



A Systematic Review of Evaluative Research on *the Prospect* Series English Textbooks in Iranian Junior High Schools

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Abstract: Textbook evaluation plays a crucial role in language education, as textbooks significantly shape teaching practices and learning experiences. The present study surveyed evaluative research on the *Prospect* series through a comprehensive search of academic databases. Guided by the PRISMA framework, the study applied a search strategy, screening and inclusion criteria, and systematically reviewed 122 journal articles in terms of publication trends, textbooks of the series, research methodologies, evaluative frameworks, and multidimensional thematic patterns. The results indicated that most evaluative studies were published in 2015, in English, with the predominance of *Prospect 1*. Qualitative and mixed-methods designs and content-analysis instruments were the most frequently employed, and teachers constituted the primary group of evaluators. Moreover, Cunningsworth-based frameworks were the most popular models for evaluation. Regarding multidimensional thematic patterns, evaluative research focused primarily on language skills, motivation, cultural representation, task design, and visual illustrations across the linguistic, affective, sociocultural, pedagogical, and physical/visual domains. The patterns suggest that the literature is substantially broad in coverage of the series but uneven in analytical depth. The findings have clear implications to inform textbook revisions, support teachers for classroom supplementations, guide researchers for future studies, and help policy makers identify priorities for evaluations and curriculum development.

Keywords: PRISMA Framework, *Prospect* Textbook Series, Systematic Review, Textbook Evaluation.

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Introduction

Textbook evaluation occupies a central position in English Language Teaching (ELT), as instructional materials play a critical role in shaping classroom practices, learning opportunities, and curricular coherence. In many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly those with limited access to authentic language input, textbooks function as the primary source of linguistic exposure, cultural representation, and pedagogical organization (Cunningsworth, 1995; McDonough et al., 2013; Tomlinson et al., 2012). Systematic evaluation of textbooks is therefore essential for identifying strengths and limitations, informing material development and revision, and ensuring alignment with both national educational goals and internationally recognized communicative standards (Richards, 2001).

In Iran, English instruction in public junior high schools has long been shaped by textbooks developed under the authority of the Ministry of Education. For several decades, the *Right Path to English* series served as the national standard. This series was largely informed by structuralist principles and emphasized memorization, grammar translation, and form-focused exercises. Over time, however, growing dissatisfaction with its limited communicative orientation and weak responsiveness to learners' real-life needs led to calls for large-scale curricular reform (Aliakbari, 2005; Riazi & Mosalanejad, 2010). These concerns culminated in the introduction of the *Prospect* series, *Prospect 1*, *Prospect 2*, and *Prospect 3*, which was officially implemented in Iranian junior high schools in 2013.

Developed under the framework of Iran's Fundamental Reform Document of Education (FRDE), the *Prospect* series was designed to align English language instruction with the country's broader educational and ideological objectives. The FRDE serves as a guiding policy for textbook development and emphasizes the incorporation of Islamic-Iranian identity and value-oriented principles into educational content (Maghsoudi & Khodamoradi, 2023). Compared with its predecessors, the series introduced notable pedagogical innovations, including a stronger emphasis on oral communication, task-based activities, and learner-centered interaction (Foroozandeh & Forouzani, 2015).

Generally speaking, locally developed English materials not only transmit language content but also represent national identity, cultural priorities, and implicit curricular values (Gheitasi et al., 2022; Hassaskhah & Abdollahi, 2021). Regarding the *Prospect* series and consistent with national policy expectations, localized, cultural and value-based content have been integrated to reinforce Iranian-Islamic identity alongside foreign language learning,

reflecting an effort to balance communicative language teaching with ideological and cultural considerations (Maghsoudi & Khodamoradi, 2023; Tafazoli & Egan, 2022).

Since its introduction, the *Prospect* series has attracted substantial scholarly attention and has become one of the most extensively evaluated English textbook series in the Iranian EFL context. A growing body of empirical research has examined its linguistic, pedagogical, affective, sociocultural, and ideological dimensions (Goodarzi et al., 2020a, 2020b; Mizbani & Chalak, 2017a, 2017b; Zohoorian et al., 2018). While some studies have investigated the extent to which the series reflects CLT principles and provides balanced coverage of language skills, others have explored teachers' and learners' perceptions of content, difficulty level, and classroom usability, often reporting divergent findings across regions and educational settings (Ahmadi Safa & Karampour, 2020; Ebrahimi & Sahragard, 2017; Ghorbani et al., 2023; Jafari et al., 2024). Additionally, several studies have analyzed cultural and ideological representations embedded in the textbooks, particularly the negotiation between local values, Islamic identity, and exposure to global perspectives (Sattarpour et al., 2024; Shojaei & Noormohammadi, 2015).

Beyond thematic diversity, research on the *Prospect* series is characterized by considerable methodological and theoretical variation. Scholars have drawn on established evaluation frameworks such as Cunningsworth's (1995) checklist, McDonough and Shaw's (1993) internal-external model, and Tomlinson's principles of materials development (Tomlinson et al., 2012; Tomlinson, & Masuhara, 2017), alongside alternative approaches including the CIPP model (Stufflebeam, 1983, 2003), Littlejohn's analytic framework (2011), and multiple intelligences theory (Gardner, 1993). Studies have also employed a wide range of research designs, instruments, and participant groups, including teachers, students, experts, and, in limited cases, textbook developers.

There are some drawbacks with regard to the studies conducted before. While the growing body of research has generated valuable insights, it remains fragmented and dispersed. Variations in research scope, methodology, stakeholder representation, and analytical depth have led to inconsistent and sometimes contradictory conclusions regarding the *Prospect* textbooks. The reason might be that each previous study has mainly focused only on a single textbook, a limited evaluative dimension, or a specific stakeholder group, which restricts the generalizability of findings. In other words, each evaluation has examined a partial aspect of the textbooks in isolation and does not provide a broad picture for understanding textbook quality as a whole. Also, a considerable number of the reviewed studies have relied on checklist-based or self-reported perceptions without applying data

triangulation, such as examining actual classroom implementation or learner outcomes. The use of diverse and sometimes selectively adapted frameworks has exacerbated this problem by reducing comparability across studies. Therefore, a more holistic understanding must be applied to collectively merge findings from different evaluative pieces to create the big picture. All in all, despite the volume of evaluative research, no comprehensive synthesis has yet integrated these findings, mapped major research trends, or systematically identified underexplored dimensions of the series. This absence of synthesis represents a significant gap in the literature. To address this gap, the present study conducts the first systematic review of journal articles evaluating the *Prospect* series used in Iranian public junior high schools. By synthesizing existing research, the study aims to identify major thematic, methodological, and temporal patterns, as well as neglected and emerging areas of inquiry. Through systematic coding and categorization, it seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of how the *Prospect* textbooks have been evaluated since their introduction. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following five research questions:

1. What temporal trends characterize research evaluating the *Prospect* series?
2. How does evaluative attention differ across *Prospect 1*, *Prospect 2*, and *Prospect 3*?
3. What research methodologies dominate *Prospect* evaluation studies in terms of language of publication, research design, data collection tools, and evaluator profiles?
4. What evaluation frameworks are most frequently employed in research on the *Prospect* series?
5. What multidimensional thematic patterns characterize evaluations of the *Prospect* series across linguistic, affective, sociocultural, pedagogical, and physical/ visual domains?

By systematically addressing these questions, this review offers a multidimensional synthesis of evaluative research on the *Prospect* series. Beyond its immediate national context, the study contributes to broader discussions on localized textbook development in EFL settings, where the need to balance global communicative objectives with national values remains a central concern.

The study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks, including materials evaluation and curriculum enactment. Materials evaluation examines the extent to which textbooks align with objectives, learner needs, pedagogy, language content, and classroom use (Cunningsworth, 1995; McGrath, 2016). Curriculum enactment distinguishes between the intended curriculum in official materials and the actual curriculum in classroom practice (Ben-Peretz, 1990; Snyder et al., 1992). From these theoretical perspectives, the review advances understanding of how textbook evaluation practices evolve within

centralized educational systems. From a practical standpoint, its findings provide evidence-based insights for material developers, teacher educators, and policymakers seeking to improve future editions of national English textbooks and enhance the effectiveness of classroom instruction.

Methods

The present study employed a systematic review design to analyze and synthesize evaluative research on the *Prospect* series of English textbooks used in Iranian public junior high schools. The review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure methodological transparency, replicability, and comprehensive coverage of relevant studies (Moher et al., 2009).

Search Strategy

A systematic search was carried out across four major academic databases of Google Scholar, ERIC, Web of Science, and Scopus, to identify relevant studies published between 2013, the year the *Prospect* series was officially introduced, and November 2025. These databases were selected for their complementary coverage. Google Scholar provides broad access to both international and locally published studies. ERIC specializes in education and language-teaching research. Web of Science and Scopus index high-quality peer-reviewed studies published in major international journals. The search strategy involved combinations of keywords related to the textbooks and evaluation focus, including “*Prospect 1*”, “*Prospect 2*”, “*Prospect 3*”, “*Prospect series*”, and “textbook evaluation”, combined using Boolean operators (AND/OR). Searches were conducted primarily within titles, abstracts, and keywords to maximize relevance.

Following PRISMA guidelines, the study selection process involved four sequential stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. The initial database search yielded 146 records. During the screening stage, titles and abstracts were reviewed to remove studies that were clearly irrelevant to the evaluation of the *Prospect* series. Studies that did not focus on textbook evaluation or that used the *Prospect* textbooks solely as instructional materials for unrelated pedagogical interventions were excluded. Duplicate records retrieved from multiple databases were identified and removed prior to eligibility assessment. The remaining studies underwent full-text review based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion Criteria

Clear inclusion criteria were applied to determine study eligibility. Due to accessibility considerations, only peer-reviewed journal articles published in open-access format were included. Although this criterion ensured that the included studies are fully available, it may have excluded relevant and valuable research published in paywalled subscription-based journals, theses, dissertations, and any other forms of grey literature. This accessibility restriction might also lead to potential publication bias by underrepresentation of studies with null or negative findings. Eligible studies were required to explicitly and directly evaluate one or more textbooks from the *Prospect* series. Studies published in languages other than English or Persian were excluded, as were unpublished theses and dissertations, conference proceedings, editorials, opinion pieces, non-academic blogs, and other non-empirical or non-peer-reviewed publications. Following the full-text eligibility assessment, a total of 122 studies met all inclusion criteria and were retained for final analysis.

Coding Procedure

Data extraction was conducted using a structured Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, with each included article as the unit of analysis. Each study was coded according to the textbook of the series, year of publication, language of publication, research methodology, data collection instruments, evaluator group, evaluation framework, and thematic patterns. The textbook codes included “Prospect 1”, “Prospect 2”, and “Prospect 3.” Publication language was coded as “English” or “Persian.” Research design codes included “Qualitative”, “Quantitative”, “Mixed-Methods”, and “Literature Review.” Data collection instruments were coded as “Content Analysis”, “Survey/Questionnaire”, “Interview”, and “Checklist.” Evaluator codes included “Teachers”, “Researchers”, “Learners”, “Curriculum Developers”, and “Heads of Educational Groups.” Evaluation frameworks were coded according to the model reported in each study. The thematic coding had five domains. Linguistic codes included “Speaking”, “Listening”, “Reading”, “Writing”, “Vocabulary & Idioms”, “Grammar & Structure”, “Pronunciation, Phonology & Intonation”, “Conversation & Dialogue”, “Discourse”, “Spelling”, “Style”, “Linguistic Intelligence”, and “Gendered Language.” Affective codes included “Motivation”, “Engagement”, “Interest & Enthusiasm”, “Attitudes”, “Autonomy”, “Satisfaction”, “Awareness”, “Anxiety”, “Confidence”, “Cooperation”, “Responsibility”, and other affective constructs. Sociocultural codes included “Cultural Representation & Identity Construction”, “Authenticity & Real-Life Contextualization”, “Intercultural & Global Awareness”, “Communicative Orientation & Pedagogical Practice”, “Bias, Ideology &

Hidden Curriculum”, “Gender Representation & Social Equity”, “Pragmatic Competence & Politeness Strategies”, “Learner Relevance & Age Appropriateness”, “Power Relations & Social Roles”, and “Criticality and Value-Based Awareness.” Pedagogical codes included “Task-Design Quality & Variety”, “CLT Implementation”, “Curriculum & Objective Alignment”, “Implementation and Classroom Feasibility”, “Methodology & Teaching Approach”, “Teacher Support & Guidance”, “Skill Integration & Balance”, “Assessment & Evaluation”, “Cognitive and Thinking Skills”, and “Creativity and Multiple Intelligences.” Physical and visual design codes included “Visuals, Illustrations, and Pictures”, “Layout, Design, and Page Organization”, “Readability, Clarity, and Typography”, “Supplementary and Supporting Materials”, “Color and Aesthetic Appeal”, “Printing and Material Quality”, “Glossaries, Review Sections, and Navigational Aids”, “Cover Design, Size, Weight, and Overall Appearance”, “Physical Usability and Classroom Functionality”, and “Consistency Across Levels and Series Coherence.”

The code “Content Analysis” under data collection instruments referred to content analysis used in the reviewed studies and was distinguished from the qualitative content analysis conducted in the present review. The extracted data were analyzed using complementary quantitative and qualitative procedures. Descriptive statistics and frequency counts were used to identify dominant patterns, while qualitative analysis involved categorizing and interpreting recurring themes across the evaluation domains.

To enhance the reliability and credibility of the analysis, investigator triangulation was applied, in which coding decisions were independently reviewed by the researchers, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus.

Results and Discussion

RQ1: What temporal trends characterize research evaluating the *Prospect* series?

An analysis of 122 journal articles published between 2013 and 2025 reveals distinct temporal patterns in evaluative research on the *Prospect* series. As shown in Figure 1, the first evaluative study appeared in 2013, coinciding with the initial nationwide implementation of the textbooks. Research activity increased sharply in the subsequent years, reaching a peak in 2015 ($n = 27$). This early surge corresponds with the broader curriculum reform in Iran and reflects heightened scholarly interest in assessing the extent to which the newly introduced series aligned with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles and national educational standards (Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2015; Kheirabadi & Alavimoghaddam, 2016).

Following this initial peak, the volume of evaluative studies remained relatively high and stable between 2016 and 2018. This period appears to represent a consolidation phase, during which broad checklist-based evaluations were increasingly supplemented or replaced by more focused investigations addressing specific pedagogical and contextual concerns, such as teachers' roles, instructional practices, professional competencies, and cultural orientations. Similar developmental trajectories in textbook evaluation research have been reported in other EFL contexts (Shak et al., 2022). After 2018, a gradual decline in the number of evaluative studies was observed, with fewer publications appearing between 2019 and 2023. One plausible explanation for this downward trend is research saturation, alongside a shift in scholarly attention toward newly introduced curricular materials, most notably the *Vision* series, which was implemented in Iranian high schools beginning in 2016 and has since generated increasing evaluative interest (Banaruee et al., 2023). A temporary resurgence in publication activity occurred in 2020 ($n = 12$), which may be associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, during which disruptions to face-to-face instruction prompted renewed scrutiny of textbook suitability for online or hybrid learning environments.

A further increase in evaluative studies was observed in 2022 and 2024 ($n = 10$ and 8 , respectively), suggesting that scholarly interest in the *Prospect* series has not fully dissipated and continues to be sustained through evaluations grounded in updated theoretical frameworks and policy-oriented perspectives. By contrast, only one relevant study was identified in 2025, which reflects the endpoint of the literature search and data collection (up to November 2025) rather than a definitive decline in research activity. Overall, the temporal distribution of studies reflects a pattern commonly observed in textbook evaluation literature: an initial surge following implementation, a subsequent phase of methodological and thematic refinement, and later fluctuations as scholarly attention shifts toward newer instructional materials (e.g., Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2015; Ghoorchaee et al., 2021; Shak et al., 2022).

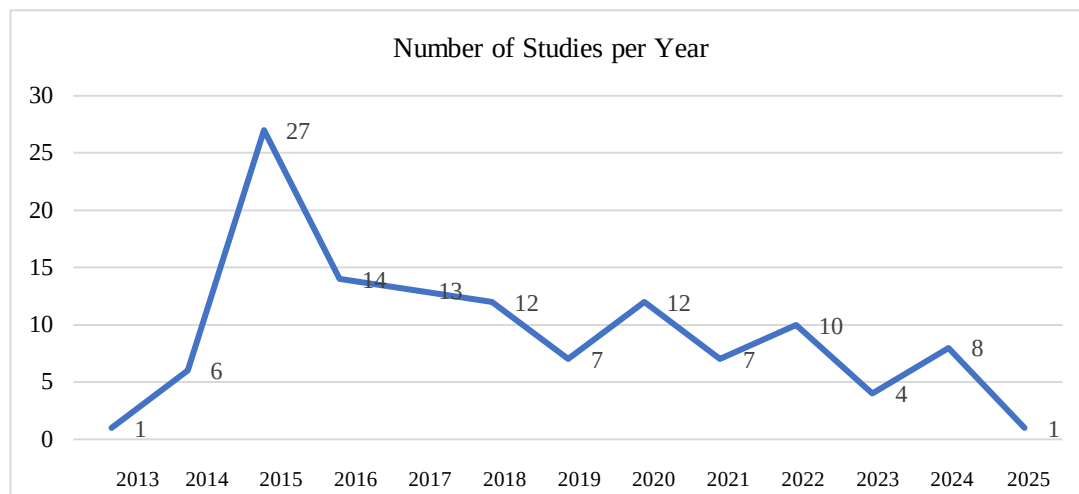


Figure 1. Temporal Trends in Evaluative Research on *the Prospect* Series

RQ2: How does evaluative attention differ across *Prospect 1*, *Prospect 2*, and *Prospect 3*?

Across the 122 studies included in the review, a total of 226 textbook evaluations were identified, as many studies examined more than one volume of the *Prospect* series. According to Figure 2, the distribution of evaluative attention across the three textbooks was uneven. *Prospect 1* received the greatest focus ($n = 97$), followed by *Prospect 3* ($n = 66$) and *Prospect 2* ($n = 63$). This pattern indicates a pronounced concentration of evaluative research on the first volume of the series (Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2015; Alavi Moghaddam, 2024; Isaee et al., 2023; Joughi, 2021; Kiany, 2022; Zohoorian et al., 2018). The predominance of *Prospect 1* can be attributed to its function as learners' initial point of entry into the reformed junior high school English curriculum and its symbolic role in the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Iran. Early evaluative studies primarily examined whether the textbook effectively operationalized national curriculum objectives and represented a substantive shift from the previously used *Right Path to English* series (Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2015; Kheirabadi & Alavimoghaddam, 2016). Similar trends have been reported in international textbook evaluation research, where entry-level materials tend to receive earlier and more intensive scrutiny, particularly during periods of curriculum reform (Shak et al., 2022).

In contrast, evaluative research on *Prospect 2* and *Prospect 3* was comparatively less frequent but tended to be more recent and methodologically focused (Ahmadi Safa & Karampour, 2020; Arab & Rastgou, 2022; Ghoorchaei et al., 2021; Isaee, 2023; Isaee & Barjesteh, 2023, 2024; Jafari et al., 2024; Mizbani & Chalak, 2017a, 2017b; Sadeghi, 2020; Taherkhani & Mottaghi, 2021). These studies more often employed mixed-methods designs

and addressed specific pedagogical and contextual dimensions, such as task design, skill development, cultural content, and teachers' attitudes toward classroom implementation (Ghoorchaee et al., 2021; Isaee, 2023; Isaee & Barjesteh, 2023; Isaee et al., 2023; Isaee & Barjesteh, 2024). This shift suggests a gradual transition from broad, checklist-based evaluations toward more targeted and analytically nuanced investigations. Overall, the comparative distribution of evaluative attention reflects a two-stage pattern in the research trajectory: an initial phase characterized by extensive evaluation of *Prospect 1* due to its central role in curricular reform, followed by a later phase in which *Prospect 2* and *Prospect 3* were examined through more specialized and theoretically informed lenses as the series became institutionalized within the educational system, as depicted in Figure 2.

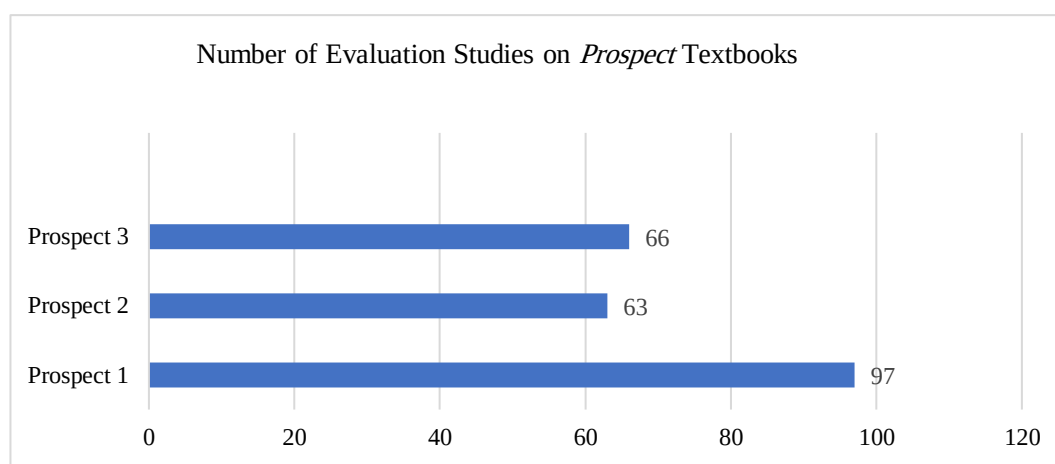


Figure 2. Comparative Frequency of Evaluation Studies on *Prospect* Textbooks

RQ3: What research methodologies dominate *Prospect* evaluation studies in terms of language of publication, research design, data collection tools, and evaluator profiles?

Analysis of the 122 studies reveals a marked imbalance in the language of publication in Figure 3. A substantial majority of the studies were published in English ($n = 101$), whereas a considerably smaller number appeared in Persian ($n = 21$). This predominance of English-language publications indicates a strong orientation among Iranian researchers toward engaging with the international English Language Teaching (ELT) research community. Publishing in English facilitates wider dissemination, enhances the visibility of findings beyond national boundaries, and increases opportunities for international scholarly dialogue concerning the evaluation of the *Prospect* series (Hyland, 2016).

With respect to research design, according to Figure 4, the reviewed studies exhibited notable methodological diversity. Qualitative approaches were most prevalent ($n = 47$),

followed closely by mixed-methods designs ($n = 40$). Quantitative studies were less common ($n = 33$), and only two studies adopted a literature review design. The predominance of qualitative and mixed-methods research aligns with broader trends in ELT textbook evaluation, where emphasis is placed on contextualized interpretation, teacher perspectives, and triangulation of data sources rather than reliance on statistical analysis alone (Shak et al., 2022; Tomlinson et al., 2012). The frequent adoption of mixed-methods designs reflects their capacity to combine checklist-based analyses with interviews or open-ended survey items, thereby offering more comprehensive insights into how the *Prospect* textbooks function in classroom practice. By contrast, the relatively limited number of purely quantitative studies may reflect widely acknowledged concerns regarding the constraints of numerical data in capturing the complexity of textbook use and pedagogical enactment (McGrath, 2016).

In terms of data collection instruments, as is evident in Figure 5, content analysis emerged as the most frequently employed method, appearing in 61 studies. Surveys or questionnaires were used in 41 studies, interviews in 35 studies, and evaluation checklists in 25 studies. It is important to note that many studies employed multiple instruments. The prominence of content analysis underscores the centrality of internal textbook evaluation in examining linguistic input, task types, sequencing, and cultural representation (Gilmore, 2007). The frequent use of surveys and interviews further reflects an increasing emphasis on teacher perceptions and classroom realities, consistent with contemporary perspectives that stress the importance of understanding how materials are implemented rather than solely how they are designed (Nation & Macalister, 2020; Richards, 2017). Conversely, the comparatively limited reliance on checklist-based instruments suggests a gradual shift away from fixed and prescriptive evaluation tools toward more flexible and interpretive approaches, a trend also noted in recent materials evaluation scholarship (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017).

Regarding evaluator profiles in Figure 6, teachers were the most frequently involved group, appearing in 61 studies, followed by researchers in 55 studies. Learners participated as evaluators in 19 studies, while curriculum developers and heads of educational groups were involved in only two and one studies, respectively. Several studies included evaluators from more than one group. The dominant role of teachers is consistent with international research emphasizing that teachers' sustained classroom engagement positions them as key informants in textbook evaluation (McGrath, 2016; Richards, 2017). The substantial involvement of researchers further highlights the role of academic inquiry in systematically documenting and critiquing curricular materials (Mukundan & Ahour, 2010).

In contrast, the relatively limited inclusion of learners and the minimal involvement of curriculum developers and educational leaders point to an underrepresentation of certain stakeholder perspectives. The broader evaluation literature emphasizes that expert stakeholders such as materials developers, supervisors, and policy-level professionals can offer complementary insights that extend beyond classroom-level evaluation (Posner, 2004; Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). The distribution of evaluator groups observed in this review thus suggests an area for methodological expansion in future research on the *Prospect* series.

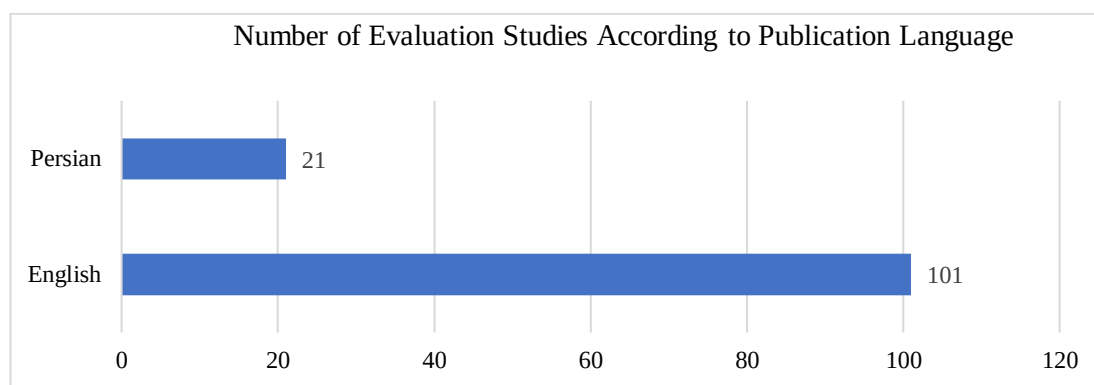


Figure 3. Language of Publication in *Prospect* Series Evaluation Studies

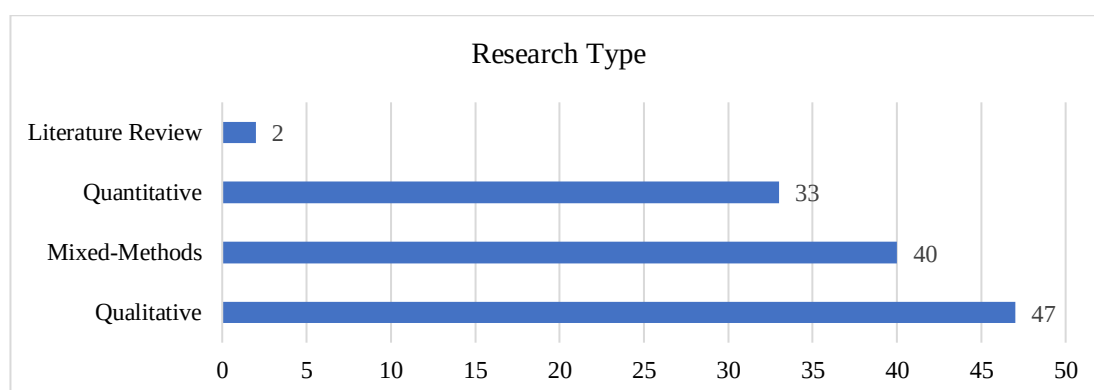


Figure 4. Distribution of Research Methodologies in *Prospect* Series Evaluation Studies

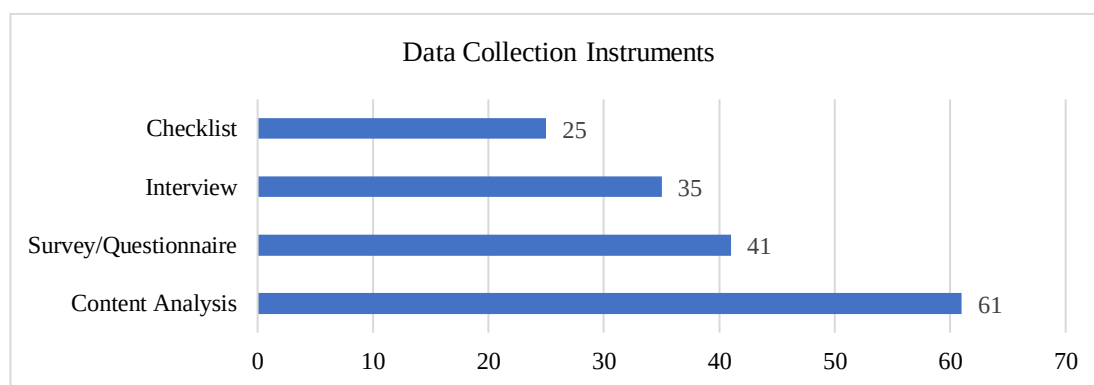


Figure 5. Distribution of Data Collection Tools in *Prospect* Series Evaluation Studies

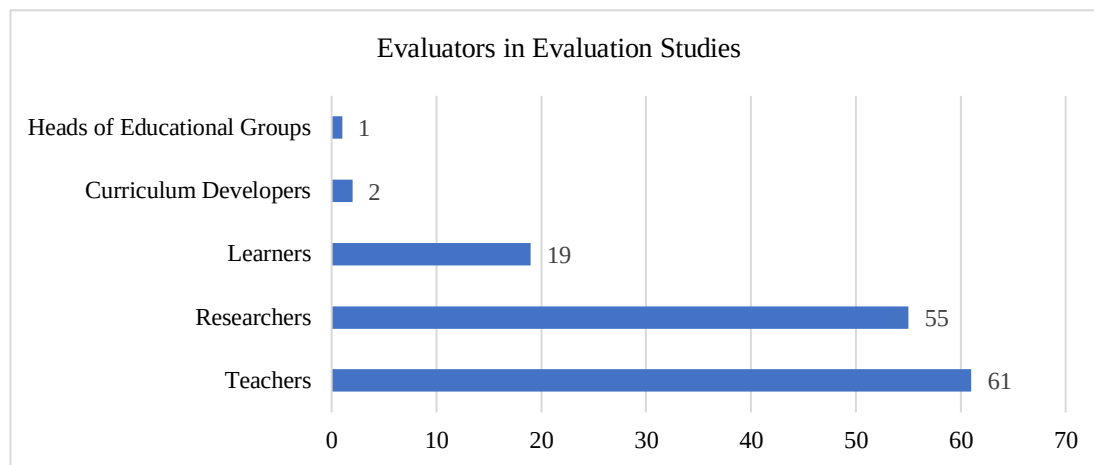


Figure 6. Distribution of Participant Groups in *Prospect* Series Evaluation Studies

RQ4: What evaluation frameworks are most frequently employed in research on the *Prospect* series?

As detailed in Figure 7, analysis of the reviewed studies indicates substantial variation in the evaluation frameworks employed to analyze the *Prospect* series. Among these, frameworks based on Cunningsworth's criteria were the most frequently used, appearing in 28 studies (Cunningsworth, 1984, 1995). This prominence reflects the comprehensive scope of the framework, which systematically addresses core dimensions of textbook evaluation, including aims, content, language skills, methodology, and learner needs. Its flexibility and adaptability have likely contributed to its widespread adoption, particularly as it can be combined with other established evaluative models, such as Tomlinson's principles of materials development or Sheldon's checklist (McGrath, 2016; Sheldon, 1988; Tomlinson et al., 2012). In addition, the strong alignment between Cunningsworth's criteria and the principles of Communicative Language Teaching, central to the design of the *Prospect* series, may further explain its frequent application in the reviewed literature (Richards, 2017).

The Internal-External (or Macro-Micro) evaluation model proposed by McDonough and Shaw (1993) and Litz's (2005) Teacher Textbook Evaluation Framework (TTEF) were the second and third most commonly employed frameworks, used in 14 and 10 studies respectively. This model's popularity appears to stem from its two-stage structure, which enables evaluators to examine both the overall design of a textbook and the characteristics of individual units or tasks. Its clear procedural logic and pedagogical grounding make it particularly suitable for systematic and staged textbook analysis.

Several frameworks focusing on cognitive and cultural dimensions were also recurrently applied. Bloom's revised taxonomy was used in eight studies to analyze cognitive

levels and task demands, consistent with its widespread use in evaluating lower-order and higher-order thinking skills in educational materials (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Similarly, Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (1997) appeared in eight studies, while broader cultural classification frameworks were employed in four studies. The presence of these frameworks reflects a growing research interest in the cognitive and intercultural dimensions of English language textbooks. Other evaluative frameworks appeared less frequently but nonetheless contributed to the methodological diversity of the field. Littlejohn's (2011) analytic framework, which emphasizes design features and learning processes, was used in six studies, as were Tomlinson's principles of materials development, particularly those related to authenticity and learner engagement (Tomlinson et al., 2012). Sheldon's early but comprehensive checklist (1988) appeared in five studies, while the CIPP evaluation model (Context, Input, Process, Product) proposed by Stufflebeam (1983, 2003) was employed in four studies to support more program-level evaluative perspectives.

Finally, cultural classification models developed by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) were used in four studies, often valued for their capacity to distinguish among source, target, and international cultural representations. These models were frequently combined with Yuen's (2011) framework, which allows for a more fine-grained categorization of cultural content and provides additional analytical depth in studies examining intercultural representation within the *Prospect* textbooks.

Critical Reflection on the Evaluation Frameworks

Although the reviewed studies employed a wide range of evaluation frameworks, the use of well-known and popular models does not necessarily guarantee their appropriateness and usefulness for evaluation of the series. In fact, no framework is inherently inappropriate in isolation. Suitability depends on the research question, the unit of analysis, the way the framework is adapted and implemented, and whether the framework is applied within its suitable scope. Frameworks become inappropriate when they are uncritically and blindly used as absolute and comprehensive measures despite their methodological and contextual limitations. There are some cases in the reviewed studies where frameworks are sometimes adapted, combined, or selectively applied without a detailed explanation about the procedures behind the scenes. Such practices can reduce transparency and limit comparability across studies. Furthermore, some frameworks are merely developed for purposes and contexts completely different from those of Islamic-Iranian public textbooks. For example, the criteria proposed by Cunningsworth (1984, 1995), Sheldon (1988), and Litz (2005) are largely

designed to support the evaluation of English language teaching materials in relatively broad or commercial contexts. Their criteria may therefore require adaptation when applied to centralized, fixed, and national textbooks in Iran. Moreover, specialized frameworks such as Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), intercultural communicative competence models (Byram, 1997), and cultural classification schemes (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999) examine only specific and limited dimensions of textbook quality and should not be interpreted as comprehensive evaluation tools. For instance, intercultural communicative competence models might offer valuable insights on intercultural and international accounts, yet they may not fully capture the ideological, religious, and national identity objectives underlying *the Prospect* series. Additionally, there are some cases in which frameworks have been used for purposes for which they have not been developed. For example, the CIPP model (Stufflebeam, 1983, 2003) was developed primarily for the evaluation of programs and educational systems. By limiting it to textbook analysis, its process and product dimensions may not be fully addressed. Another concern is about checklist-based evaluative frameworks that may rely substantially on the evaluator's judgment, merely counting the presence or absence of features. This way of evaluation may not critically explain textbook assumptions, quality, effectiveness, contextual relevance, methodological validity, and actual usefulness in classrooms.

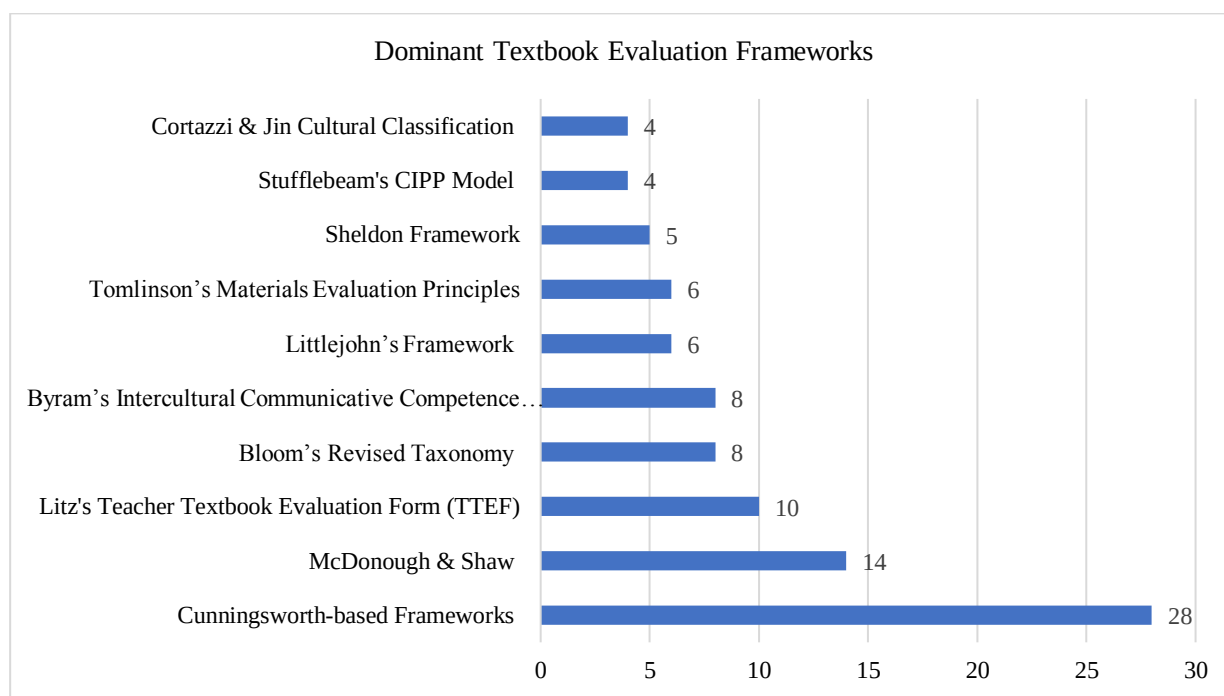


Figure 7. Top Ten Evaluation Frameworks Used in *Prospect* Series Textbook Research

RQ5: What multidimensional thematic patterns characterize evaluations of *the Prospect* series across linguistic, affective, sociocultural, pedagogical, and physical/visual domains?

The thematic analysis revealed five domains through which *the Prospect* series has been evaluated. The following subsections present the principal patterns within each domain.

Linguistic Patterns

The findings in Figure 8 indicate that evaluative research on the *Prospect* series has addressed a wide range of linguistic dimensions, with primary emphasis placed on the four language skills. Speaking received the greatest attention, appearing in 66 studies, followed closely by listening and reading, each examined in 63 studies, and writing, which featured in 60 studies. Overall, the relatively balanced distribution across the four skills reflects the centrality of communicative competence in contemporary English Language Teaching curricula. This pattern is consistent with international textbook evaluation research, which frequently foregrounds language skills due to their direct relevance to curricular objectives and classroom practice (Harmer, 2007; Richards, 2015). The slightly stronger emphasis on speaking and listening appears to align with the *Prospect* series' stated orientation toward oral communication and task-based interaction in junior high school classrooms.

In addition to language skills, core language components were also extensively examined. Vocabulary and idiomatic expressions were addressed in 57 studies, while grammatical and structural features were analyzed in 51 studies. This sustained attention reflects longstanding concerns in English as a Foreign Language textbook evaluation regarding lexical load, sequencing, and grammatical progression, which are widely recognized as key determinants of learner accessibility and developmental appropriateness (Nation & Macalister, 2020). Pronunciation and phonological features received a moderate level of attention, appearing in 28 studies. Despite their acknowledged importance for intelligibility and oral proficiency, this comparatively lower level of focus mirrors broader international trends in which pronunciation remains underrepresented in both materials design and evaluation research (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

By contrast, several linguistic dimensions were addressed only sporadically in the reviewed studies. These included conversation and dialogue features, discourse-level analysis, spelling, stylistic variation, linguistic intelligence, and gendered language. Their limited representation is consistent with findings from the wider literature, which suggest that discourse-oriented, sociolinguistic, and critical language analyses are less frequently undertaken, partly due to their methodological complexity and the specialized analytical

frameworks they require (McDonough et al., 2013). Overall, the distribution of linguistic focuses suggests that research on the *Prospect* series has prioritized core skills and language components, while more nuanced and socially situated dimensions of language use have received comparatively limited attention.

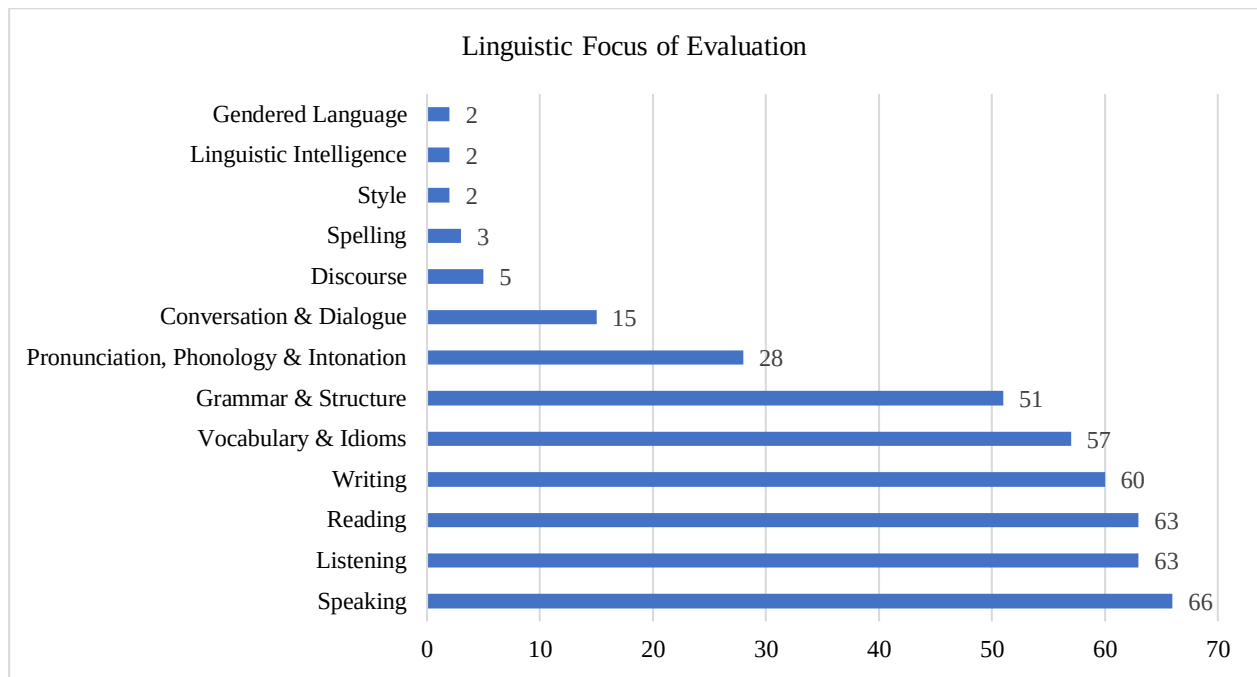


Figure 8. Dominant Linguistic Focus Areas in *Prospect* Series Evaluation Studies

Affective Patterns

Analysis of affective dimensions across the reviewed studies in Figure 9 indicates that motivation and engagement were the most prominent themes in evaluations of the *Prospect* series, appearing in 67 and 56 studies, respectively. This emphasis is consistent with extensive empirical research identifying motivation and engagement as among the strongest affective predictors of success in second language learning and, consequently, as central criteria in the evaluation of instructional materials (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). The salience of these constructs also aligns with the communicative and task-based orientation of the *Prospect* series, which foregrounds learner involvement, interaction, and purposeful language use in classroom activities.

Several additional affective dimensions received a moderate level of attention. Learner interest or enthusiasm was examined in 23 studies, while attitudes toward English language learning were addressed in 18 studies. Constructs related to learner autonomy and satisfaction appeared in 11 and 10 studies, respectively. The presence of these variables reflects broader

international trends in English Language Teaching research that emphasize learner agency, perceived relevance, and the affective conditions supporting sustained engagement in communicative and learner-centered curricula.

In contrast, a range of affective constructs were examined less frequently. These included awareness, anxiety, confidence, cooperation, and responsibility, each appearing in a limited number of studies. Their relative underrepresentation mirrors wider patterns in textbook evaluation research, where more complex or multidimensional affective constructs often require specialized theoretical frameworks and validated measurement instruments and are therefore less commonly incorporated (MacIntyre, 2017). Finally, several affective variables, such as enjoyment, curiosity, empowerment, teacher efficacy, and learner agency, were identified in only a single study each. Although marginal within the reviewed literature, the inclusion of these constructs signals a gradual expansion of evaluative attention toward themes associated with positive psychology, learner well-being, and teacher emotion in contemporary English Language Teaching materials (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014).

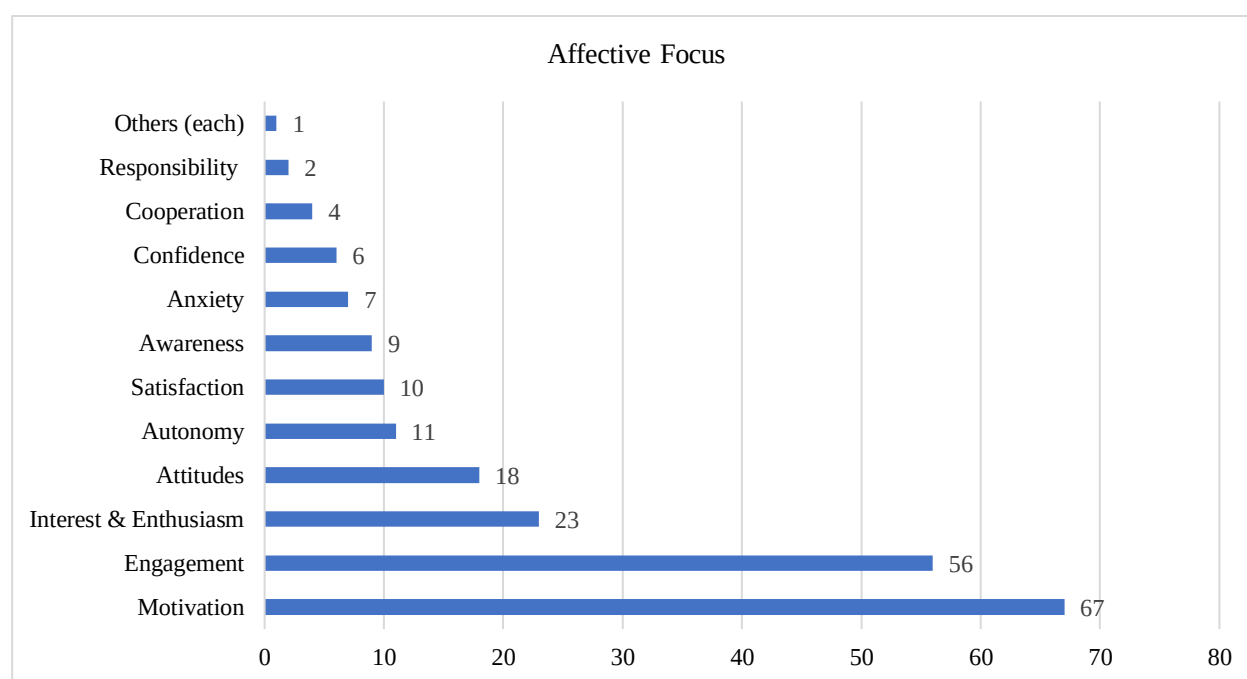


Figure 9. Dominant Affective Focus Areas in *Prospect* Series Evaluation Studies

Sociocultural Patterns

According to Figure 10, analysis of socio-cultural dimensions across the reviewed studies identified a range of recurring themes in evaluations of the *Prospect* series. The most frequently examined focus was cultural representation and identity construction, which

appeared in 83 studies and primarily addressed the portrayal of Iranian national, religious, and local cultural identities. This strong emphasis reflects broader trends in English as a Foreign Language textbook research, particularly within state-sponsored curricular contexts, where issues of national identity, cultural preservation, and value transmission constitute central analytical concerns (Curdts-Christiansen, 2016; Gray, 2010).

The second most prominent theme was authenticity and real-life contextualization, examined in 80 studies. This focus is closely aligned with international perspectives emphasizing the importance of meaningful, context-embedded communication in language learning materials and the need for textbooks to reflect plausible social situations and communicative purposes (Gilmore, 2007; Tomlinson et al., 2012). Intercultural and global awareness also received substantial attention, appearing in 47 studies, consistent with influential frameworks that advocate the development of intercultural communicative competence and global citizenship through language education (Byram, 1997; Yuen, 2011).

Communicative orientation and sociocultural pedagogy were addressed in 37 studies, reflecting both the Communicative Language Teaching-based design of the *Prospect* series and the wider research emphasis on interaction, collaboration, and socially situated language use in EFL classrooms (Richards, 2015). In addition, issues related to bias, ideology, and the hidden curriculum were examined in 30 studies. This strand of research resonates with critical scholarship highlighting that language textbooks often embed implicit political, moral, or ideological messages alongside overt instructional content (Pennycook, 1998).

Gender representation and social equity constituted another recurrent theme, addressed in 21 studies. These evaluations echo longstanding concerns in the textbook literature regarding gender imbalance, stereotypical role assignments, and unequal visibility of social groups in EFL materials (Sunderland, 2012). Less frequently examined, yet still notable, were pragmatic competence and politeness strategies, which appeared in 15 studies and align with international emphasis on socio-pragmatic appropriateness and culturally sensitive language use (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Age appropriateness and learner relevance were addressed in 11 studies, reflecting a common evaluative criterion related to developmental suitability and learner needs (McGrath, 2016).

Finally, power relations and critical or value-based awareness occupied the least represented positions, appearing in 10 and 7 studies, respectively. Their limited presence mirrors emerging international movements toward critical pedagogy, reflexivity, and transformative cultural engagement in language education. Although increasingly influential

at the theoretical level, these perspectives remain only partially and inconsistently integrated into mainstream textbook evaluation research (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

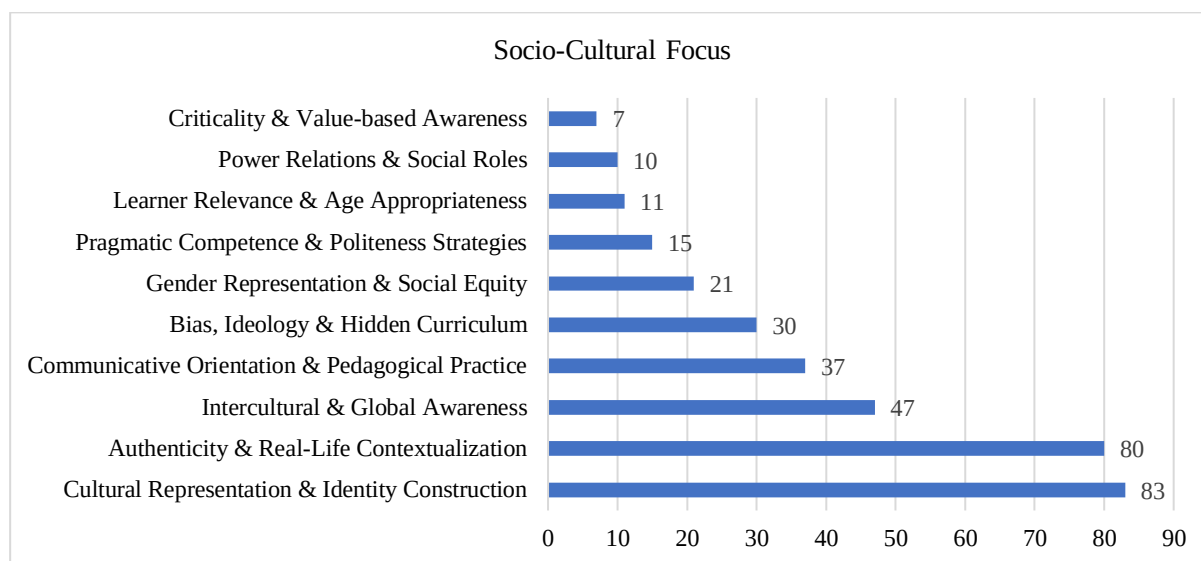


Figure 10. Top Ten Socio-Cultural Dimensions in *Prospect* Series Evaluation Studies

Pedagogical Patterns

With respect to pedagogical dimensions provided in Figure 11, task design quality and variety emerged as the most frequently examined focus, appearing in 83 studies. Evaluations in this category typically addressed task types, sequencing, interaction patterns, and degrees of authenticity. This prominence reflects the central role of tasks in communicative and task-based language teaching, where they function as the primary unit of organizing meaningful language use and scaffolding learner participation (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004).

The implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) constituted the second most common pedagogical focus, examined in 76 studies. These evaluations frequently considered the extent to which the *Prospect* series promotes communicative competence, interactional practice, role play, pragmatic appropriateness, and situational language use. The emphasis on CLT alignment is consistent with international evaluative criteria for communicative materials and reflects the stated pedagogical orientation of the series (Littlewood, 2014; Richards, 2006). Curriculum and objective alignment appeared in 56 studies, indicating sustained concern with coherence among textbook content, national curriculum goals, and learner needs. In addition, 48 studies addressed implementation and classroom feasibility, often focusing on contextual constraints such as class size, instructional time, teacher preparedness, and resource availability. This attention to practical enactment

mirrors well-documented discussions in the English as a Foreign Language literature regarding the gap between textbook design and classroom realities, particularly in public-sector educational contexts (Holliday, 2013).

Several other pedagogical dimensions received moderate attention, including methodology and teaching approach, teacher support and guidance, and skill integration and balance. These themes resonate with scholarship emphasizing the importance of methodological transparency, teacher mediation, and integrated skill development in effective instructional materials (McGrath, 2016).

Less frequently examined, yet pedagogically significant, were assessment practices, addressed in 11 studies, which typically focused on assessment alignment, validity, and washback in English Language Teaching contexts (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). Cognitive or thinking skills were examined in seven studies, often through Bloom-based analytical frameworks to assess levels of cognitive demand. Finally, creativity and multiple intelligences appeared in only five studies. Their limited presence reflects a broader international pattern in which creativity-oriented and multiple-intelligence-based task evaluations remain relatively rare, partly due to the absence of widely operationalized frameworks for systematic analysis (Tomlinson et al., 2012). Overall, the distribution of pedagogical focuses suggests that research on the *Prospect* series has prioritized task design and communicative alignment, while more specialized dimensions such as assessment literacy, cognitive depth, and creativity have received comparatively limited attention.

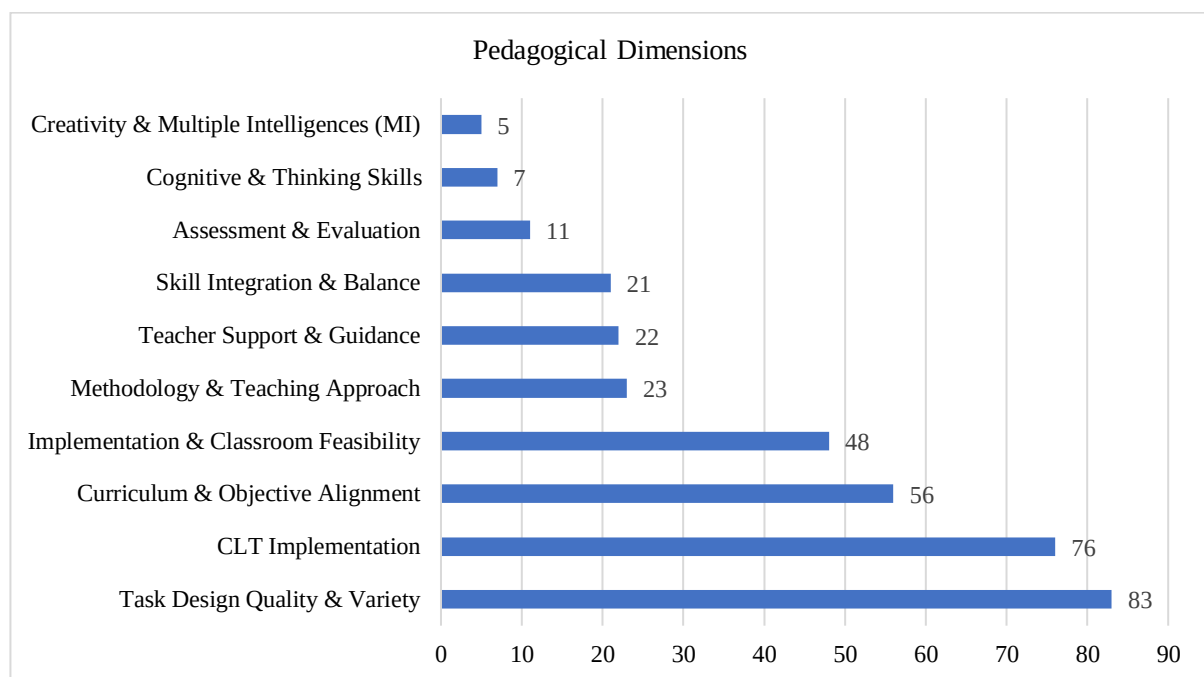


Figure 11. Top Ten Pedagogical Dimensions in *Prospect* Series Evaluation Studies

Physical Layout and Visual Patterns

The analysis of the reviewed studies shown in Figure 12 identified multiple recurring dimensions related to physical layout and visual design in evaluations of the *Prospect* series. The most frequently examined aspects were visuals, illustrations, and pictures, which appeared in 82 studies, followed by layout, design, and page organization, addressed in 73 studies. This strong emphasis reflects the recognized role of multimodal design in English Language Teaching materials, where visual elements contribute to scaffolding comprehension, contextualizing input, and sustaining learner attention (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Tomlinson et al., 2012). A substantial proportion of studies specifically considered whether visuals were meaningfully aligned with accompanying texts and tasks, consistent with the view that images should serve pedagogical functions rather than operate as purely decorative features.

Readability, clarity, and typography received considerable attention in 45 studies, while supplementary materials such as workbooks, teachers' guides, and audio resources were examined in 41 studies. These findings align with research suggesting that legible fonts, appropriate spacing, and coherent formatting facilitate reading fluency and reduce cognitive load (Nuttall, 1996), and that well-designed supplementary materials are central to effective classroom implementation and teacher support (McGrath, 2016). Color use and overall aesthetic appeal were addressed in 38 studies, and printing quality and material durability in 32 studies. Concerns in these areas often related to issues such as low-contrast printing, paper quality, and binding strength, reflecting broader evidence that physical production quality can influence both learner engagement and teacher satisfaction, even when pedagogical content is otherwise sound (Harmer, 2007).

Other dimensions appeared less frequently but remained pedagogically relevant. Glossaries and review sections were examined in 28 studies, cover design and overall physical appearance in 27 studies, and physical usability and classroom functionality in 20 studies. These evaluations commonly addressed practical considerations, including ease of navigation, manageable size and weight, and durability under classroom conditions. Finally, consistency across textbook levels was identified in 16 studies. This dimension aligns with international expectations that textbook series maintain coherent visual and structural identity across levels in order to support learner progression, familiarity, and cumulative development (McDonough et al., 2013). Overall, the distribution of findings suggests that research on the *Prospect* series has devoted substantial attention to visual and layout features, particularly

their pedagogical integration, while practical production and cross-level coherence considerations have received comparatively moderate but consistent scrutiny.

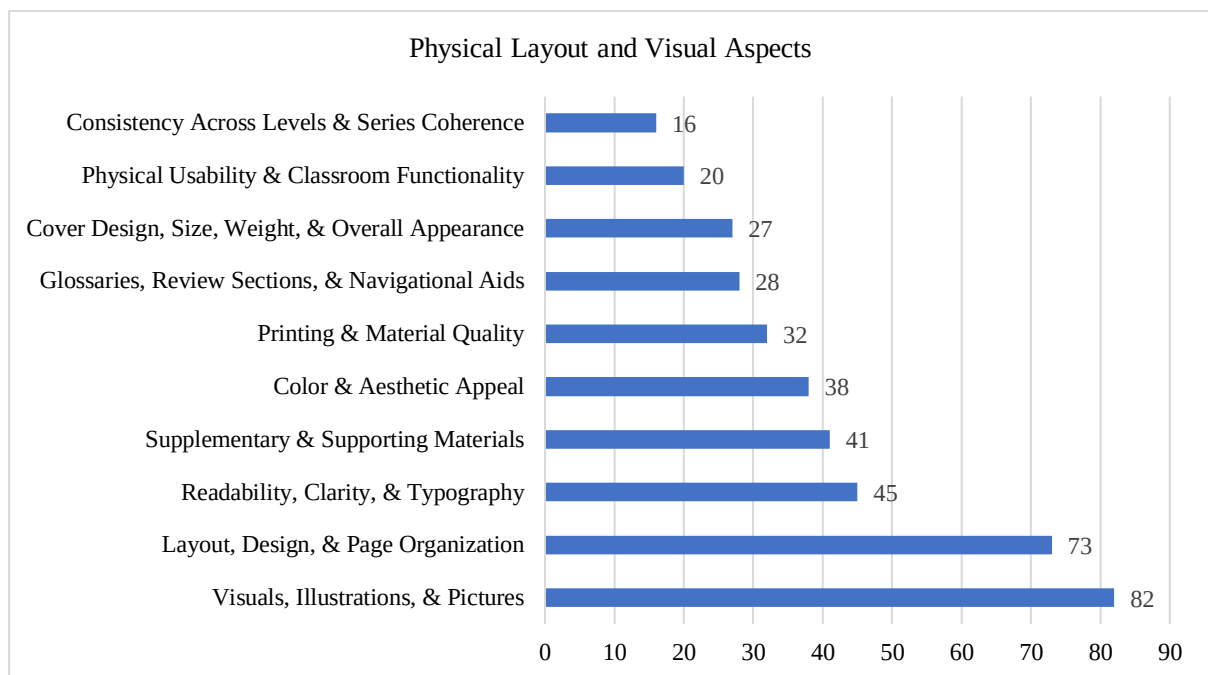


Figure 12. Top Ten Physical Layout and Visual Design Dimensions in *Prospect* Series Evaluation Studies

To sum up, the five domains reveal that evaluations of *the Prospect* series have concentrated most strongly on immediately observable textbook features such as language skills, task types, cultural content, learner motivation and engagement, and visual presentation. By contrast, more complicated and less observable constructs that require longitudinal investigations have received less attention. Future research should therefore prioritize deeper and more robust explorations that address the gaps in analytical depth, particularly through longitudinal, conceptual and context-sensitive approaches to textbook evaluation.

Conclusions and Implications

This systematic review provides the first comprehensive synthesis of 122 evaluative studies examining the *Prospect* series. By consolidating a methodologically diverse and temporally distributed body of research, the study offers an integrated account of how the series has been analyzed across linguistic, affective, socio-cultural, pedagogical, and visual design dimensions. In doing so, it transforms a previously fragmented literature into a coherent

evidence base that clarifies both dominant trends and persistent gaps in the textbook evaluation research within a centralized educational system.

The temporal distribution of studies reflects a pattern common in textbook evaluation research after major curriculum reforms. Research increased rapidly after the introduction of the series and reached its highest level in 2015. This trend can be due to the nationwide implementation of the textbooks, which provided sufficient classroom exposure for empirical studies. The peak is also coincident with Iran's broader educational reform movement, particularly the implementation of the Fundamental Transformation of Education ([Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2015](#); [Kheirabadi & Alavimoghaddam, 2016](#)). Similar implementation-driven increases in evaluative research can be seen in other EFL contexts with curriculum change ([Shak et al., 2022](#)). The gradual decline in publication activity after 2018 can reflect both the maturation of the research field and the growing scholarly attention toward newer materials like the *Vision* series ([Banaruee et al., 2023](#)).

The review also revealed an uneven distribution of evaluative attention across the three textbooks, with the highest focus on *Prospect 1* as the first point of contact with the revised curriculum and its symbolic significance within the shift toward CLT ([Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2015](#); [Alavi Moghaddam, 2024](#); [Isaee et al., 2023](#); [Joughi, 2021](#); [Kiany, 2022](#); [Zohoorian et al., 2018](#)). Early studies were largely based on determining whether the textbook is meaningfully different from the previous series and whether it successfully embedded national curriculum objectives into classroom materials ([Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2015](#); [Kheirabadi & Alavimoghaddam, 2016](#)). In contrast, evaluations of *Prospect 2* and *Prospect 3* increasingly focused on more specialized issues such as task design, cultural representation, classroom implementation, and teacher perceptions ([Ahmadi Safa & Karampour, 2020](#); [Arab & Rastgou, 2022](#); [Ghoorchaie et al., 2021](#); [Isaee, 2023](#); [Isaee & Barjesteh, 2023, 2024](#); [Jafari et al., 2024](#); [Mizbani & Chalak, 2017a, 2017b](#); [Sadeghi, 2020](#); [Taherkhani & Mottaghi, 2021](#)). This progression suggests a shift from broad judgments about curricular reform toward more focused analyses. This trajectory is similar to developments reported in international textbook evaluation research ([Shak et al., 2022](#)). This pattern also suggests that textbook evaluation should not be conceptualized as a preliminary validation exercise conducted at the point of curricular reform, but rather as a sustained and cyclical process that accompanies implementation, adaptation, and revision over time. Continuous evaluation is particularly critical in centralized systems, where textbooks function as primary curricular instruments and shape instructional practices at scale.

From a methodological perspective, the findings reveal a strong preference for qualitative and mixed-methods inquiry as well as content analysis and teacher perceptions. Teachers emerge as the primary evaluators in the literature. This tendency is consistent with wider scholarship in materials evaluation, which emphasizes the importance of practitioner perspectives and situated understanding of instructional resources (McGrath, 2016; Richards, 2017). However, the limited participation of other senior professionals and stakeholders indicates a structural gap in the evaluative landscape. Moreover, because most studies relied on content analysis and self-reported perceptions, existing knowledge is substantially more descriptive than critically evaluative.

The distribution of publication language is characterized by a strong predominance of English-language studies. It raises important questions regarding knowledge transmission and accessibility. While publishing in English enhances international visibility and scholarly exchange (Hyland, 2016), increasing the availability of high-quality research in Persian can promote the practical impact of findings among teachers, supervisors, and local stakeholders in the national educational system. A more balanced linguistic ecology of publication could therefore enhance both global engagement and local applicability.

The thematic patterns demonstrate strong alignment between research on the *Prospect* series and global priorities in English Language Teaching. Dominant emphases on communicative orientation, task design, cultural representation, learner motivation, and visual functionality reflect widely recognized principles of contemporary materials development (Cunningsworth, 1995; Gilmore, 2007; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017). The prominence of cultural and identity-related themes is particularly noteworthy and reflects the dual role of the *Prospect* series as both a language-learning resource and a tool for transmitting national, cultural, and educational values (Byram, 1997; Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Gray, 2010). However, the review identifies several underexplored domains, including pronunciation, discourse-level analysis, critical and identity-related affective constructs, power relations, assessment literacy, higher-order thinking skills, creativity, and multiple intelligences (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Derwing & Munro, 2015; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014; Norton & Toohey, 2011). This imbalance suggests that evaluative efforts have concentrated primarily on visible and immediately observable textbook features, whereas more complex cognitive, sociocultural, and affective processes remain less explored. Future research should adopt more theoretically expansive and analytically sophisticated perspectives.

The review also raises important methodological questions concerning the selection and application of evaluation frameworks. Although established models such as those proposed by Cunningsworth, McDonough and Shaw, and Litz were widely employed, their frequent use should not be interpreted as evidence of contextual appropriateness. Some of these frameworks were originally designed for commercial ELT materials or educational environments different from the centralized Iranian context. Furthermore, some studies adapted or combined frameworks without clearly explaining the rationale or procedures behind those modifications. Greater transparency in framework selection, adaptation, and implementation is therefore required.

All in all, the findings have clear implications for multiple stakeholders. For curriculum developers and textbook authors, the review provides evidence that can inform future revisions of the *Prospect* series by identifying both strengths and weaknesses. For teachers, the findings highlight dimensions that may require classroom supplementation, adaptation, or additional instructional support in order to address learners' needs more effectively. For researchers, the review identifies methodological and thematic gaps valuable for further investigation, particularly through longitudinal, classroom-based, and outcome-oriented research designs. For policymakers and educational authorities, the findings can help establish priorities for future evaluations, curriculum development efforts, and resource allocation decisions. These implications underscore the importance of viewing textbook evaluation as an ongoing process.

In conclusion, this review presents a multidimensional and data-driven portrait of more than a decade of research on the *Prospect* series. The overall landscape is substantial yet uneven: robust in teacher-informed, communicatively oriented, and culture-focused analyses, yet comparatively limited in critical, cognitive, and system-level perspectives. By synthesizing dispersed studies into structured temporal, methodological, and thematic patterns, the present review establishes a consolidated reference point for future textbook development, evaluative research, and curriculum reform. Beyond the specific case of the *Prospect* series, the findings contribute to broader discussions on how large-scale, state-sponsored English as a Foreign Language textbook reforms are examined, sustained, and refined within centralized educational contexts.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The findings of this systematic review should be cautiously interpreted regarding several methodological limitations. First, the review included only journal articles available in open-

access format. This accessibility restriction may have resulted in availability bias by excluding relevant studies published in paywalled subscription-based journals that could not be accessed in full text. As a result, the studies included in this review may not represent the complete body of related studies. Second, the restriction to published journal articles creates the potential risk of publication bias. Studies with statistically significant, novel, or clearly positive findings may be more likely to appear. Therefore, the patterns identified in this review may underrepresent evaluative studies that found null, negative, mixed, or even no substantial strengths or weaknesses in the textbooks. Third, theses and dissertations were excluded from the review. These sources may contain valuable detailed findings. Therefore, their exclusion may have reduced the methodological and contextual diversity of this study. As a result, future systematic reviews should seek to include paywalled and subscription-based journal articles, doctoral dissertations, master's theses, institutional repositories, and other relevant grey literature. A broader search strategy would provide a more comprehensive account of *Prospect* series evaluation and enable researchers to assess whether the trends identified in the present review remain stable across published and unpublished research.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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