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## Evaluation of the Communicative and Cultural Aspects of ‘Prospect Two’ Based on Cisar’s (2000) Checklist

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**Abstract:** Textbooks are vital components of the language teaching programs. By using textbooks, learners can go forward step by step and find their ways; on the other hand, they are a kind of plan for teachers and help them manage their time in order to enhance learning in the classroom. The present study attempted to evaluate the new textbook used in Iranian junior high schools named ‘Prospect 2’ which was introduced by the Iranian ministry of education in 2013. To achieve this aim, Cisar’s (2000) checklist was used to reveal the merits and demerits of the textbook in terms of the communicative and cultural aspects. The sample of this study consisted of 10 teachers from Neka city. The questionnaire included 15 items containing two categories including communicative and cultural (images and culture) aspects. The instrument used in this study was a Likert-scale type questionnaire. The data were analyzed through descriptive methods using the SPSS software version 21. The findings revealed that the more courseware development integrates learners’ language and learning needs, teachers’ readiness to integrate the course books’ orientation, as well as current research on what constitutes adequate language learning, the more they will succeed in contributing to genuine language learning. Also, the occasional inclusion of some aspects of target culture in addition to those of Iranian culture might help ameliorate the efficiency of the book. Finally, using more variety in designing textbook exercises might help increase learners’ motivation.

**Key words:** materials evaluation, textbook evaluation, communicative and cultural aspects.

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## 1. Introduction

Textbooks are vital components of the language teaching programs. Textbooks often contain ideologically-oriented values, cultural biases, and social stereotypes. In countries where the textbooks are designed and developed by the Ministry of Education and not selected by the EFL teachers, textbook evaluation seems to be inevitable and necessary (Alipour, Mohebzadeh, Gholamhosseinzadeh, & Mirzapour, 2016). English language teaching (ELT) textbook investigation has a short history in Iran. Such studies focus on textbook from different perspectives such as analyzing the status of sexism in ESL/EFL textbooks in Iran (Ansari & Babaei, 2003), factors contributing to an acceptable ELT textbook (Hamidi, Bagheri, Sirnavae, & Seyyedpour, 2016; Sarem, Hamidi, & Mahmoudie, 2013), investigating the place of culture in ELT textbooks (Aliakbari, 2004), and critical discourse analysis framework for textbooks (Keshavarz & Akbari Malek, 2009).

The study of English language teaching textbooks and the evaluation of their course materials have always been considered by the researchers inside and outside of the country. For example, a study has been done outside of the country by Fatima, Shah, and Sultan (2015) on analysis and evaluation of English textbooks for 7th and 8th class respectively. The researchers identified how well a pre-used textbook matched the needs of a learning program and how much appropriate the activities were. The books have been analyzed impressionistically and with in-depth terminology. The results suggested some problematic areas and that textbooks needed improvement regarding the four skills and culture representation. The exposure of only foreign culture and basic skills are not emphasized equally. The findings accentuated the need to revisit the material by the authors that would contribute to the improvement of the English textbooks at these levels. But it is noteworthy that many of these studies have mainly focused on the review of the books taught in institutions. For instance, a

comparative study done by Razmjoo (2007) in which high school text books and Interchange series were analyzed. He found that unlike the EFL private institute textbooks that indicate the CLT principles to a great extent, English high school textbooks in Iran are not contributing to CLT implementation. Additionally, Sahrahgard, Rahimi, and Zaremoayeddi (2009) carried an in-depth examination of the third edition of Interchange. They noticed that New Interchange 3rd edition had some weaknesses such as dearth of reference to teachers and students. The other types of textbook evaluation are the in-use evaluation designed to examine materials that are currently being used and the retrospective or post-use evaluation of a textbooks that have been used in any respective institution.

In another study carried out by McGrath (2006), it was revealed that English teachers of Secondary schools considered the use of the textbooks as important. Alavi (2013) stated that the textbook "Prospect 1" was designed to help students to learn English for communicative purposes using all the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing based on communicative language teaching approach. Alternatively, it was believed that the last previous textbooks suffered from lack of communicative skills, and the students were unable to use the language in real situation, so we were interested to find the teachers' perceptions in this regard.

Recently new series of English books for junior high schools have been published under the title of "Prospect". Since they are totally different from previous course books, a few studies have been conducted to evaluate them. The present study focused on the evaluation of 8th grade English textbook using Cisar's (2000) checklist to provide appropriate procedures and guidelines for teachers and students of this degree.

The significance of the present research is related to the fact that, by using a checklist, it has a particular potential to examine the strengths and weaknesses of any textbook and the findings can help teachers to replace or balance the effects of book's shortcomings. It can also give directions for modifying English book 2 in the future.

In this study, the eighth grade English language textbook was studied and evaluated using Cisar's (2000) materials evaluation checklist. The research questions based on Cisar's (2000) checklist were:

1. To what extent does the 'Prospect 2' book pay attention to the communicative aspects of language learning?
2. To what extent does the 'Prospect 2' book pay attention to the cultural aspects of language learning?

## **2. Review of the Related Literature**

### **2.1 Role of Textbooks in Language Learning**

Tomlinson (2003) believes that a textbook helps provide a route map for both teachers and learners, making it possible for them to look ahead to what will be done in a lesson as well as to look back on what has been done. Regarding the aspect of a textbook, McGrath (2006) believes that a textbook is like oil in cooking – a useful base element. Textbooks are like ladies' handbags. Because we can take what we need from them and ladies tend to take handbags wherever they go. According to Richards (2007), the main criterion for textbook evaluation is that they should be suitable and ideal in a particular situation and with some particular students.

Harper (as cited in Zohrabi et al., 2012), contents that good textbooks are the result of many years of experience and much research and discussion with teachers, consultants and publishers. It can also be seen as a map through the provision of a revision of cultural components and as a structured program of linguistics, by giving information to teachers and learners and making it possible for them to see the grounds to be included and to briefly describe the route taken in earlier lessons. Based on Zohrabi (2011), materials, especially course books, need to be evaluated at every stage of the course in order to find their weaknesses and improve them. As stated by Zohrabi, Sabouri, and Kheradmand (2014), textbooks are one of the elements that may promote or discourage learners depending on their materials. They are a kind of support for both teachers and learners. Textbooks provide students a kind of consistency. Textbook design and evaluation, based on Sardabi and Koosha (2016), has recently turned into a very important area in English Language Teaching.

### **2.2 Textbooks Evaluation**

As asserted by Hamidi and Montazeri (2014), it takes a lot of time and energy to choose or develop an appropriate textbook which meets the requirements of the institutions and the needs of the learners. As Tomlinson (2006) states, no textbook is perfect, since it can be used by different students in different circumstances. In evaluating a textbook, we need to know how it meets learners' needs. Evaluation might vary from one context to another based on the aims, wants, and abilities of the evaluators. Assessment of textbooks is a profitable way of teacher development and gives beneficial perception to the teachers. The first of three which are related to the collection of information concern factors which deal with students' background, learning processes, and instructional factors. The second component is the interpretation of the information and comparing it with some desired state of affairs, goals, or other information that you think is relevant to your decisions. And the last one is the decision-making process about instruction, students, textbooks, etc (Becerra, 2006). According to Jahangard (2007) evaluation of EFL materials currently taught at Iran public school requires a deeper and more exhaustive analysis and scrutiny by a group of experienced teachers. It can be claimed that "process evaluation is believed as a guarantee of quality product" (Hussain et al., 2011). Fredriksson and Olsson (2006) stated that when a textbook is introduced, it should be carefully examined to ensure that the material is suitable for the school setting. In this examination, a

number of different aspects should be taken into consideration, for example, the age and proficiency level of the students, what language factors that the students need to learn, and the course syllabus and so on.

### 2.3 Empirical Studies

Many studies have been carried out internationally to explore textbook evaluation. Although literature on evaluation of Prospect 2 based on Cisar's (2000) checklist is rare, there are many research studies on evaluation of Prospect 1. For instance, Jahangard (2007) evaluated four EFL textbooks that have been used in the Iranian high schools by the Ministry of Education. He discussed the merits and demerits of the textbooks with reference to 13 common criteria extracted from different materials evaluation checklists. The criteria were as follows: explicitness of objectives, good vocabulary explanation and practice, educationally and socially acceptable approaches to the target community, periodic review and test sections, clear attractive layout, print easy to read, appropriate visual materials, interesting topics and tasks, clear instructions, clearly organized and graded content, plenty of authentic language, good grammar presentation and practice, fluency practice in all four skills, and independent learning situations. Sabzalipour and Mousavi (2013) have conducted. The purpose of this study was to evaluate English language textbook currently taught at Iranian first grade high school from the students' perspective. For this purpose, a 40 items questionnaire based on eight criteria namely content, physical appearance, exercises and activities, clarity of instructions, level of textbook, vocabulary, grammar, and consideration of learning style differences in the textbook were developed. This study was conducted at four high schools in Tonekabon in Mazandaran Province. A total of 273 students participated in the study. The subjects were all female with the same age. The researcher investigated the students' attitude toward this textbook to see whether they have positive or negative attitude toward them. Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2014) evaluated the Iranian junior high school new textbook "Prospect1" based on teachers' perceptions and experiences. To do so, 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 part in this study. A semi structure interview was conducted to scrutinize the strengths and weaknesses of Prospect1. Arabloo (2015) evaluated and analyzed the teachers' points of view toward the newly developed Iranian junior high school English textbook "Prospect 2". For this purpose, eighteen male and female teachers teaching junior high school (grade eight) from some cities in Iran, namely, Tehran, Urmia, Chaldoran, Khoy, Sanandaj and Tabriz were asked one interview question. The researcher recorded their voices while talking by a voice recorder and then listened and summarized the answers and perceptions toward the book. Additionally, our findings were supported by Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2015) who evaluated the Iranian junior high school new textbook "Prospect" and its old version Right Path to English1 (RPE1) in order to find out to what extent these textbooks are based on communicative purposes based on teachers' perceptions. 100 male and female English junior high school teachers ranging from 2 to 30 years of teaching experience took part in the study. Moreover, Kia-Ahmadi and Arabmofrad (2015) carried out this study in Gorgan as well, with the aim of comparing the new edition of English text book Prospect 1 with the previous Right Path to English 2 based on students' perceptions. A study done by Asadi, Kiany, Akbari, and Ghafar Samar (2016) aimed at conducting a program evaluation of the newly developed textbook (Prospect 1) in the Iranian Ministry of education by applying the CIPP (context, input, process, and product) program evaluation model. To this end, the study was done in two different phases: in phase I, context, input, and process evaluation of the new textbook were conducted and the participants were 4 members of the textbook development team. In phase II, product evaluation of the new textbook was done and the participants were 30 junior high school teachers. For both phases of the study, a qualitative research method was adopted using interviews. The interviews were then analyzed using content analysis. Salehi and Amini (2016) evaluated the seventh grade English language textbook for Iranian junior high schools named Prospect 1 which was introduced by the Iranian Ministry of Education in 2014. To achieve the main goal, three objectives have been introduced and two researcher-made questionnaires were used. Sample of this study consisted of 150 teachers teaching this book in cities of Isfahan province (Najafabad and Fooladshahr) and 200 students studying in the mentioned cities. The textbook was evaluated in terms of eight main factors including layout and physical appearance, content, objectives, language type, skills, activities and tasks, culture values, and teacher's needs. Quantitative data were collected through a five-point Likert scale questionnaire consisting of 47 items for both teachers and students.

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Participants

Ten English language teachers were asked to fill out a Cisar's (2000) checklist containing 15 questions. The participants consisted of both male and female teachers from different schools in Neka city who selected through convenience sampling. Their ages varied from 25 to 42 years old majoring in English language teaching both at the B.A. and M.A. levels. Their teaching experience varied from 3 to 20 years.

### 3.2 Instruments and materials

**Cisar's (2000) Checklist:** In order to study language teaching books and collecting views, Cisar's checklist (2000) was used regarding the content of these books according to the American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages. The

eighth grade English language textbook, i.e., Prospect 2 which is commonly used for schools in Iran was evaluated based on the textbook evaluation checklist developed by Cisar (2000). The checklist which consists of five aspects and is based on a five-point Likert-scale formats; its options are answered on a range of phrases “very low” to “very high”. Number 1 shows very low, 2 shows low, 3 shows average, 4 shows high and 5 shows very high. This checklist includes five aspects (communicative), (cultural), (expansion of concepts), (comparative) and (functional).

Communicative aspect refers to the ability to communicate with special attention to the role of students in the use of conversation. Cultural aspect is related to the power understanding of student to other cultures. The third aspect in Cisar's checklist focused on the extent of ability of an educational book to develop the course content and the language learned and is called "expansion of concepts". Comparative aspect studied the strength of the book in making linguistic and cultural comparisons between the first and second language. The last aspect examined in this checklist is "functional" which indicates to what extent an educational book encourages the learners to the use of language learned in out of class and real life.

As to the materials, the English language textbook taught in Iranian junior high school (grade eight) was used. This book was the newly edited version of English textbook for the second grade junior high school students in Iran. Authors of this book were Khadir, Khairabadi, Alavi Moghaddam, Foroozandeh Shahraki and Nikupour.

### 3.3 Procedure and data analysis

To evaluate the quality of ‘Prospect 2’, a checklist provided by Cisar (2000) was used. The purpose of using questionnaire as a method was to elicit teachers' answers and attitudes towards the selected book. The researcher selected 10 teachers through convenience sampling. The participants were both male and female teachers. After selecting teachers, they were asked to clarify their attitudes towards the available items. Then the questionnaires were given to the selected teachers. After collecting the questionnaires, the researcher analyzed together the collected data. Items were analyzed descriptively based on the checklist (Cisar, 2000) using the SPSS version 21.

## 4. Results and Data Analysis

### 4.1 Reliability Analysis of the Questionnaire

Before presenting the descriptive statistics of the questionnaire items, the reliability result of the instrument which was checked in a pilot study is shown.

Table 4.1

#### *The Result of the Reliability Analysis*

Cronbach's Alpha	Participants (total)	N of Items
.898	10	15

As Table 4.1, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the Cisar's (2000) checklist with 15 items and 10 participants was found to be .898 which shows a high reliability index.

### 4.2 Teachers' Responses on the Items of the Checklist

The item total statistics for each item of the checklist answered by the teachers along with its Cronbach's alpha reliability can be found in the following table.

Table 4.2

#### *The Item Total Statistics for Each Item of the checklist Answered by the Teachers*

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
com1	83.70	148.456	.399	.896
com2	83.70	143.344	.784	.889
com3	83.60	148.933	.425	.895
com4	83.50	144.278	.802	.889
com5	83.70	151.122	.334	.897
com6	83.60	149.156	.529	.894
com7	83.80	146.400	.540	.893
com8	84.00	142.889	.754	.889
com9	84.00	138.444	.853	.886
com10	83.60	140.711	.742	.888
com11	83.90	142.100	.712	.889

cul1	85.70	159.567	-.128	.905
cul2	85.60	155.156	.100	.901
cul3	85.40	159.378	-.121	.904
cul4	85.70	161.122	-.210	.906

Table 4.2 above shows that all the items (the column for Cronbach's alpha if item deleted) contributed a high reliability index (above .88) to the questionnaire. The items of the checklist were in a Likert-scale format ranging from very low to very high. Number 1 shows very low, 2 shows low, 3 shows average, 4 shows high and 5 shows very high.

### 4.3 Answering the First Research Question

The first question investigated to what extent the Prospect 2 book paid attention to the communicative aspect of language learning. The next table shows the descriptive statistics of the checklist items including mean and standard deviation related to the communicative aspect. It should be mentioned that since we have 5 options, any score below 3 would be considered a negative score and any score above 3 would be considered a positive score.

Table 4.3

#### *The Descriptive Statistics of the Checklist Items Related to the Communicative Aspect*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Status
com1	10	4.10	.876	Positive
com2	10	4.10	.738	Positive
com3	10	4.20	.789	Positive
com4	10	4.30	.675	Positive
com5	10	4.10	.738	Positive
com6	10	4.20	.632	Positive
com7	10	4.00	.816	Positive
com8	10	3.80	.789	Positive
com9	10	3.78	.919	Positive
com10	10	4.20	.919	Positive
com11	10	3.90	.876	Positive
Valid N (listwise)	10			

The instrument used in this study was a Likert-scale item questionnaire. The communicative aspect had 11 items in a Likert-scale format ranging from very low (1) to very high (5). As it can be seen in Table 4.3, all the 11 items received mean scores above 3 which show the positive view of the teachers towards the communicative aspect of *Prospect 2*. Item 4 "Do book activities allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and / or ability to use language" received the highest score (4.30) and item 9 "Do the book activities allow students to use different and diverse strategies for comprehension" received the lowest score (3.78).

#### 4.4 Answering the Second Research Question

The second question investigated to what extent the Prospect 2 book paid attention to the cultural aspect of language learning. The next table shows the descriptive statistics of the checklist items including mean and standard deviation related to the cultural aspect. It should be mentioned that since we have 5 options, any score below 3 would be considered a negative score and any score above 3 would be considered a positive score.

Table 4.4

*The Descriptive Statistics of the Checklist Items Related to the Cultural Aspect*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Status
<b>cul1</b>	10	2.10	.738	Negative
cul2	10	2.20	.789	Negative
<b>cul3</b>	10	2.40	.699	Negative
cul4	10	2.14	.726	Negative
Valid N (listwise)	10			

The cultural aspect had 4 items in a Likert-scale format ranging from very low (1) to very high (5). As it can be seen in Table 4.4, all the 4 items received mean scores below 3 which show the negative view of the teachers towards the cultural aspect of 'Prospect 2'. Item 3 "Are students encouraged to diagnose, analyze and discuss the views, behaviors and customs related to foreign culture (in areas related to school, family, games, sports, etc.)" received the highest score (2.40) and item 1 "Are different regions / countries speaking English represented in the book?" received the lowest score (2.10).

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study were consistent and also in contrast to some general findings of previous studies conducted on 'Prospect 2' textbook or similar books. For instance, Arabloo (2015) evaluated and analyzed the teachers' points of view towards the newly developed Iranian junior high school English textbook "Prospect 2". For this purpose, eighteen male and female teachers teaching at junior high schools (grade eight) from some cities in Iran, namely, Tehran, Urmia, Chaldoran, Khoy, Sanandaj and Tabriz were interviewed. The researcher recorded their voices using a voice recorder and then listened and summarized the answers and perceptions towards the book. The teachers mentioned both positive and negative points about the book, but finally the findings of the study revealed that most teachers had positive attitudes towards 'Prospect 2'.

Similarly, Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2014) evaluated the Iranian junior high school new textbook 'Prospect 1' based on teachers' perceptions and experiences. They invited fifteen male and female English junior high school teachers in some cities in Iran ranging from 2 to 30 years of teaching experience to take part in this study. A semi structure interview was conducted to scrutinize the strengths and weaknesses of 'Prospect 1'. The findings of the research revealed some main strengths, such as a. The emphasis is on Communicative Language Teaching approach; b. The emphasis is on the integration of four skills; c. Some practical implications are presented which are on the basis of the results of this study and might be of use to the teachers, syllabus designers and materials developers.

Additionally, our findings were supported by Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2015) who evaluated the Iranian junior high school new textbook "Prospect" and its old version Right Path to English1 (RPE1) in order to find out to what extent these textbooks are based on communicative purposes based on teachers' perceptions. 100 male and female English junior high school teachers ranging from 2 to 30 years of teaching experience took part in the study. The textbooks were analyzed based on Razmjoo (2010) questionnaire. The findings of the research revealed that Prospect1 followed the communicative language teaching approach and fulfills students' needs.

Moreover, Jahangard (2007) evaluated four EFL textbooks that have been used in the Iranian high schools by the Ministry of Education. He discussed the merits and demerits of the textbooks with reference to 13 common criteria extracted from different materials evaluation checklists. The criteria were as follows: explicitness of objectives, good vocabulary explanation and practice, educationally and socially acceptable approaches to the target community, periodic review and test sections, clear attractive layout, print easy to read, appropriate visual materials, interesting topics and tasks, clear instructions, clearly organized and graded content, plenty of authentic language, good grammar presentation and practice, fluency practice in all four skills, and independent learning situations. The results of the study indicated that book four had better features in comparison with the three other textbooks (which needed huge revisions and modifications).

In addition, a study done by Asadi, Kiany, Akbari, and Ghafar Samar (2016) aimed at conducting a program evaluation of the newly developed textbook (Prospect 1) in the Iranian Ministry of education by applying the CIPP (context, input, process, and product) program evaluation model. To this end, the study was done in two different phases: in phase I, context, input, and process evaluation of the new textbook were conducted and the participants were 4 members of the textbook development team. In phase II, product evaluation of the new textbook was done and the participants were 30 junior high school teachers. For both phases of the study, a qualitative research method was adopted using interviews. The interviews were then analyzed using content analysis. The results of phase I indicated that there were some challenges with the

textbook development project such as lack of suitable infrastructure, lack of enough budgets, and lack of necessary human and physical resources. The findings of the phase II showed that there were some pitfalls with the new English textbook such as using an unsuitable method of literacy instruction; over-localizing the content; complete abandoning of grammatical structures; and setting unrealistic objectives considering the time and resources constraints. Study of Sabzalipour and Mousavi (2013) in which the researchers investigated the students' attitude towards this textbook revealed that the students felt positive about the textbook.

The findings of the present study have the following pedagogical implications for teachers, learners, policy makers, and material developers: national textbooks cannot provide students with the underlying essentials of intercultural communication. Learners will not be prepared to communicate in multicultural world using the textbooks. Therefore, intercultural communication must be embedded in all ELT textbooks used in the Iranian context. One practical implication on the basis of the results of this study is that teachers should incorporate appropriate and practical techniques for the instruction of communicative language teaching which the book is based this method. To provide better efficiency regarding the use of ELT textbooks such as Prospect 2, course book authors should be involved in a process of continuous reflection as they produce the materials. Since the new textbook diverges radically from its predecessor, it is suggested that teachers capitalize upon communicative language teaching techniques such as role-play and language games.

The second question of the study investigated the extent the 'Prospect 2' book paid attention to the cultural aspect of language learning. The cultural aspect had 4 items in a Likert-scale format ranging from very low (1) to very high (5). Based on the result, all the 4 items received mean scores below 3 which showed the negative view of the teachers towards the cultural aspect of 'Prospect 2'. Also, the study had several limitations and delimitation. For instance, finding an appropriate questionnaire among a list of available questionnaires was really time consuming and difficult. The participants of the study were limited to the English teachers teaching in Neka. The study just focused on the traits indicated in the checklist and did not focus on other possible important features. Also, the absence of student's attitudes towards the book can be another shortcoming of the present analysis.

In the light of the results and conclusions drawn from the present study, the following suggestions are presented to researchers for conducting future studies: future studies can involve a larger sample of teachers to express their views regarding 'Prospect 2' textbook. This study evaluated 'Prospect 2' textbook based on Cisar's (2000) checklist; it would be beneficial if researchers took other criteria into account and evaluated the textbook using some other checklists.

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