

Teachers' Perceptions of and Concerns for the Implementation of the New First Grade English Textbook at Iran's Public Junior High Schools

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Abstract

Changing the English textbook of the first grade junior high school at Iran's public schools after 27 years has sparked researchers' interests in conducting evaluations of the new English textbook to get insights into its strengths and weaknesses. In line with this trend, this study aimed at evaluating the new textbook (Prospect 1) from teachers' perspectives. To attain this objective, 30 junior high school teachers were interviewed and the data were then analyzed by qualitative content analysis.

The results revealed that from teachers' perspectives, there were some pitfalls with the new textbook such as applying an unsuitable method of literacy instruction; over-attention to the communication skills at the expense of literacy skills; over-localization of the content; overlooking the development of intercultural competence in students; and lack of authenticity in the presentation of the content. Finally, as the central figures in the process of educational change, the participant teachers offered some suggestions to amend the new textbook with the hope that their voices be heard by the pertinent authorities.

Keywords: Textbook evaluation, Prospect 1, English school teachers, Iran's Public Schools English Textbook, Teachers' Perspectives

Introduction

Bearing in mind the multiple roles that textbooks play as well as their significance in any educational settings, their evaluation becomes a necessity. Tomlinson (2003) believed that textbook evaluation can develop our understanding of the ways in which it works, and thus contribute to both acquisition theory and pedagogic practices. To Phonhan, Watkhaolarm, and Chaiyasuk (2012), “textbook evaluation is an essential tool to guarantee ELT material value because it can effectively facilitate the accomplishment of language learning programs” (p.18). Jolly and Bolitho (2012) considered trialing and evaluation as being vital to the success of any textbooks. Besides, textbook evaluation is “an educational necessity because it shows how a textbook can be improved or justified” (Alamri, 2008, p.3).

Textbook evaluation becomes more significant in times of innovation and change. The reason is that textbooks could be beneficial in times of educational change by serving as a vehicle for teacher and learner training, by providing support and relief from the burden of looking for materials, by providing as complete a picture as possible of what the change will look like, and through the psychological support they give to teachers (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). Thus, due to the important roles that textbooks play in innovation, their evaluation becomes a necessity.

Before mentioning the studies related to the evaluation of the new textbook, it is worth knowing that since the new textbook has been published recently, there were few published papers available to the researcher. To begin, Elahi Shirvan et al. (2014) developed starters to help learners deal with the alphabets of English. The results of the study indicated that starters could significantly improve learners’ mastery of alphabets.

The focus of the study of Farhang et al. (2014) was to explore the cultural policy of the new English textbook published in Iran (Prospect 1). Critical reviews of this book indicated that although there has been a great shift in new series of English books, there are still some challenges such as neglecting intercultural communication, paying heed only to the first level of Bloom’s taxonomy of thinking (consisting of six levels that is used to focus on higher order thinking: Knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) and Goffman’s (1959) roles of users of

language in light of cultural awareness (i.e., being able to communicate across languages and cultures, and to question the very categories through which we understand cultures and what it means to analyze or participate within them) and a fallacy in the definition of localization of English language learning.

In Golshan and Jafari's (2014) study, 92 Iranian EFL teachers teaching Prospect 1 evaluated and compared the new textbook with several other popular global textbooks such as Headway, Interchange, Four Corners, etc. The findings revealed that EFL teachers considered Prospect 1 to have the poorest pedagogical quality compared to global textbooks.

Kamyabigol and Baghaeeyan (2014) conducted an evaluation of Prospect 1 based on the Cunningsworth's checklist, including 14 categories: content, grammar, vocabulary, phonology, language skills, methodology, study skills, visuals, practice and testing, supplementary materials, objectives, content selection, and grading and recycling. The findings indicated that Prospect 1, to some extent, met the instructional objectives of the approach but still had some important pitfalls which need to be addressed. Some of the deficiencies of the textbook were: lack of authenticity of dialogues, artificiality of recordings, not recycling the new words, and lack of phonetic transcriptions for the new words.

In their study, Shadloo and Elahi Shrivani (2014) aimed to find out how intercultural competence is dealt with in Prospect 1. To do so, the contents of the textbook were evaluated based on Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, consisting of six stages: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. The Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity describes the perspectives and behaviors in the face of cultural difference, and outlines a continuum of increasing cultural awareness, understanding, and adjustment (Bennet, 2004). The findings indicated that the textbook mainly keeps learners at the stage of "denial of difference", that is, they are not able to construe cultural difference (Bennet, 2004) and just acquire awareness of their own culture by medium of English language.

Seddigh et al. (2014) evaluated Prospect 1 based on a checklist proposed by Ghorbani (2011). The checklist consisted of 7 main categories: practical

considerations, skills, exercises and activities, pedagogic analysis, appropriacy, supplementary materials, and general impression. The findings showed that Prospect 1 has some pitfalls from teachers' views such as not taking into account grammar and writing, not involving pronunciation practice, teaching English with the Persian culture, and being simple and boring for the students with English backgrounds.

Bagheri and Karampour (2015) compared the teachers' perspectives on Prospect 1 in the center of Fars Province and in its remote villages or towns such as Lamerd, Mohr, Galedar, Ashkanan and Alamarvdasht to see whether the book is appropriate for both city center and the remote villages. The results revealed that the teachers in remote villages ran through more difficulties due to the lack of background knowledge of English in students. Other findings were that there was not any balance between the skills in the book, and that most of the emphasis was on oral skills.

Janfeshan and Nosrati (2014) evaluated Prospect 1 based on Biocchi's (2001) checklist examining title, publisher, price, content, grammar focus, levels, materials, methodology, advantages and disadvantages of the textbook to reveal the positive and negative characteristics of the book. They reported the strong points of the textbook as good focus on oral and communicative skills, having supplementary materials, exposing students to real world materials and common day's language functions, and teaching grammar through functions. However, the weak points were pointed out to be: less concentration on written activities, not having a story line, not recycling the materials, limiting written activities to workbook, including very little written activities, presenting 26 letters of alphabets in 8 units in about 8 months, ignoring teaching the target and international cultures, and lack of some activities for persuading the students to learn beyond the contents of the book.

In another study, Khansir and Mohammadifard (2015) conducted a micro-evaluation (task analysis) of Prospect 1 based on Littlejohn's (2011) checklist. The checklist contains three main sections: what is the learner expected to do (including turn take, focus, and mental operation), who with, and with what content (including input to learners, and output from learners). The results indicated some pitfalls in Prospect 1, such as not being able to completely meeting its objectives, having the content beyond the

students' English language knowledge and consequently affecting negatively both the understandability of the tasks and the students' participation in the activities, separating English culture from English language, not presenting interesting contents, and lack of the relevance of illustrations to the subject of the tasks.

Finally, Behdad (2014) evaluated Prospect 1 by using social-semiotic theory of multimodality and seven criteria of AAAS project 2061 (2003). This list of seven criteria are as follows: providing a sense of purpose, attending the ideas students already have about target language use, enhancing/ facilitating learning environment, providing support to the teachers and the students to teach and to learn, engaging students with relevant phenomena, developing and using ideas on how to use language for communication, as well as assessing and evaluating the progress of learning. The results of her study revealed both strengths and weaknesses in the textbook. She reported the strengths of the textbook as having supplementary materials as well as having a variety of topics, situations, and functions. The pitfalls of the textbook were lack of communicative practicality of some of activities, lack of problem solving tasks related to everyday life situations, lack of presentation of vocabularies and phrases in a meaningful context, lack of relevance of pictures to the content, and lack of warm-up exercises at the beginning of each lesson.

During the last two decades, Iranian EFL public school textbooks have always been under fierce attack and criticism because they could not meet the expectations of most teachers and students (Shafiee, 2012). To address and tackle the problems, the Ministry of Education has decided to change the English textbooks of both junior and senior high schools based on the changes of both EFL curriculum policies and foreign language objectives of the National Curriculum (Curriculum Guidelines of Foreign languages, 2005; National Curriculum of Islamic Republic of Iran, 2012; Prospect 1, 2013). The movement has begun by changing the EFL textbook of the first grade of junior high school in which students make their first official contact with English. Since the EFL textbook of the first grade of junior high school has undergone radical changes (in comparison to the previous textbook) and the textbook has been published only recently, its evaluation

becomes essential to ensure that it is in effect a real improvement over past practices (Nation & Macalister, 2010).

English learning will not be accomplished without considering some essential components in any educational settings. In other words, English language instruction has many important components but the most essential ones for many ESL/EFL classrooms and programs are the instructional materials, the most important of which are the textbooks (Kurniawan, 2006). Although all areas of language teaching and learning have been influenced by wide exploitation of technology and virtual learning, textbooks live on as a pillar component of language teaching (Tomlinson, 2001).

This study aimed at conducting an evaluation of the new textbook from teachers' perspectives in order to reveal its strengths and weaknesses, and determine whether it could survive, or need modification for optimal learning. There is no doubt that evaluating the newly developed official English textbook is of great significance because it could contribute to the future success of the Iranian national language education program by providing some guidelines for the subsequent revisions and amendments of certain aspects of the textbook. Furthermore, it may be a valuable input to the Ministry of Education by serving as a possible guide for similar future textbook development projects.

Method

In this study, a qualitative research methodology was adopted using interviews. The method of interviewing was "based on conversation, with the emphasis on researchers asking questions and listening, and respondents answering" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, as cited in Warren, 2002, p. 83).

Moreover, the interviewees were considered as "meaning makers, not passive conduits for retrieving information from an existing vessel of answers" (Holstin & Gubrium, 1995, as cited in Warren, 2002, p. 83).

Participants

The participants of the study were 30 junior high school English teachers, 9 females and 21 males from 8 provinces of the country. Table 1 illustrates the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1
Demographic information of participants

Gender							
Female				Male			
9				21			
Educational degree							
PhD student		MA		BA		Associate degree	
1		6		22		1	
Age							
50-59		40-49		30-39		20-29	
1		4		23		2	
Teaching experience							
Above 10		5 to 10		3 to 4		1 to 2	
8		16		4		1	
Geographical location							
Fars	Mazandaran	Khorasan Jonobi	Khorasan Shomali	Tehran	Esfahan	Lorestan	Guilan
2	5	2	3	1	15	1	1

Results and discussions

The results of the content analysis indicated that 6 categories for the evaluation of the new textbook emerged which could be listed as follows:

- Strong points of the new textbook
- Weak points of the new textbook
- The applicability of the textbook in the educational context
- Eliminating the students' needs to participate in extracurricular English classes
- Meeting the two major goals of "communication" and "literacy" skills
- Suggestions for improvement

Each category was further analyzed and some subcategories emerged which will be presented and discussed as follows:

- *Strong points of the new textbook*

From teachers' perspectives, the new textbook addressed the problems of the old textbook, such as being based on traditional methods of language instruction; focusing mainly on reading and writing skills; lack of attention to communicative skills; not having supplementary materials; and promoting a teacher-centered classroom atmosphere, and they considered this to be very favourable. Therefore, they pointed out the strong points of the new textbook to be: being based on the newer approaches of language teaching (CLT); reviving the forgotten skills of listening and speaking; paying attention to the learners' communicative needs; being equipped with supplementary materials (teacher's book, work book, CDs, and flash cards); promoting autonomy by changing the class atmosphere from absolutely teacher-centered to more student-centered; and focusing more on meaning. An example of the teacher participants' responses is:

T1: "...*Prospect 1 has aimed to improve students' listening and speaking skills which is a giant step in developing the language proficiency of students across the country....*"

Similar to the findings of this study, Hamidzadeh (2014), Janfeshan and Nosrati (2014), Behdad (2014), Bagheri and Karampour (2015), and Khansir and Mohammadifard (2015) reported the strong points of the new textbook as having supplementary materials, being based on the

communicative language teaching, having a good focus on oral and communicative skills, focusing mainly on meaning, and fostering autonomy in students.

- *Weak points of the new textbook*

Conversely, weak points of Prospect 1 were pointed out to be: not paying enough attention to literacy skills, not presenting English alphabet letters in order and at the start of the instruction, being very difficult for students with no English background, abandoning grammar, mere attention to fluency at the expense of accuracy, lack of enough practice in pronunciation, lack of authenticity in the presentation of the content, presenting merely the Iranian culture and ignoring the international cultures, and setting unrealistic goals considering the constraints of the educational context.

One of the major areas of complaint among teachers was the method of alphabet instruction. Contrary to the old textbook that presented the alphabet in the order (from A to Z) and at the onset of English instruction, in the new book, the alphabets are spread across all units and are taught via conversations. Moreover, the alphabets are not presented in the order (from A to Z). Two samples of the teacher participants' responses in this regard are:

T2: "...How can you expect a novice or beginner, who is already ignorant of alphabets and the sounds they represent, to read and understand the words...?"

T3: "...It is completely unprecedented to teach students a language before teaching alphabet of that language...."

The teachers believed that the authors should have paid attention to this fact that the learners are not limited to students from Tehran who are usually familiar with English alphabet before coming to schools, but are from all over the country including faraway villages. Unfortunately, most of the teachers confessed that they deviated from the textbook method and taught the alphabet at the onset of English instruction. They considered this as the last resort and believed that most of their problems were solved in this way.

In fact, teaching literacy skills to young learners have been an area of concern since there is evidence in the literature for this challenge. For

instance, Arnold and Rixon (2008) believed that teaching reading and writing to young learners (learners from 5 to 12 are considered as young) is very challenging, and there is room for debate about the exact point at which reading and writing skills should be introduced to young learners. More importantly, they pointed out that according to a number of studies which were done in this respect, the systematic development of literacy in English tends to be neglected in the majority of the materials. Hence, sufficient attention should be paid to literacy instruction especially at the elementary stages of language learning.

The studies which were conducted on Prospect 1 evaluation further support the results of the present study. For instance, finding the textbook deficient in teaching the alphabets, Elahi Shirvan et al. (2014) developed starters to help learners deal with alphabets of English.

Another pitfall of the textbook was being unsuitable and challenging for students with no English background and thus being demotivating for them. One of the teachers said:

T4: "...The textbook can demotivate students with no English backgrounds, because these students compare themselves with more proficient ones and they become disappointed and start growing negative attitudes towards language...."

Similar to this study, Khansir and Mohammadifard (2015) found that the content of the book is beyond the students' English language knowledge and students with no English background would have problems studying the textbook.

To continue, other weak points were abandoning grammar and lack of enough practice in pronunciation. For example, two teachers stated:

T5: "...I do not know what is listening and speaking without grammar? Is it really possible?..."

T6: "...Lack of enough practices in pronunciation is deeply felt..."

To Thompson (1996) and Wu (2008), the two most common misconceptions of CLT are that it does not teach grammar and that it means teaching only speaking (as cited in Dailey, 2010). However, this is illogical since grammar is necessary for efficient communication and communication can be learned not only through speaking, but reading and writing as well (Thompson, 1996, as cited in Dailey, 2010). More importantly, grammatical

competence is an essential component of communicative competence which is an ultimate goal of communicative language teaching (Littlewood, 2013).

As the results indicated, in teachers' views, neglecting the grammar instruction would not produce desirable outcomes. An upshot of this was the development of fluency at the expense of accuracy. In this respect, one of the teachers said:

T7: "...As teachers, we demand developing both accuracy and fluency in students. We do not want fluency at the expense of accuracy and vice versa..."

However, some teachers confessed that to solve the students' problems and to answer their questions on grammar points, they taught the grammar rules explicitly to the students. For instance, one of the teachers stated:

T8: "...When students ask me „why when you ask me what's **your** name, I should answer **my** name" and other similar questions, I have to teach grammar explicitly..."

This is considered as a good strategy since Loschky and Bleyvroman (1993, as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2001) suggested that encountering a grammatical problem in a communicative language teaching class, a focus on form should take place immediately by drawing students' attention to it.

In fact, teachers believed that grammar should be integrated into the textbook in a functional way like what could be perceived in international textbooks. Similar to the findings of this study, Seddigh et al. (2014) reported teachers' discontent on the abandoning of grammar in Prospect 1.

Bagheri and Karampour (2015) pointed out that teachers demanded teaching grammar in a motivating and realistic context.

Regarding pronunciation, as the interview results indicated, one of the most obvious deficiencies was lack of attention to teaching of word stress, sentence stress, and intonation. An example of teachers' responses is as follows:

T9: "...When students do not receive instruction on important issues such as stress and intonation from the beginning, their pronunciation skills will not grow in an appropriate way ..."

Some scholars (e.g., Brazil, 1985; Cauldwell & Hewings, 1996; Clenell, 1997; and Levis, 1999, as cited in Litz, 2005) have argued that

pronunciation skills such as stress and intonation should be taught in an explicit context, so as to emphasize their communicative value and relevance. They also believed that pronunciation skills should be taken care of from the beginning stages of language instruction. However, it should be pointed out that one of the fundamental problems that teachers have to grapple with is teaching pronunciation in CLT since “the proponents of this approach have not dealt adequately with the role of pronunciation in language teaching, nor have they developed an agreed-upon set of strategies for teaching pronunciation communicatively” (Seidlhofer 2001, p.57). The same as the present study, Seddigh et al. (2014) found lack of pronunciation practice as one of the major weak points of the textbook. Moreover, Kamyabigol and Baghaeeyan (2014) criticized the textbook for not providing phonetic transcriptions for the new words.

Another major pitfall of the textbook in teachers’ views was being inauthentic in the presentation of the content especially the conversations. For example, the following is an example of the first conversation of the first lesson of the textbook titled “My name”:

Teacher: What’s your name?

Student 1: My name is Ali Mohammadi.

Teacher: How are you Ali?

Student 1: Fine, thank you (Prospect 1, 2013, p.6).

To teachers, Prospect 1 conversations are based on the pre-memorized chunks of the language. To them, it is not an interactive, authentic, and meaningful way of conversing in the language. In line with this study, lack of authenticity of Prospect 1 has been confirmed by other studies which were done in this respect. For instance, Hamidzadeh (2014) considered authenticity as the most salient weak point of the textbook. Similarly, in

Kamyabigol and Baghaeeyan’s (2014) study, lack of authenticity of dialogues was reported to be one of the major pitfalls of the textbook. Bagheri and Karampour (2015) also found that the authors of Prospect 1 have not paid full attention to authenticity and put the authenticity a little bit aside. Thus, it could be concluded that Prospect 1 might move some steps forward regarding authenticity in comparison to the old textbook, but it still needs improvement in this respect in order to comply with the principles of CLT.

Another area of discontent among teachers was accentuating the Iranian culture and totally ignoring the presentation of the international cultures in the textbook. In this regard, some of the teachers believed:

T10: "...Overlooking other cultures is quite illogical because at present students are very culturally conscious and familiar with other cultures since we live in the technology age..."

T11: "... The textbook doesn't remind students that they are supposed to learn English to communicate with other cultures and nations...."

Culture has become an increasingly important component of English language teaching in recent times and many scholars (e.g., Chastain, 1988; McGrath, 2002, as cited in Guilani, Yasin, & Hua 2011) are strongly in favour of teaching the culture of a language that is taught. Whatever the reason, the presentation of only the Iranian culture was not appealing for most of the teachers because this was contradictory to both principles of CLT and Common European Framework of Reference (Lappalainen, 2011).

Not only in the present study, but also in other studies negative reactions were also reported because of the presentation of only Iranian culture in the new textbook. For instance, Khansir and Mohammadifard (2015) considered the separation of English culture from English language as one of the salient pitfalls of the textbook from teachers' perspectives. Janfeshan and Nosrati (2014) found that the culture of English language countries is ignored in the new textbook. Seddigh et al. (2014) considered one of the pitfalls of the new textbook as teaching English with the Persian culture. Farhang et al. (2014) reported neglecting intercultural communication as one of the major weak spots of the textbook.

In sum, there have been debates over how to integrate culture into L2 materials and which culture (native or target) should be given priority over the other one. The best method is striking a balance between the source and the target cultures to give the learners comprehensive view of cultural awareness (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Finally, teachers considered setting unrealistic objectives as one of the main pitfalls of the textbook regarding the constraints of the educational context (i.e., lack of resources at schools, large classes, insufficient allocated time for English instruction, etc.). According to Graves (2000), goals and

objectives set for the course should be realistic. They should be set considering the constraints and resources of the educational contexts.

Graves (2000) believed that “goals should not be what you want to achieve, but what you can achieve. They should be achievable within the time frame of the course with that group of students” (p.94). However, teachers believe that in the design and development of the new textbook, these factors were not taken into consideration.

- *The applicability of the textbook in the educational context:*

What we mean by educational context here is the public schools. The main features of public schools are: the formal system of education, heterogeneity regarding facilities, teachers, and students, and English being taught as a foreign language with two hours specified for its instruction (Farhady et al., 2010; Maftoon et al., 2010).

According to Sazman-e Sanjensh-e Amoozesh-e Keshvar (literally, Iran’s Educational Measurement Organization), the country is divided into three different regions: privileged, semi-privileged, and deprived. Evidently, the most tangible issue of any curriculum and textbook development is identifying the needs of each region independently (Maftoon et al., 2010). However, as the results of the study revealed, in the design and development of the new textbook, the heterogeneity of the needs in each of the above-mentioned regions has not been taken into consideration. Nearly, all the teachers believed that the textbook is applicable mostly in the privileged areas of the country. They further mentioned that lack of educational facilities and the little amount of devoted time for English instruction is a barrier to the favorable performance of both teachers and students. Some of the teachers’ comments could be seen as follows:

T12: “...*The book is not applicable because of lack of time and resources...*”

T13: “...*Diversity of students has not been considered in writing the textbook and this could cause many problems...*”

T14: “...*Big size of classes (35 to 45 students per class) is not suitable for pair and group works...*”

Similar to this study, Khansir and Mohammadifard (2015) reported two non-linguistic factors which cause a hindrance to the success of the textbook. These two factors were inadequate time devoted for language

instruction at schools and large classes. The teachers in their study believed that the authors of Prospect 1 should provide the materials and content of the units considering students with no English backgrounds since this problem affects negatively both the understandability of the tasks and the students' participation in the activities and leads to developing negative attitudes towards language.

- *Eliminating students' needs to participate in extracurricular English classes*

Since English language teaching in the formal education of public schools in Iran lacks the capability to equip students with the required level of English to meet their communicative needs, students usually resort to private language institutes to achieve their goals. These private institutes are active throughout the country and a lot of students are attracted to them because of their almost acceptable level of English instruction in comparison to public schools.

One of the main objectives of changing the English school books of public schools has been pointed out to be "reducing the gap between the public and private sectors" (Prospect 1 authors, personal communication, July, 11, 2014). In other words, it was claimed that students' needs to participate in the private language institutes or any extracurricular English classes would be eliminated by studying the new textbook. Furthermore, one of the authors of the book believed that "educational justice will be established all over the country by studying Prospect 1 since the students' needs to participate in out of school classes will be removed" (Prospect 1 authors, personal communication, July, 11, 2014).

To investigate whether the textbook has reached this objective, the issue was raised in this study. However, nearly all the teachers believed that the quality of English Language instruction at public schools is lower compared to private language institutes or other extracurricular English classes. They claimed less amount of time dedicated to instruction; low proficient teachers; less interesting textbooks; and lack of equipment and resources as some of the reasons behind this deficiency. Thus, not only has not this need been eliminated, but also is felt more. For instance, one of the teachers said:

T15: *“...Even if the students study the three prospect books and 3 vision series, the need to participate in extracurricular English classes is not eliminated...”*

- *Meeting the two major goals of “communication” and “literacy” skills*

Two main goals of the new textbook were developing “communication” and “literacy skills” in students at the end of the academic year (Prospect 1, 2013). On this issue, almost all the teachers consented that the textbook has been successful in developing communication skills (listening and speaking) while it has not been successful in developing literacy skills (reading and writing). Regarding communication skills, because of the complete abandoning of grammatical structures, teachers were very concerned about lack of accuracy in students’ speech. They expressed their deep concerns on developing literacy skills in students since they considered students as not being able to meet the expectations of both activities of work book and final achievement tests because of being very weak at literacy skills and becoming demotivated as a result of this. Some of the teachers’ responses are as follows:

T16: *“...To some extent the textbook has been successful in developing students’ communication skills but to a little extent literacy skills.....”*

T17: *“.....In fact we are very concerned about developing literacy skills in students because they act very weakly in this respect....”*

If one takes a glance at the new textbook, one could easily perceive that the communication skills (speaking and listening) have been paid more attention than the literacy skills (reading and writing). This might be due to the fact that students of the first grade of junior high school are young and most of the time, in developing materials for young learners, communication skills prevail (Tomlinson, 2005). However, as the results revealed, the most area of discontent among teachers was the method of presentation of literacy skills in the textbook. In fact, teachers observed the new textbook as the opposing pole to the old one and complained about the fact that the two textbooks lay at the two ends of the continuum. Bluntly put, teachers demanded striking a balance between communication (listening and speaking) and literacy skills (reading and writing). For example two of them stated:

T18: *"...The old textbook went into extremes at teaching reading, writing, and grammar; however, the new one has gone into extremes at teaching listening and speaking..."*

T19: *"....As teachers, we would like creating a balance between communication and literacy skills. We demand both accuracy and fluency. We do not want fluency at the expense of accuracy and vice versa..."*

Similar to this study, the results of Janfeshan and Nosrati's (2014) study revealed that Prospect 1 has a good focus on oral and communicative skills at the expense of literacy skills. Bagheri and Karampour (2015) considered the heavier weight that is attached to listening and speaking at the expense of reading and writing as one of the weak spots in Prospect 1. Another result of their study is that there is not any balance between the skills in the book and most of the emphasis is on oral skills.

- *Suggestions for improvement*

Some teachers refrained from giving suggestions to improve the new textbook. The reason was they were very pessimistic about their views being taken into consideration and their voices being heard by the pertinent authorities. After all, suggestions were: focusing more on literacy skills (reading and writing); injecting a healthy dose of grammar in the textbook in order to prevent students from speaking in a parrot-fashion way; including more authentic, meaningful conversations in the students' book; including more fun activities and tasks; presenting the positive and negative aspects of the target and international cultures in order to promote critical thinking in students; and finally hearing teachers' voices. In this respect, some of the teachers' responses are as follows:

T20: *"...Focusing more on literacy skills and integrating the grammar functionally into the textbook...."*

T21: *"...Presenting the positive points of other cultures or those cultures that are similar to ours could be optimal..."*

T22: *"...We, as teachers, expect those responsible, to take our perspectives into the consideration, and hear our voices..."*

To conclude, radical changes in the English textbook of first grade junior high schools of Iran after 27 years has evoked a lot of reactions (mostly negative ones) from different stakeholders (especially teachers). An

interesting point observed was that teachers' expectations were high because they had waited so long to get a perfect version of the textbook, yet, they were disappointed since it could not meet the expectations of most teachers. Besides, based on many teachers' viewpoints, the book was far from other similar internationally recognized textbooks. To respond to this expectation, one of the Prospect 1 authors stated that "because of lack of enough resources and a very low budget, Prospect 1 could not compete with the glittering international textbooks in the market" (Prospect 1 authors, personal communication, July, 20, 2014). Still, another Prospect 1 author asserted that "Prospect 1 has not been produced under a very powerful international supervision of big names like Oxford, Cambridge, and British Council. Therefore, it could not compete with global textbooks".

In fact, for the successful implementation of any change, three conditions should be met. First, the culture of new trends should be cultivated in the stakeholders (such as learners, teachers, parents, authorities, and administrators). Second, the government should provide adequate funds, personnel, and resources. Third, assuming that a teacher is the most significant factor in the whole educational program, the teacher education centers should train teachers to implement the new approaches in different contexts (Farhady et al., 2010). Unfortunately, in case of the new textbook, none of these three conditions have been met: The culture of the new trends were not cultivated in stakeholders; the government did not provide adequate fund, personnel, and resources for the change; and most teachers did not receive training regarding the implementation of the new approach in their contexts (Prospect 1 authors, personal communication, July, 11, 2014).

However, most Prospect 1 teachers confessed that they have not been psychologically and educationally ready for such a tremendous change. Except some head teachers, most teachers have not received any training on the new textbook. Because of this, they confessed that they were sticking to their traditional methods in reality because in this case they became more confident and less frustrated in their work. They experienced a lot of concerns about the application of the new textbook in their classes since they did not have adequate information, time, and access to resources.

Conclusion

This study aimed at evaluating Prospect 1 from teachers' perspectives.

The reason is that teachers are the key variables for successful implementation of any change since they must shoulder classroom burdens by themselves (Fullan, 2007). Most of the teachers considered the new textbook as a significant move forward for English instruction at public schools compared with the old version. However, they believed that like any other initiative, this innovation is not without its pitfalls. Nearly all teachers were discontent about the method of alphabet instruction as well as the ignorance of the development of intercultural competence in the textbook.

Any evaluation is done in the hope of utilizing the strong points and amending the weak points. To improve the textbook, some suggestions have been offered by teachers such as focusing more on literacy skills (reading and writing); injecting a healthy dose of grammar in the textbook; including more authentic, meaningful conversations in the textbook; presenting the positive and negative aspects of the target and international cultures in order to promote critical thinking in students; and finally hearing teachers' voices.

However, it must be noted that one round of evaluation is never enough for such a sensitive textbook at the national level because the textbook will have a great impact on the success or failure of English education of millions of students who attend public schools. It is hoped that those interested will carefully put the textbook under their lens once more to come up with more cases of weak and strong points. Such evaluations will prove to be invaluable when similar national textbooks are to be developed once more by the Ministry of Education in the future.

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