Wu and Pei (2018) in the evaluation of critical thinking questions of EFL textbooks for tertiary-level English majors in China. They maintain that the growing trend in boosting HOTS of more recent educational materials is rooted in the changes of national educational

policies which moved toward critical thinking skills. In this regard, the cultivation of critical thinking-oriented tasks in educational materials needs the stipulation of national guidelines and needs to start from the top of the educational system to change and affect the whole curriculum over time (Susandari et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study demonstrated, via the application of Bloom's revised taxonomy, that the locally developed ELT textbooks to be used in Iranian schools of the public ELT sector mostly develop LOTS in negligence of representing HOTS while a balanced representation of both HOTS and LOTS was represented in *Four Corners* series in a balanced way from the beginning up to more advanced levels. In addition, despite this balanced portrayal, the focus of the Four Corners series was primarily on the development of LOTS.

The findings reflect a sign of caution for local materials developers in that they should judiciously consider all cognitive levels in learning to push learners toward autonomy and prepare them for real-world interactions in the future rather than here and now. That is to say, local material developers need to pay more attention to students' cognitive development needs. To meet this end, some reforms in educational policies of the country are needed to foster the significance of HOTS in language learning in general and in textbook development in particular. These new policies should consist of transparent guidelines and strategies for the local materials developers. A similar alarm is ringing for developers of *Four Corners* series in increasing a load of HOTS in more advanced volumes of the series due to the increase in the students' expertise in the language learning process.

The results of this study are pedagogically beneficial for three groups of stakeholders as the following: First, referring to the results of the present study, national policymakers and curriculum designers will be informed about the extent to which their cognitive goals and objectives in developing

the new generation ELT textbooks for high schools (i.e., *Prospect* and *Vision* series) have been fulfilled. They will also be able to crosscheck the validity of the claims made by the authors of the textbooks regarding EFL learners' cognitive development. Second, material developers can acquaint with the advantages and disadvantages of their textbooks and eliminate their shortcomings to improve them for the next editions in terms of the provided cognitive levels and load. Since some of the EFL learners in Iran participate in English classes of both public and private sectors, they encounter two distinct systems of cognitive level development. Taking this point into account, materials developers and ELT private institute directors of studies in Iran are suggested to cooperate in converging their development and selection policies and programs concerning representing LOTS and HOTS in the process of cognitive level development in language learning. Finally, the findings raise the awareness of teachers regarding the represented cognitive levels within the textbooks and, therefore, based on their class purposes and objectives, they can add some supplementary materials to the textbooks wherever needed.

The process, results, and conclusion of the present study lead to some further lines of research. Further research would be to see how junior and senior high school English textbooks should be coordinated to assure that students learn the critical skills and knowledge at the proper level. The methods of task selection by instructors and the types of supplementary materials are also questions that researchers can seek to answer. The future researchers can also investigate cross-cultural ELT textbooks regarding their inclusion of cognitive levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy. Moreover, future studies can fulfill the limitations of the present study via including the other recently published volumes of *Vision* series, namely *Vision 2* and *3* to provide a more thorough comparison. Additionally, the cognitions of authors of the evaluated textbooks in the present study can be addressed to scrutinize their rationales for inclusion/exclusion of the different levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy in the materials.

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