

A Comparative Study of Two EFL Books: Prospect I and American English File I

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Abstract

Textbooks play a fundamental role in the language learning process. Hence, textbook evaluation is critical, with a significant impact on the learning and teaching process. For evaluating ELT textbooks, theorists and authors have offered several evaluation frameworks based on several principles and criteria. The present study was an effort to compare the evaluation of two English textbooks used highly in Iranian schools and language institutes (Prospect I and American English file I). In order to compare these two books, an evaluation checklist adapted from Miekley (2005) was distributed among English language teachers in Tehran. The participant teachers were told to respond to the individual checklists for each Prospect I and American English File I. From the distributed checklists, 100 were returned to the researcher. The averages of the checked items were reported through the figures in order to compare the books. The results demonstrate contrasts in substance, significance, and attractiveness of courses between Prospect I and American English File I. Thus, they can be helpful for curriculum developers, textbook designers, and instructors.

Keywords: Textbook evaluation, Miekley's checklist, American English File, Prospect I

INTRODUCTION

"Although the standard for reading ESL textbooks has been raised significantly recently, the method of choosing a suitable text has not become any easier for many teachers and managers" (Wen et al., 2011). One of the three essential components of any educational context (the two alternatives are the student and the teacher) has long been seen as an essential basis for teachers' decisions about what to show and how to teach and overall student performance. Resources and textbooks are among the most important aspects "within the information and lubricate the wheels of learning; they are better if they permanently provide concrete models in the training room. They act as information models and, in the best case, serve as "resources for teacher development" (P. 98). As a result, the context of English books is a crucial element in deciding learners' performance in a very learning process, and academics and information creators have an outstanding obligation to select all parts properly to show a foreign language in an environment. Most theorists, practitioners, language psychologists, EFL teachers, program developers, and plenty of staff members concerned with the method for teaching a foreign language can

collaborate to see that materials and teaching methodologies would be more practical and will produce relevant results of a situation in the learning process for all learners.

There has been a productive discussion concerning the role of ESL textbooks in foreign instruction and learning across the world. Many lecturers in the Asian nation have conducted studies on the analysis of textbooks in secondary faculties and schools to find why teachers and students are discontented with their textbooks for English as a far-off language. This analysis guides students to spot their deficiencies in every section of their textbooks by examining two different volumes. This research can also assist instructors in gaining a much better grasp of textbooks and overcoming obstacles via careful preparation and time management. It can conjointly aid educationalists and textbook developers by providing them a far better understanding of textbook design. As a result, the textbook choice is sort of important. Reviewing textbooks could cause improved learning and teaching.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Teaching materials

ELT materials form the backbone of English teaching (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017). In general, they work in many language programs, such as the de facto curriculum, and determine what to teach in what order, including class density and pace. (AbdelWahab, 2013; Allen, 2015; Garton and Graves, 2014; Mishan and Timmis, 2015) In this way, they create a common basis for students and teachers in an institution and control what and how besides determining the content. They regulate the implementation and delivery of language lessons (Harwood, 2014; McGrath, 2013).

ELT materials are essential for any language teaching program, and they set the bottom for the language teaching/learning method (McGrath, 2006, 2016 Tomlinson, 2008). The hassle to emphasize the vital role of material analysis has abounded (Tomlinson, 2013). It has guided the stakeholders to contemplate a data-driven, disciplined, and educated decision-making process. The pioneers within the field not only set the theoretical ground but also dole out analysis and suggest sensible implications, even with materials evaluation checklists (Brown, 1995; Cunningsworth, 1995; Dubin, & Olshtain, 1986; Ellis, 1997; Graves, 1996, 2000; Grossman, & Thompson, 2008; Guyer, & Peterson, 1988; Hargreaves, 1989; Harmer, 2003, Hirsch, 1988; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Johnson, 1989; Krahnke, 1987; Letter, 2000; Littlejohn & Windeatt, 1989; McDonough & Shaw, 1993; McGrath, 2002; O'Neill, 1982; Richard-Amato, 1988; Sheldon, 1987; Skierso, 1991; Tomlinson, 2003; Willis, 2000).

Authentic versus created materials

Martínez (2002), cited in AlAzri and AlRashdi (2014), defines authentic materials as materials geared toward the daily life of native speakers and not for didactic purposes, while Klickaya (2004) characterizes those as materials representing the actual world uncovering. On the other hand, Little, Devitt, and Singleton (1989), as cited in Peacock (1997), identify the real-life materials as created and used with a social purpose in the

language community of countries. Rogers and Medley (1988) also characterize the authentic as materials that reveal the authenticity and naturalness of language and are well contextualized within the context of native speakers. These materials can be in oral and written form. Wong, Kwok, and Choi (1995) report that their authenticity identifies authentic materials regarding time, people, and places. These materials are available, used by the people of that country, and exist in the target language country. Gerbhard (1996), cited in Oura (2001), also reports that authentic materials vary in different ways, they can be as auditory materials such as radio broadcasts and songs, visual materials such as television broadcasts and films, printed materials such as magazines, posters, and cards, as well as real or unreal objects such as dolls.

Alternatively, the counterfeit materials are teaching materials created and designed for educational purposes only; they are planned, designed, and produced based on the curriculum and policies of each country, in this context, Iran, as textbooks. These textbooks are also geared towards the needs and abilities of the students.

Textbooks

Textbooks are an essential element in the language teaching curriculum. They are necessary for both teachers and students, as they give them confidence. According to Brown (2001, p. 136), "the most obvious and common form of material support for language teaching comes through textbooks." Hutchinson and Torres (1994, p. 232) define the role of textbooks in the education system as "a vehicle for teacher training and students, as support and relief to give the fullest possible picture of the change and as psychological support, they provide to teachers." It can be argued that while there are role plays, conversations, discussions, and board work, none of them play a crucial role in teaching (Brown, 2001).

Evaluation

The definition of cons in analysis has been around for decades, since Carter (1971), and various assessment definitions have been offered over the years. One notable is that of Scriven (1991), later adopted by Yank Analysis Association (2014): "Evaluation is the systematic method of determining utility, value, value, or importance."

Probably the most frequently has been given by Trochim (2006), who claims that "evaluation is the systematic evaluation of the price or merit of an object." Another definition emphasizes action and data evaluation rather than value or merit, stating that "evaluation is the systematic collection and evaluation of data to provide useful feedback on a particular object" (ibid.). According to Hutchinson and Waters (1, p. 97), textbook analysis is primarily an analytical and straightforward comparison process, comparing "needs" with solutions.

Types of evaluation in language teaching

There are three styles of evaluation acknowledged by most researchers. They include formative, summative, and illuminative evaluation.

Formative evaluation

The purpose of formative assessment is to watch the teaching method work out, whether it is learning or not. The second performance of this analysis is that if the evaluation finds that the teaching-learning process is satisfactory, it motivates lecturers and students to figure more durable for higher results.

According to Tanner (1972), "Formative assessment refers to the use of tests and other assessment procedures during the course and teaching program. "To lead the students to master the content, both criterion-referenced and norm-referenced tests are used.

Summative evaluation

This assessment is completed at the tip of the session to live the performance of the students. Annual, internal, or external reviews are samples of a summative assessment. This assessment is employed to certify the pass or failure of the product. Students are rated from across the curriculum. Supported by this evaluation, a call is created whether a student ought to be a consequent category or keep within the same class again. In contrast, summative assessments assess scholars' learning, knowledge, skills, or success at the end of a teaching period, admire a teaching unit, course, or program).

Scriven (1967) argues that "all evaluations can be summative (that is, they have the potential to perform a summative function), but only some have the additional ability to perform formative functions."

Evaluation checklists

The various data collection tools include questionnaires, surveys, interviews, and tests. The model or method for data collection should be specified in a step-by-step process. It must be carefully designed and executed to ensure that the data is correct and valid. A checklist is one of the methods of collecting data.

The checklist contains many aspects to be considered when planning, conducting, and reporting an evaluation and covers the requirements in typical evaluation requests for proposals. It is divided into the following seven subsections; further, it can help respond to a request for a complex assessment or serve as a reminder of various decisions to be made in any assessment task.

- Focusing on the Evaluation
- Collecting Information
- Organizing Information
- Analyzing Information
- Reporting Information
- Administering the Evaluation,

Tomlinson (2003) suggests that checklists should be classified separately according to quantitative, qualitative, or outline format. Quantitative checklists are those that use rating scales with or without additional questions. Qualitative checklists use closed/open

questions without grading scales; checklists in outline format are without a rating scale or questions of any kind.

Research on the textbook evaluation in Iran

Several projects have been performed in Iran to evaluate textbooks (e.g., Hashemi and Rahimpour, 2011; Torki and Chalak, 2016; Salehi and Amini, 2016; Shahmohammadi, 2018;). For example, Shahmohammadi (2018) has used an eclectic checklist derived from previously used frameworks to evaluate textbooks taught in secondary schools in Iran from teachers' perspectives. Homework and exercises are aspects of the textbook that need the most improvement and revision; however, the vocabulary is its most enjoyable part.

METHOD

In order to evaluate Prospect 1 and American English file 1 books compared to each other, the present study was designed. Therefore, 50 English language teachers at the secondary school level (both private and public) from Tehran were selected for the evaluation checklist. The checklists were distributed among 50 teachers who took part. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, they were supposed to fill two google forms to rate Prospect 1 and American English File 1. The selected checklist for this study was adopted by Miekley (2005). It includes a textbook and its related manual. The subcategories include content, vocabulary, grammar, exercises and activities, the attractiveness of the text's physical makeup, general features, background information, methodological guidance, supplementary exercises and materials, and context (the checklist is available in appendix 1). The checklist includes 5 Likert scales. It was explained to the teachers to rate the checklist according to the Likert scale (0 for totally lacking the feature, 1 for poor, 2 for adequate, 3 for good, 4 for excellent). The checklists were gathered, and the data were reported in clustered columns showing the average of the rated items for each book.

RESULTS

As the checklist included several sections, the gathered data was presented in different sections to compare the sections individually.

1. Content

The content section included the following items:

- i. Is the subject matter presented either topically or functionally in a logical, organized manner?
- ii. Does the content serve as a window into learning about the target language culture (e.g., American, British, etc.)?
- iii. Are the reading selections authentic pieces of language?
- iv. Compared to texts for native speakers, does the content contain real-life issues that challenge the reader to think critically about his/her worldview?
- v. Are the text selections representative of the variety of literary genres, and do they contain multiple sentence structures?

As shown in Figure 1, the teachers believe that the content of Prospect 1 is less suitable than American English File 1.

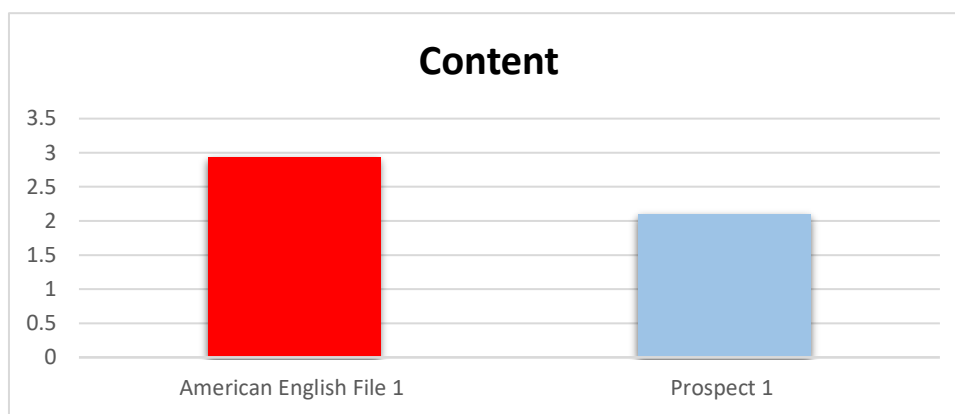


Figure 1. Evaluation of Content

1.1. Vocabulary and grammar.

The vocabulary and grammar section included the following items:

- i. Are the grammar rules presented in a logical manner and increasing order of difficulty?
- ii. Are the new vocabulary words presented in a variety of ways (e.g., glosses, multi-glosses, appositives)?
- iii. Are the new vocabulary words presented at an appropriate rate so that the text is understandable and students are able to retain new vocabulary?
- iv. Are the new vocabulary words repeated in subsequent lessons to reinforce their meaning and use?
- v. Are students taught top-down techniques for learning new vocabulary words?

As shown in Figure 2, the teachers believe that vocabulary and grammar of American English File 1 are provided techniques in a more understandable way than Prospect 1.

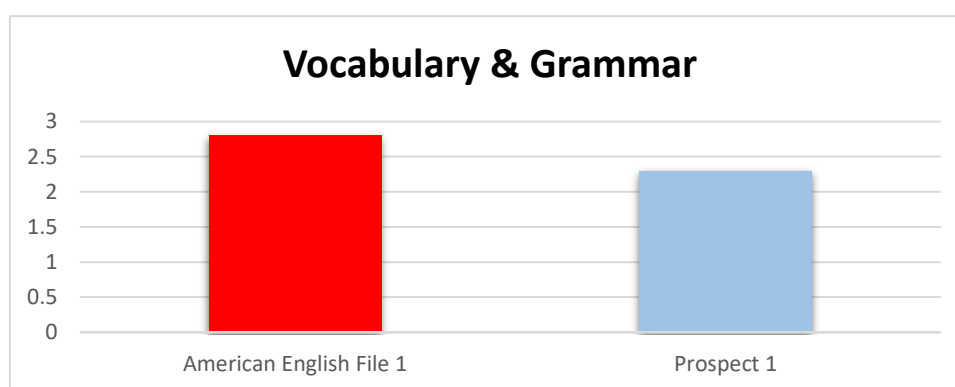


Figure 2. Vocabulary & Grammar

1.2. Exercises and activities.

The exercise and activities section includes the following subsection items:

- i. Are there interactive and task-based activities that require students to use new vocabulary to

communicate?

ii. Do instructions in the textbook tell students to read for comprehension?

iii. Are top-down and bottom-up reading strategies used?

iv. Are students given sufficient examples to learn top-down techniques for reading comprehension?

v. Do the activities facilitate students' use of grammar rules by creating situations in which these

rules are needed?

vi. Does the text make comprehension easier by addressing one new concept at a time instead of

multiple new concepts?

vii. Do the exercises promote critical thinking of the text?

According to Figure 3, the teachers believe that activities and exercises in American English File 1 lead to more comprehension and understanding of the subject than Prospect 1.

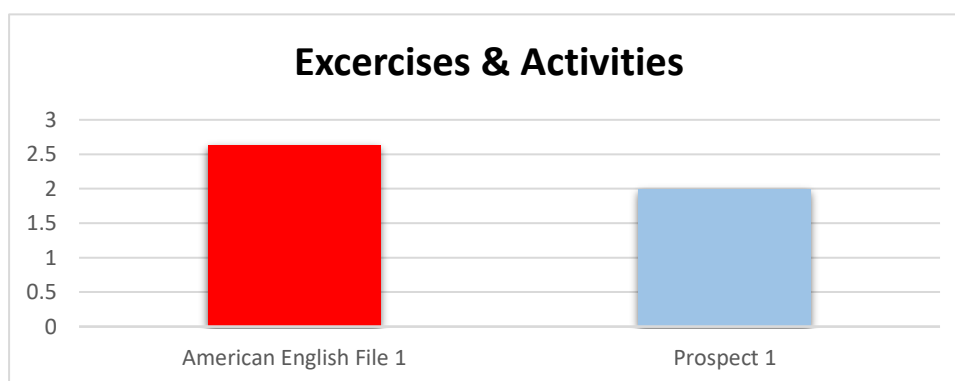


Figure 3. Exercises & Activities

1.3. Attractiveness of the text and physical make-up.

The attractiveness of the text and physical make-up includes the following items:

i. Is the cover of the book appealing?

ii. Is the visual imagery of high aesthetic quality?

iii. Are the illustrations simple enough and close enough to the text that they add to its meaning rather than detracting from it?

iv. Is the text interesting enough that students will enjoy reading it?

As observed in Figure 4, the teachers believe that the content of Prospect 1 is less attractive than American English File 1.

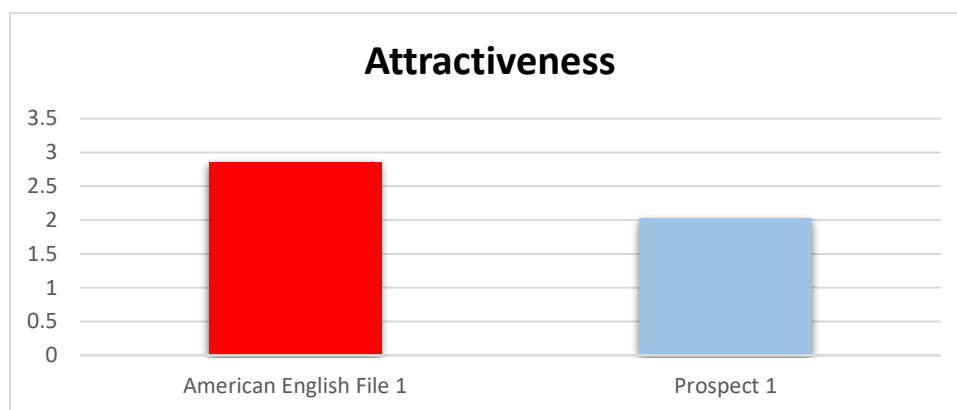


Figure 4. Attractiveness

2. Teacher's Manual

This section is devoted to the manual of the related books.

2.1. General Features.

The general features of the teacher's manual included the following items:

- i. Does the manual help teachers understand the objectives and methodology of the text?
- ii. Are correct or suggested answers given for the exercises in the textbook?

As shown in Figure 5, the teachers believe that Prospect 1 Manual has a lower rate of understanding of the objectives for the teachers than American English File 1.

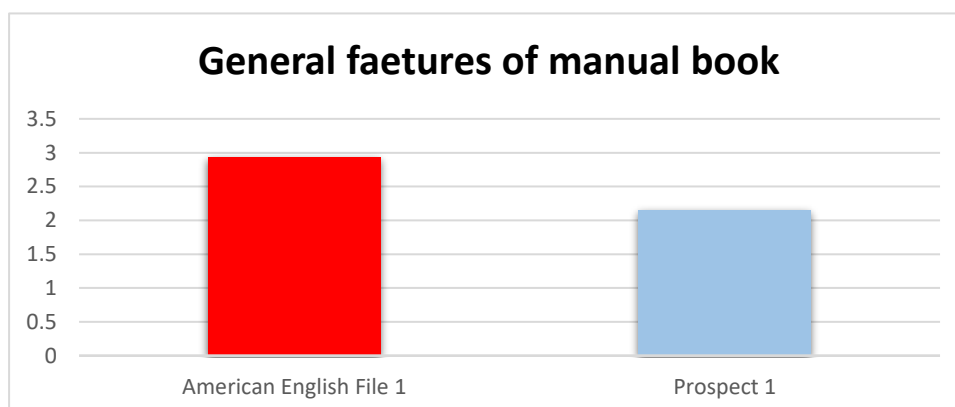


Figure 5. General features of manual book

2.2. Background information.

The background information section includes the following items:

- i. Are teachers shown how to teach students to use cues from morphology, cognates, rhetorical relationships, and context to assist them in lexical inferencing?
- ii. Is there a list of true and false cognates for vocabulary words?

According to Figure 6, the teachers believe that Prospect 1 is less clear than American English File 1 in assisting lexical inferencing and true false cognates.

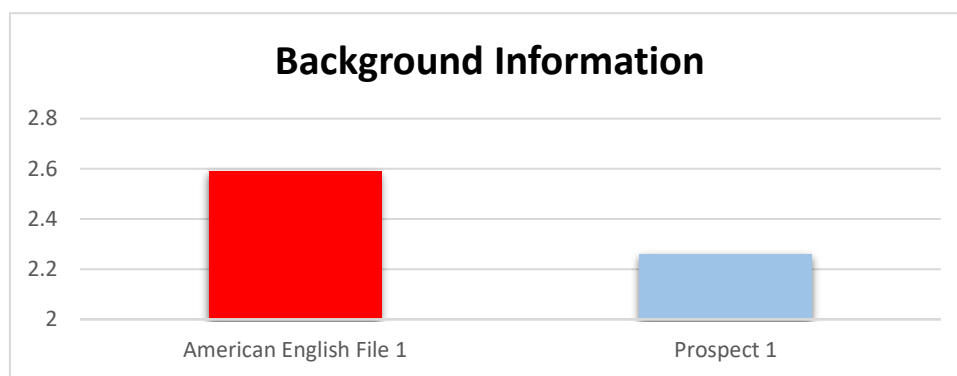


Figure 6. Background Information

2.3. Methodological Guidance.

The methodological guidance section includes the following items:

- i. Are teachers given techniques for activating students' background knowledge before reading the text?
- ii. Are teachers given adequate examples for teaching students to preview, skim, scan, summarize, and find the main idea?
- iii. Does the manual suggest a clear, concise method for teaching each lesson?

As seen in Figure 7, the teachers believe that Prospect 1 Manual has fewer suggestions, examples, methods for teaching. In addition, it should be noted that teachers believe manual books are not enough to present methods and examples of teaching.

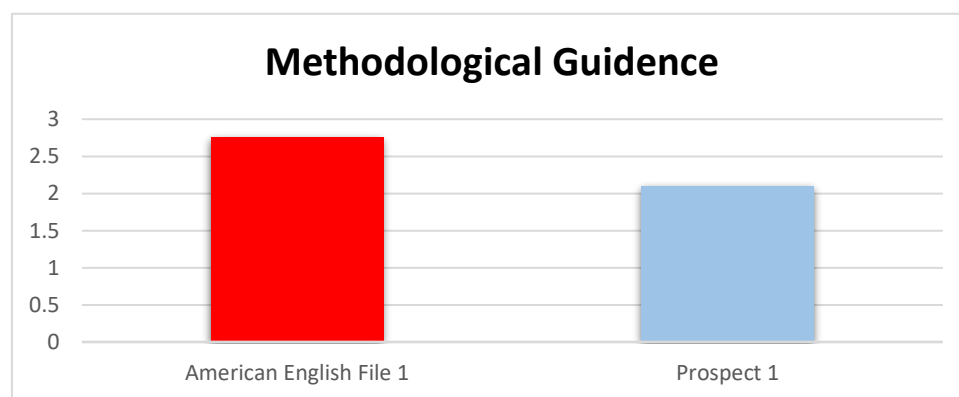


Figure 7. Methodological Guidance

2.4. Supplementary exercises and materials.

Supplementary exercises and materials include the following items:

- i. Does the manual give instructions on how to incorporate audiovisual material produced for the textbook?
- ii. Does the manual provide teachers with exercises to practice, test, and review vocabulary words?
- iii. Does the manual provide additional exercises for reinforcing grammar points in the text?

As shown in Figure 8, the teachers believe that supplementary exercises and materials are less provided in Prospect 1 Manual than American English File 1.

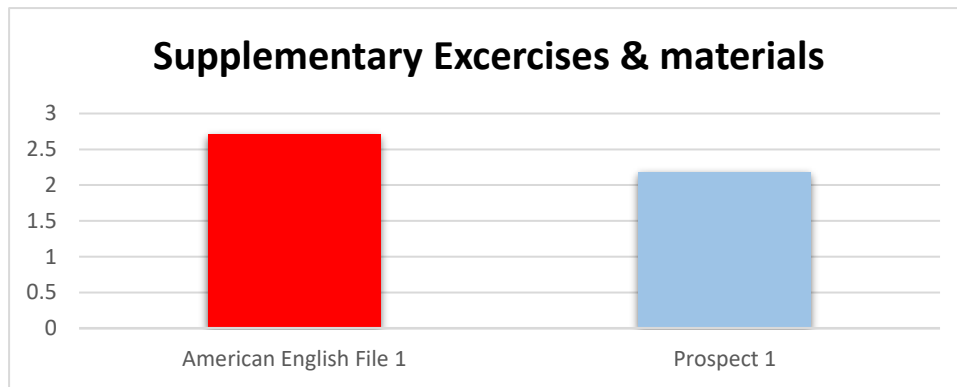


Figure 8. Supplementary Exercises and Materials

3. Context

In the context section, the teachers were asked about the appropriateness of the books for the related curriculum and course goals. The items included:

- i. Is the textbook appropriate for the curriculum?
- ii. Does the text coincide with the course goals?

As stated in Figure 9, the teachers believe that the context of Prospect 1 is less suitable than American English File 1 for the related course and curriculum, and they think that Prospect 1 is less appropriate than American English File 1 in meeting the course ends.

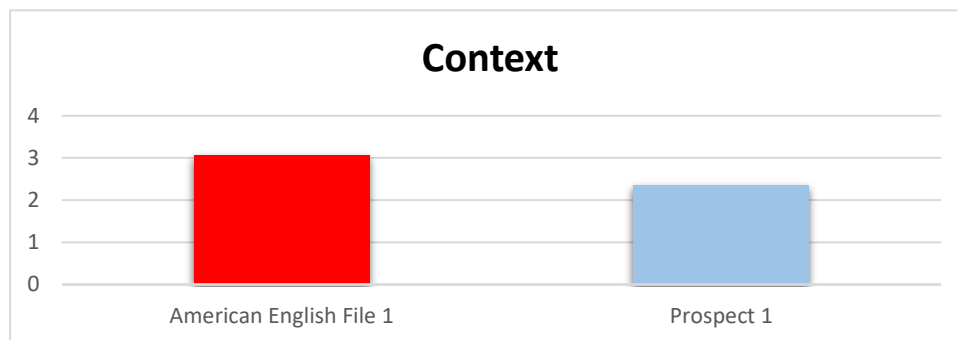


Figure 9. Context

3.1. Is the textbook appropriate for the students who will use it?

This section of the checklist includes the following items:

- i. Is the text free of material that might be offensive?
- ii. Are the examples and explanations understandable?
- iii. Will students enjoy reading the text selections?
- iv. Will the content meet students' felt needs for learning English, or can it be adapted for this purpose?

As seen in Figure 10, the teachers believe that Prospect 1 is less appropriate than American English File 1 for the students studying it, and also, they think that Prospect 1 is less enjoyable and understandable than American English File 1.

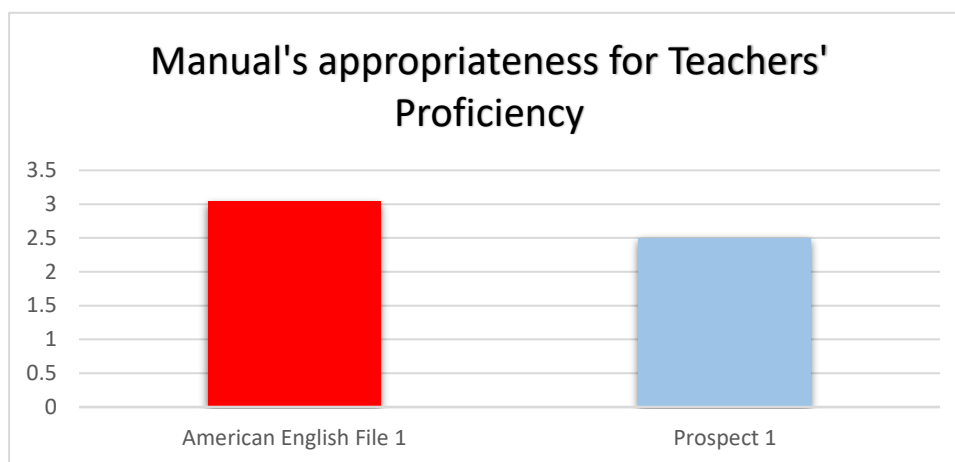


Figure 10. Appropriateness for Students

3.2. Are the textbook and teacher's manuals appropriate for the teacher?

This section included only the following item;

- i. Is the teacher proficient enough in English to use the teacher's manual?

The results show that teachers think that Prospect 1 is at a lower level of teachers' proficiency.

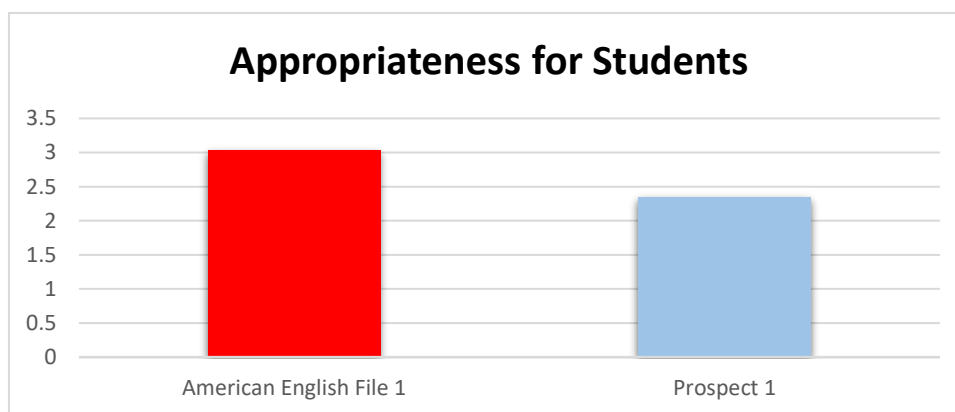


Figure11. Manual's Appropriateness for Teachers' Proficiency

CONCLUSION

Due to the popularity of two commonly practiced textbooks in Iranian schools and language institutes, the present study intended to examine teachers' views. Using a formerly administered Likert scale checklist with different subcategories consistent with the research questions, it was revealed that the teachers who participated in the study think that:

- The content of Prospect 1 is less appropriate.
- The vocabulary and grammar of American English File 1 are more transparent and understandable.
- Exercise and Activities are more effective in American English File 1.
- The attractiveness of Prospect 1 is less than American English File 1.
- The manuals have less rate of understanding of the objectives for the teachers in Prospect 1 in contrast to American English File 1.
- Prospect 1 has less instruction about how to teach lexical in contrast to American English File 1.
- Prospect 1 has less methodological guidance than American English File 1.
- There are fewer supplementary exercises and material for teaching Prospect 1 in contrast to American English File 1.
- Prospect 1 is less appropriate than American English File 1, and in meeting the Course and curriculum ends.
- Prospect 1 is less enjoyable for the learners in contrast to American English File 1.
- Prospect 1 Manual is at a lower level of teachers' proficiency than American English File 1.

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Appendix1

Textbook Evaluation Checklist		Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor	Totally Lacking	Mandatory	Optional	Not Applicable
I. Textbook									
A. Content									
	i. Is the subject matter presented either topically or functionally in a logical, organized manner? (1,2,3) ⁱ	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	ii. Does the content serve as a window into learning about the target language culture (American, British, ect.)? (2,18)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	iii. Are the reading selections authentic pieces of language? (5,10)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	iv. Compared to texts for native speakers, does the content contain real-life issues that challenge the reader to think critically about his/her worldview? (1,2,3,7,21)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	v. Are the text selections representative of the variety of literary genres, and do they contain multiple sentence structures? (1,13)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
B. Vocabulary and Grammar									
	i. Are the grammar rules presented in a logical manner and in increasing order of difficulty? (1,2,3)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	ii. Are the new vocabulary words presented in a variety of ways (e.g. glosses, multi-glosses, appositives)? (2,3,12)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	iii. Are the new vocabulary words presented at an appropriate rate so that the text is understandable and so that students are able to retain new vocabulary? (1,2,3,5)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	iv. Are the new vocabulary words repeated in subsequent lessons to reinforce their meaning and use? (1,2,3.)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	v. Are students taught top-down techniques for learning new vocabulary words? (7,8,9,11)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
C. Exercises and Activities									
	i. Are there interactive and task-based activities that require students to use new vocabulary to communicate? (1,2,3,5)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	ii. Do instructions in the textbook tell students to read for comprehension? (6)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	iii. Are top-down and bottom-up reading strategies used? (17)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	iv. Are students given sufficient examples to learn top-down techniques for reading comprehension? (7,8,9,10)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	v. Do the activities facilitate students' use of grammar rules by creating situations in which these rules are needed? (1,2,3)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	vi. Does the text make comprehension easier by addressing one new concept at a time instead of multiple new concepts? (2,3)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	vii. Do the exercises promote critical thinking of the text? (2)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
D. Attractiveness of the Text and Physical Make-up									
	i. Is the cover of the book appealing? (1,2,3)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	ii. Is the visual imagery of high aesthetic quality? (1,2,3,14)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	iii. Are the illustrations simple enough and close enough to the text that they add to its meaning rather than detracting from it? (1)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
	iv. Is the text interesting enough that students will enjoy reading it? (15)	4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N

II Teacher's Manual									
A. General Features									
i. Does the manual help teachers understand the objectives and methodology of the text? (1,2,3)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
ii. Are correct or suggested answers given for the exercises in the textbook? (1,2,3,4)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
B. Background Information									
i. Are teachers shown how to teach students to use cues from morphology, cognates, rhetorical relationships, and context to assist them in lexical inferencing? (7)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
ii. Is there a list of true and false cognates for vocabulary words? (1,2,3)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
C. Methodological Guidance									
i. Are teachers given techniques for activating students' background knowledge before reading the text? (8,9,22)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
ii. Are teachers given adequate examples for teaching students to preview, skim, scan, summarize, and to find the main idea? (8,11,6)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
iii. Does the manual suggest a clear, concise method for teaching each lesson? (1,2,3)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
D. Supplementary Exercises and Materials									
i. Does the manual give instructions on how to incorporate audio-visual material produced for the textbook? (2)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
ii. Does the manual provide teachers with exercises to practice, test, and review vocabulary words? (1,2,3)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
iii. Does the manual provide additional exercises for reinforcing grammar points in the text? (1,2,3)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
III. Context									
A. Is the textbook appropriate for the curriculum? (1,2,19,20)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
i. Does the text coincide with the course goals? (1,2,3,19,20)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
B. Is the textbook appropriate for the students who will be using it? (1,2)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
i. Is the text free of material that might be offensive? (1,6,16)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
ii. Are the examples and explanations understandable? (1)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
iii. Will students enjoy reading the text selections? (1,2,3,15)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
iv. Will the content meet students' felt needs for learning English or can it be adapted for this purpose? (2,3)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
C. Are the textbook and teacher's manual appropriate for the teacher who will be teaching from them? (1,2,4)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N
i. Is the teacher proficient enough in English to use the teacher's manual? (1)		4	3	2	1	0	M	O	N