

Selecting and Analyzing Course Books

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Abstract: *This article is dedicated to analyses of course book, choosing course book by teachers and reasons for course book use. Teacher's opening course book should come to conclusion whether they will use this unit with his students or not. Is the language appropriate for the level of the group? Are the topics suitable for learners? Does the book have right activities? If the course book is good, the language, content and sequencing in the book will be suitable, and that the topics and treatment of the different language skills will be attractive.*

Key words: course book, activity, content, level, teacher's guide, Price and availability.

According to four alternatives we may decide whether course book is appropriate or not. First of all, we may omit the lesson or part of the lesson. That solves the problem and gives us chance to deal with something else. Omitting lessons from course books is not big problem. On the other hand, omitting too many pages may bring to the problem that students start to wonder why they are

using the book especially if they have bought it themselves. One more alternative is replacing some lessons of the course book with others. And there are some reasons to it: our own material maybe is more interesting and more appropriate for our students. However, the same problem as with omitting may occur when too many lessons are replaced. The third alternative is to add something to what is already in the book. In case of rather boring lesson the teacher may want to add activities and. The final version is to adapt what is given in the book.

Using course books creatively is one of the teacher's premier skills. The way in which we get students to look at reading texts, do exercises or solve puzzles in the book is extremely important. If they do so before we give our instructions, they often don't concentrate on what we have to say.¹

¹ Harmer, Jeremy. The Practice of English Language Teaching (3rd ed.). Essex: Pearson Education. 2001



Some teachers don't have good opinion about course book. They consider them as boring and often inappropriate for the class in front of them. Such people prefer to rely on their own ideas, reference books, pages from magazines, ideas from the students themselves and a variety of other sources.

Other teachers think that course book is one of the vital things in teaching. For them, course books provide good teaching material which is attractively presented. The course book has a consistent syllabus and provides good vocabulary exposure and practice, pronunciation work and wide range of writing tasks. In good course books there is a range of reading and listening material and workbooks. It takes less time to prepare a good course book lesson than to start from the beginning each time and prepare brand new material; however, many teachers do not have enough time to prepare and plan as much as they would like to. All course books provide with teacher's guide to help teachers with procedure and give them extra ideas. And

in most cases students really like course books.

It gives them the chance to look forward and back, preparing for what's coming and revise what they have done already.

However, there is the ever-present danger that both teacher and students will get locked into the book, using its content as the only material which is taken into the classroom, and always teaching and learning only in the way the book suggests. In such circumstances, the book may become like a millstone around the necks of all concerned, endangering the *engagement* which a student-centered classroom might otherwise create. As a result, some teachers take the decision to do without course books altogether, a decision which may well be of benefit to their students if, and only if, they have the experience and time to provide a consistent program of work on their own, and if they have a bank of materials to back up their 'no-course book' decision.²

² Harmer, Jeremy. *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (3rd ed.). Essex: Pearson Education. 2001



Teachers should see course books as proposals for action, not as instructions for action. In other words, we can look at the possibilities the course book offers us and then decide between the options for course book use. If teachers and students approach course books in that light, and use them according to the criteria we suggested above, they will have a much more beneficial effect than if they are followed slavishly. However, good course book comes to life when it is used by students and teachers, and it is they, not the book, who should determine exactly how and when the material is used.

Teachers have to decide what books to use. How should they come to one conclusion whether one book is better and more appropriate than another?

First of all we should analyze both books. It can be done with the help of looking through some interesting areas: layout and design, methodology, topics, etc.; we can write a description of our ideal course book and see does selected

course book match up to it. Alternatively, we can make up a checklist.

Before making our final choice, we will want to consult colleagues, and indeed anyone who has an opinion about the book(s) in question. We need to be aware, of course, of their differing teaching situations or competing publisher, author or methodology loyalties, but it is always worth listening to what other people have to say.

Finally, it is a good idea to give our students a chance to choose out of given variants, which they consider as the most appropriate. They may not make our decision for us, but their opinion can help us come to a final decision.

If we talk about advantages of course book, there are plenty of them which were presented by Penny Ur³:

- A course book provides a clear framework. Teacher and learners know where they are going and what is coming next, so there is a sense of structure and progress.

³ Ur Penny. A Course in Language Teaching.

-Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996



- In many places the course book serves as a syllabus. If it is followed systematically, a carefully planned and balanced selection of language content will be covered.

- The course book provides texts and learning tasks which are likely to be of an appropriate level for most of the class. This of course saves time for the teacher who would otherwise have to prepare his or her own.

- A book is the cheapest way of providing learning material for each learner. Alternatives, such as kits, sets of photocopied papers or computer software, are likely to be more expensive relative to the amount of material provided.

- A book is a convenient package. It is a bound, so that its components stick together and stay in order. It is light and small enough to carry around easily.

- For teachers who are inexperienced and occasionally unsure of their knowledge of language, the course book can provide useful guidance and support.

- The learner can use material to learn new material and monitor his

progress autonomously. However, without course book the learner is teacher dependent.⁴

We would like to present you possible course book analysis checklist which was proposed by Jeremy Harmer:

Price and availability: How much does the course book cost? Will students have to

buy any extra material (workbook, etc.)? Are all the components (course book, workbook, teacher's guide, audio, etc.) available? What about other levels? Is this good value for money? How much does the whole package (with all the components) cost?

Add-ons and extras: Apart from a workbook, what other extras are offered with the course? Are there Internet sites with extra material (exercises, texts, etc.), or with 'meeting places' for users? What else does the publisher offer to support the course? What value should we place on the extras that are available?

⁴ Ur Penny. A Course in Language Teaching. -Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996

Layout and design: Is the book attractive? Is its design appropriate for the students, and the teacher? Does the design of the book make it easy to follow?

Instructions: Are the instructions clear and unambiguous? Are they written in language that the students will understand? Can the course book be used by students working on their own, or is a teacher necessary to show them how to use it?

Methodology: What kind of teaching and learning does the course book promote? Is there a good balance between *study* and *activation*? How do the authors appear to think that people learn languages and do we agree with them?

Syllabus: Is the syllabus appropriate for our students? Does it cover the language areas (grammar, vocabulary, functions, pronunciation, etc.) that we would expect? Do we and our students like the sequencing of language and topics, etc.? Does the course book build in a feeling of progress?

Language skills: Does the course book have the appropriate balance of skills? Is the skills work really designed to promote the skills (e.g. writing-for-writing, not writing-for-learning)? Are there possibilities for both *study* and *activation* in the skills areas? Are the skills activities likely to *engage* students?

Topics: Does the book contain a variety of topics? On balance, are the topics appropriate for the kind of students who will be using the course book? Are the topics likely to *engage* the students?

Cultural appropriacy: Is the material appropriate for the cultural situation that the

students are in? Do the texts contain culturally insensitive material? Are the activities appropriate for the learning culture? Is the course book unprejudiced in the way it deals with different customs, ethnicities, races and sexes?

Teacher's guide: Does the course book have an accompanying teacher's guide? Is it easy to use? Does it explain things clearly? Does it offer alternatives to the course book activities? Does it



have all the answers that teachers and students need? Does it provide differentiated activities for fast and slow learners?

At the beginning of our article we mentioned that one of four alternatives when the given material in course book is not suitable is to adapt. There are a number of ways to adapt material that is not suitable for a particular teaching situation. Here are some ideas: we can extend the given material when the task or exercise is too short and the learners need more practice. In such situation we can write extra items, following the same pattern. Sometimes we have to short material when the task or exercise is too long and the learners don't need so much in practice. The solution to such problem is using as much as you need, but not feeling that it was already used or giving different parts of the text or task to different learners. Despite of these, the methodology of the course book can be changed when the given tasks are not suitable for learners' learning styles or one and the same task is repeated. We

just can change the interaction pattern. One more strategy is changing the level of material as the texts or tasks are too easy or too difficult. This problem can be solved by making tasks more or less challenging. One more strategy is reordering material when the activities in the units in the book always the same sequence. Here we can change the order of the material used.

We talked a lot about advantages of course book. However, there is a range of disadvantages also. We would like to present the list of disadvantages given by Penny Ur:

- Inadequacy. Every class- in fact, every learner- has their learning needs: no one course book can possibly supply these satisfactorily.

- Irrelevance, lack of interest. The topics dealt with in the course book may not necessarily be relevant or interesting for your class

- Limitation. A course book is confining: its set structure and sequence may inhibit a teacher's initiative and



creativity, and lead to boredom and lack of motivation on the part of the learners.

- Homogeneity. Course books have their own rationale and chosen teaching and learning approach. They do not usually cater for the variety of levels of ability and knowledge, or of learning styles and strategies that exist in most classes

- Over- easiness. Teachers find it too easy to follow the course book uncritically instead of using their initiative; they may find themselves functioning merely as mediators of its content instead of as teachers in their own right.

In conclusion, we would like to say that even if any course book has a list of advantages as framework, syllabus, ready- made texts and tasks, economy of time, convenience, guidance for inexperienced teacher, learner's autonomy and etc. it has the long list of drawbacks. For example, sometimes it is irrelevant and lack of interest; limitation of the teacher and there can be over easiness. Although, it is considered that the course

book which was chosen correctly, according to the criteria will be more beneficial than the blindly chosen one.

References:

- [1]. Harmer, Jeremy. The Practice of English Language Teaching (3rd ed.). Essex: Pearson Education. 2001
- [2]. Ur Penny. A Course in Language Teaching. –Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996