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COURSE-BOOK EVALUATION: WORLD ENGLISH (INTRO) BY MARTIN MILNER

Abstract:

In this paper, I will evaluate a course book titled 'World English Intro' which is the initial book of a series composed of four successive books. Initially, the rationale behind the paper will be explained. Secondly, qualities of a good course book will be elaborated. Thirdly, a coursebook titled 'World English Intro' will be explained with its supplementary components. Fourthly, target learners and context within which the coursebook will be used. Finally, the paper will be concluded with final discussion on advantages and disadvantages of using the coursebook in question within this context.

Although they have long been discussed in the area of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning, they have stood up as 'reality' in the field. Publishers have always expanded their capacity to publish coursebooks. The number of publishers has increased in time to cater for the growing market of language teaching. The publishers have varied their publications to appeal to various needs of learners and institutions (Harmer, 2007a; Harmer, 2007b).

Today, a coursebook is not a coursebook only. It comes with extensions and supplementary materials such as audio CDs, DVDs, workbooks, on-line supporters, smart board companions, etc. Therefore, when evaluating a coursebook, we should take those into account as well.

Deciding on which coursebook to use is not an easy one; decision makers should take a number of criteria into account. Course objectives, learner profile, and institutional goals are only some of them. Before all, options could be short-listed to cater for the aforementioned needs through reviewing coursebooks initially with a ready-made criteria list or with a genuinely created one.

Keywords:

Course book evaluation, Qualities of good course books

JEL Classification: I29

Introduction

In this paper, I will evaluate a course book titled 'World English *Intro*' which is the initial book of a series composed of four successive books. Initially, the rationale behind the paper will be explained. Secondly, qualities of a good course book will be elaborated. Thirdly, a course book titled 'World English *Intro*' will be explained with its supplementary components. Fourthly, target learners and context within which the course book will be used. Finally, the paper will be concluded with final discussion on advantages and disadvantages of using the course book in question within this context.

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Qualities of a Good Course book

The description of 'quality course book' is tentative and may have changed in time in accordance with the needs and changing nature of language teaching and learning (Richards, 2001). For instance, when Grammar Translation method was popular, the course books were prepared to meet relevant expectations whereas nowadays Communicative Language Teaching and Learning is more popular thus giving rise to increase in the number of course books prepared to cater for communicative needs.

Apart from Graves (2000) and Griffiths (1995, pp. 50-51), Pakkan (1997, pp. 37-38) summarizes fundamental qualities of course books under eight items as follows:

A good course book should;

1. be practical; that is, easily obtainable, affordable, and easy to use for teachers and learners,
2. appeal to the profile of the learners who will use it,
3. be motivating and encouraging both on the part of learners and teachers,
4. be clearly and systematically structured,
5. also be flexible enough to be modified and adapted,
6. have variety,
7. serve the communicative needs in being situationally and linguistically real and authentic,
8. have supplementary materials to support extensive study.

Similarly but more specifically, Ur (1996, p. 186) presents a list of criteria for course book assessment. Other criteria are supplied by Işık (2011, pp. 256-266). In his article he evaluates 4th and 5th grade English course books specifically prepared to be used in primary schools by the Ministry of Education in Turkey. He evaluates the course books from 26 different perspectives: Language Teaching Philosophy, Needs and Context Analysis, Approach, Using Language as a Means of Communication, Cross-Curricular Aspect, Functions, Basic Linguistic Element, Skills, Topic Choice, Student Motivation, Density, Presentation, Activating or Building up Schemata (Warm-up Activities), Activities, Application, Comprehensible Samples of the Target Language, Student Participation, Variety, Page Layout, Individual Differences, Native and International Culture, Holistic Approach to Learners, Holistic Approach to Language, Instructions, Classroom Management, and Periphery.

Bearing in mind the possibility of grasping the earlier studies, the latest will be used in this paper to evaluate World English *Intro*. Also, it is assumed that the latest one covers and includes the recent development in technology as well.

World English *Intro*

Firstly, directly citing back cover information will provide a lot for us:

“World English” is an exciting new four-skill general English series which uses National Geographic content, images, and video to teach the language that learners need to succeed in their daily lives. The series is built upon clear and practical learning goals which are presented and practiced through appropriate themes and topics. A competency-based series, World English uses real people, real places, and real language to connect learners of English to the world.

Features:

- A practical, competency-based syllabus gives learners the chance to practice language through communicative tasks, build their language strategies, and find their way to becoming more comfortable in the real world.
- National Geographic Video on the Classroom VD, Student CD-Rom, and Online Video Workbook allows teachers to bring the text to life in the classroom.
- World English provides extensive teacher support through the Online Lesson Planner, Teacher’s Edition, Classroom DVD, Assessment CD-ROM with ExamView, and the Teacher Web Site.

World English *Intro*

World English *Intro* is composed of the following components:

- Student Book with Student CD-ROM
- Student Book
- Workbook
- Online Video Workbook
- Combo Split Intro A Student Book with Student CD-ROM
- Combo Split Intro B Student Book with Student CD-ROM
- Combo Split Intro A Online Video Workbook
- Combo Split Intro B Online Video Workbook

- Teacher's Edition
- Online Lesson Planner
- Classroom Audio CD
- Classroom DVD
- Assessment CD-ROM with ExamView™

Language Teaching Philosophy: it is hard to evaluate this since the series aims at teaching general English across the globe.

Needs and Context Analysis: the books were prepared upon a scientific needs analysis.

Approach: basically communicative.

Using Language as a Means of Communication: the course book uses language as a means of communication.

Cross-Curricular Aspect: the course book tries to teach language through interesting topics and themes across the globe which is highly advised to make language content more meaningful.

Functions: functions of language are clearly stated and embedded in the design of the units.

Basic Linguistic Element: the coursebook considers sentence and chunks as the basic element of language rather than only the word.

Skills: all four skills are included in an integrative manner which is something desired for most of the time (Kumaradivelu, 2006).

Topic Choice: topics are interesting and motivating in that sense. National Geographic documentaries supply the variety and curiosity on the part of the learners.

Student Motivation: as the topics and the themes are interesting, student motivation is considered top priority in the coursebook.

Density: activities and level of the coursebook is of medium which is something desired.

Presentation: the presentation of the coursebook is clear enough to be followed by the learners.

Activating or Building up Schemata (Warm-up Activities): each unit starts with warm up activities in order to trigger schemata of the learners which is found to be valuable in education.

Activities: activities are not fully relevant to real life needs in the sense that the learners will not probably be doing similar activities in their daily life.

Application: the activities serve the purpose of having a communicative value.

Comprehensible Samples of the Target Language: through interesting topics and tasks, the course book provides comprehensible input for the learners.

Student Participation: the course book tries hard to increase student participation through variety of activities and supplementary materials.

Variety: the course book has variety which the learners like.

Page Layout: face-validity is pretty high since the course book is in color and fine paper.

Individual Differences: the course book appeal to learner differences through variety of activities.

Native and International Culture: the course book bases its content to world culture which makes it globe-native having a positive impact on learners.

Holistic Approach to Learners: the focus is not only on the language; rather, it tries to teach content as well.

Holistic Approach to Language: the course book sees the language as a whole rather than segments.

Instructions: instructions are clear and short. They could be friendlier though.

Classroom Management: the course book contributes the classroom management positively in that it provides teacher a lot of activities, tasks, and extensive study.

Periphery: there are supplementary materials to cater for peripheral learning.

Target Learners and Context¹

Turkish Air Force Academy (TurAFA) is a four-year military academy where the students are both academically educated on five major engineering and administrative departments, i.e. aerospace, electronics, industrial, computer, and administrative sciences and at the same time trained to be fighter pilots for the Turkish Air Force. Although the medium of instruction is not English in the academy, it is given special attention and quite an important amount of time is allotted to English classes in the curriculum.

English Language Teaching System at TurAFA

At TurAFA, English is taught at all levels as there is heterogeneity in the proficiency levels of the students at the time of the acceptance to the school. There are some students having studied English for some years and reached a certain level of proficiency in English before TurAFA and thus starting their English courses at the advanced level, while there are some with no or insufficient previous experience of English and taking beginner level English courses.

The new syllabus has been in use since the beginning of the academic year 2007 and it aims to create an opportunity for the students to learn and/or practice English while increasing their content awareness in the subject matters which will constitute crucial parts of their career. The students of TurAFA will have pre-arranged career fields with clear-cut definitions after graduation, which helped the designers of the syllabus while deciding on the content of the new system. All of the students need to learn and/or improve the language of English in four skills and they are getting educated and trained for almost the same career areas in which they will have to use English. CBI views the target language largely as the vehicle through which subject matter content is learned rather than as the immediate object of study (Brinton, Snow and Wesche, 1989, p. 5). Therefore, the compatibility of the main principle of CBI encouraged the designers in their effort to both form their own syllabus and produce their own materials within this English language environment of TurAFA.

¹ This part is adopted from Er and Ülgü (2012)

The syllabus mainly consists of three stages. First, a series of General English course books written especially for adult learners are used. The series includes five different books starting from an introductory level and ending with an advanced level. All the books of the series contain thematically-based, four-skill-integrated units with critical thinking skills. Second, after studying the last book of the series, all the students start studying the authentic books prepared by the Foreign Languages Department of TurAFA according to the principles of CBI. However, only the advanced and ‘super’ (referring to the upper advanced) course students can have the opportunity to study the whole six books as the beginner and intermediate level students spend more time in the program improving their proficiency to reach the prerequisite advanced level necessary for these books. Each semester all junior and senior students take at least two engineering courses in English. Those engineering courses are all delivered by the subject matter teachers.

The students taught in this program are evaluated by means of four-skill achievement tests. In addition, all the students are to keep a course portfolio including their authentic assignments. It is also officially taken into consideration during the assessment of the students.

Conclusion

It can be drawn from the above-analysis that World English *Intro* can be used during the initial phase of the program in my institution. However, for the later phases, the institution should develop its own material since it is a unique one in terms of needs of the learners and in terms of context. For visual presentation of the course book, visit website at www.elt.heinle.com/worldenglish.

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