

# **Evaluation of Worldview Textbooks: Textbooks Taught at a Military University**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper intends to evaluate the Worldview series textbooks of English learning, which are being taught at an Iranian military university foreign language center. No textbook evaluation had been conducted by the university administration prior to the introduction of the textbooks to the language program. Theorists in the field of ELT textbook design and evaluation such as Richards (2001), Sheldon (1988), Cunningsworth (1995) and Williams (1983) all agree that evaluation checklists have some criteria pertaining to the physical layout, organization and content characteristics. This study makes use of a combined and contextualized evaluation checklist from available textbook evaluation checklists. This paper takes the advantages of the most common criteria among these textbook evaluation checklists. Furthermore, after discussing advantages and disadvantages of using commercial textbooks in teaching and textbook evaluation through checklists, some suggestions for curriculum development will be proposed. The findings of this research can be useful for ESL researchers and teachers in general as well as ELT material developers and textbook evaluators in particular.*

**Keywords:** Textbook evaluation, EFL materials, checklists

## **1. Introduction**

EFL materials and textbooks are key factors in many language programs and making judgments about them needs “book evaluation.” There are different reasons for evaluating textbooks that are related to the teacher, content, and learner. Teaching methods, Learners’ needs, aims, culture, administrative system, and educational decisions are examples of them. Another reason for evaluating EFL textbooks is the fact that it can be a determining factor in teacher development and professional growth. Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) state that “textbook evaluation helps teachers move beyond impressionistic assessments and it helps them to acquire useful, accurate, systematic, and contextual insights into the overall nature of textbook material” (cited in Jahangard, 2008, 33) . In addition, they suggest that there are three types of textbook evaluation: ‘predictive’, ‘in use’, and ‘post-use’. Pre-use predictive or evaluation is used to predict the potential use of the textbook. In- use evaluation is used for the materials, which are currently being taught, and post use or ‘retrospective’ evaluation of a textbook is used after finishing the textbook. This paper is a kind of ‘in use’ evaluation of a textbook, since the evaluated textbooks are currently being taught at the foreign language center of an Iranian military university.

Many evaluators combined the checklists to make standard and contextualized checklists for a particular course book (E.g. Mukundan, Nimehchiasalem, Hajimohammadi, 2011; Jahangard 2008; Litz 2002); therefore for the purpose of evaluating Worldview Series the same policy were taken into account. Before this particular book the Interchange Series have been taught for the biennial courses. No textbook evaluation or consultation with the instructors had been conducted by the university administration prior to the introduction of the textbook to the language program. To determine the effectiveness of

this book for the general English courses, which are being held at the university foreign language center, this evaluation were conducted on the basis of a set of pre-specified criteria.

*Worldview* Series are a four level English course books for adults and adolescents, which have been written by Rost. The writer of the book has been active in the areas of language teaching, language acquisition, and language policy for over many years. He has written several other books as author or coauthor , including the groundbreaking multimedia course *Longman English Interactive* (Longman, 2004) and he is the instructional designer and series editor of several young adults and adult series, including *English Firsthand* (Longman, 2004) and the standard-setting academic training series, *Contemporary Topics* (Longman, 2003). In his idea in the *Worldview* project, he has collaborated with the *Worldview* editorial team at Pearson Longman to create a dynamic series that reflects the principles of positive multiculturalism and successful learning that he has experienced firsthand during his career. He believes that *Worldview* has a perfect blend of features that appeal to today's students: a compelling topic selection, active student-led tasks, and a careful incorporation of different media and resources. He thinks that the *Worldview* approach, with its flexibility of instructional options and clarity of tasks and assessment procedures, will just as importantly allow teachers to be more confident, more creative, and more effective.

#### *Criteria for textbook evaluation*

Sheldon (1988) suggests that no general list of criteria can ever really be applied to all teaching and learning contexts without considerable modification. Most of these standardized evaluation checklists contain similar components that can be used as helpful starting points for ELT practitioners in a wide variety of situations. According to Richards (2001) before evaluating a textbook, the following information is needed.

#### *The role of the textbook in the program*

Here the objective of the course, the role of the textbook as the core of the program or as a peripheral textbook of the course, the size of the class, availability of workbooks for the practice should be considered.

#### *The teacher in the program*

Here the teacher's experience, native language, proficiency in the target language, obedience to the recourse book, role in selecting textbooks for a particular course, should be taken into account.

#### *The learners in the program*

Here the expectancy of learners from a textbook, their needs, and the way in which they use the book, are important.

The other point in evaluating a textbook is commercial issues. "No commercial textbook will ever be a perfect fit for language program" (Richard, 2001, p.257). According to Byrd (1995) two factors involving in the development of commercial textbooks are those representing the interests of the author, and those representing the interest of the publisher.

Cunningsworth (1995) suggests four criteria for evaluating course textbooks:

1. Learners' needs
2. The usability of the textbooks for the learners
3. The learning process
4. Textbook's role as a support for learning

## **2. Method**

By considering the mentioned factors, the following EFL/ESL textbook evaluation schemes were consulted to evaluate the textbooks under study.

### ***Materials***

Materials used for the purpose of the present study include textbook evaluation checklists proposed by Mukundan, J., Nimehchisalem, V., & Hajimohammadi, R. (2011); Nation & Macalister (2010); Joshua, M. (2005); Litz, (2005) ;Richards, (2001); Robertson, (1997); Cunningsworth, (1995); Williams, D. (1983); Williams, R. (1981) and Tucker (1975).

### ***Procedure***

After a close examination of the mentioned checklists the most common criteria among them were:

*Layout and Design*

*Aims and approaches*

*Methodology of the book*

*Skills; Activities and Tasks*

*Language Type and Content*

*Practical consideration*

*Periodic review and test section*

*Authentic language*

*Cultural and social factors*

*The course components*

Before evaluation, the course components of the investigated series will be introduced.

### ***The Student Book with Student Audio CD:***

The student book contains twenty-eight 4 page units; 7 review units (1 after every 4 units); 4 World of Music Units (2 in each half of the book); Information for pair and group work; a vocabulary list; and a grammar reference section. The Student Audio CD includes tracks for all pronunciation and listening exercises.

### ***The Workbook:***

It has twenty eight 3- page units that correspond to each of the Students Book units. It includes review, practice activities for Grammar, Vocabulary, Listening, and Pronunciation, along with Self-Quizzes after every 4 units.

### ***The Class Audio Program:***

It contains all the recorded material for in-class use.

*The teacher's Resource Book (with Testing Audio CD and TestGen Software):*

It has three sections of reproducible material: extra communication activities for class use, model writing passages for each student book writing assignment, and a testing program, which is the new feature of course; material. TestGen software is used for customizing the tests.

### ***WorldView Video:***

It Presents 7, five minutes authentic video segments connected to Student Book Topics. The related features can be downloaded from *Worldview Companion Website*.

### ***The WorldView Companion Website:***

It provides a variety of teaching supports, including supplemental reading material and Video Activity Sheets.

## **3. Findings & Discussions**

The investigated textbooks will be scrutinized against each of the features in the base of proposed criteria.

### ***Layout and Design***

The layout and design of a course textbook is related to its organization and presentation of language contents and activities. As discussed in the course components section the total course package (e.g. students' books, teachers' book, workbooks, CD) are excellent. The course components are effectively and distinctly organized around specific topics such as meeting people, interesting places, celebrations, travelling, shopping. Moreover, they are divided into 28, four page units with review units after every four lessons.

Additional useful components of this book are that in the scope and sequence section of the introduction the vocabulary topics, listening/reading topics, grammar focus, pronunciation, speaking and writing themes can be found. It seems that the overall layout and design of Worldview differ for each skill and sub skills, for instance the organization and sequence of the structure and pronunciation are on the basis of complexity which means the less complex structure and pronunciation come first, while it seems that those of vocabulary, listening, and reading, speaking, and writing are on the basis of usefulness, since the topics like *Greetings, names, numbers* come at the beginning of the syllabus.

The other useful part of the *Student Book*, in comparison to other textbooks, is the reference section for the grammar, which, is an advantage for it. Through it the learner can learn the grammar both implicitly and explicitly. Furthermore, this point makes it easy for individual study.

On the other hand, one glaring weakness of the book is to find your way around the course book. For instance, although the instruction in the listening section has been given in the listening section of each unit, the same instruction has not been included in the related audio. Moreover, this makes students and sometimes teachers miss some part of the listening section.

### ***Aims and approaches***

With its flexible format and course components, Worldview is applicable to a variety of course needs. Each unit can be easily expanded by using activities from *Teacher's Edition*, Teacher's Resource Book and supplementary reading assignments in the Worldview Companion Website. Rost (2005) states "*Worldview's* approach to language learning follows a simple and proven MAP" (p.3). In his MAP approach, "M" stands for 'Motivating learning through stimulating contents and achievable learning goals'. The concept of Motivation has been called the "neglected heart" of the language teaching (Rost, 2005) and is among the major factors affecting learners' success in ESL situations (Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001; Gardner, 2001). Rost furthers the "A" stands for "Anchoring language production with strong, focused language presentations," and "P" represents "Personalizing learning through engaging and communicative speaking activities" (ibid).

### **3. Methodology**

This item is taken from Cunningsworth (1995) checklist. By methodology it means the approaches taken by the course book, the learner involvement, techniques used for presenting/practicing new language items, the way of teaching different skills, developing communicative abilities among learners, teaching how to learn, and making students feel responsibility for their own learning.

Tomlinson (1998) suggests that Materials should permit a silent period at the beginning of instruction. Many of the lessons in the Worldview start with receptive skills and this permits a silent period at the beginning. By presenting many graphs, tables and World of Music sections in the student book it is possible to stimulate both right and left brain activities. Both controlled practice and communicative one can be found in the book, but it seems that the number of controlled practice exceeds that of communicative practice.

One of the major shortcomings of the investigated textbook and many other English textbooks is that it doesn't include any advice or help to students on study skills and learning strategies. Although there are

some explanations of these strategies at the begging of each workbook, it seems that a peripheral attention is given to the learning strategies.

### ***Skills; Activities and Tasks***

Overall, the syllables framework of the Worldview is functional and communicative. It organizes around the functions, which most commonly are needed in speaking. Each of the 28 units of Worldview starts with a communicative opening exercise as “Getting Started” to introduce the target language vocabulary. In Listening/Reading section there is a functional conversation that introduces the target grammar, and this is the clever use of integrated skills. The same integration can be followed in the pronunciation section in which stress, rhythm, and intonation practice are based on the target vocabulary and grammar. The speaking section of each unit includes a speaking task focused on student’s production of target vocabulary, grammar and functional language. The Writing section of each unit is the most reflective of making the task individualized and there is an attempt to make writing task as a personalized activity. Since individuality can enhance the significance and strength of learning experiences (Feuerstein et al.1980, Cited in Williams & Burden.1997), it can be a benefit of this section.

However, the main lack of the book in the *Activates and Task* area is some mismatch between the recorded listening in the CD accompanied by student book and the transcription in the book. For instance looking to Student Book 1, Unit 3 page 11 in the first topic of the Reading section, the first sentence is completely left out in the textbook, and this created discrepancy between numbering of items in the textbook and that of audio CD.

Textbook	Audio CD
<i>Leisure, Sports, and Entertainment</i>	<i>the first topic is Leisure, Sports, and Entertainment</i>
1. Jazz is/isn’t Australian	1. The Tango is Argentinean
2. Judo and kendo <i>are/aren’t</i> Chinese.	2. Jazz isn’t Australian, It’s American.
	3. Judo and kendo aren’t Chinese, they’re Japanese

At the same page in the third topic, ‘*Famous people*’, the mentioned name in the audio CD does not match with the famous person’s name in the second question. The same mismatch can be found in the third question of that page, but here it affected the question completely.

Textbook	Audio CD
1. Is J.k. Rowling British? A) Yes, she is. B) No, she isn’t.	1. Is J.k. Rowling British? Yes, she is.
2. Is Angela Merkel German? A) Yes, she is. B) No, she isn’t.	2. Is tope model Gisele Bundchen German? No, she isn’t. She is Brazilian.
3. Is Ben Affleck Australian? A) Yes, he is. B) No, he isn’t.	3. Are Harry Berry and Ben Affleck Australian? No, they aren’t. They’re American.

Considering the macro level evaluation of Activities and Tasks and micro one, it seems that the activities and tasks in the macro level are appropriate but in the micro level they are not fitted properly.

Each unit in Worldview Series consisted of two lessons; *Lesson A* and *Lesson B*. Lesson A is allocated to the receptive (listening and reading) skills and lesson B to productive (speaking and writing) skills. On the other hand, it seems that the textbooks are a multi-skills syllabus and therefore covers and integrates both receptive and productive skills. An example of this integration can be found in reading section in which reading and listening are integrated. Three prominent authors in ELT, Swan (1985), Harmer (1996) and McDonough and Shaw (1997) advocate an integrated, multi-skills syllabus because it considers and incorporates several categories of both meaning and form(cited in Litz,2002,p.24).

A close analysis of each unit shows that the materials are sequenced by difficulty level. For instance dialogues in listening section become a little longer and complex as the units progress. Similarly, reading texts become longer while their discourse structure (cohesion and coherence) become more complex.

### ***Language Type and Content***

Worldview as a course, books the main grammar items appropriately in each level. It seems that the book takes both the simplicity of materials and the need of the learners in the sequencing of materials. Each unit starts with a topic for vocabulary like, *Holiday celebrations, Clothes and sizes, important life events*; nevertheless they are related to the needs of the learners. Then apparently, material for vocabulary teaching and range of vocabulary are adequate. The strategy used for learning vocabulary is mostly context based. Since deducing the meaning of vocabulary is the most important method of learning new vocabulary (Evans & John, 1998, p.83), here it seems that strategy for learning new vocabulary is appropriate. Pronunciation work is attended from the very beginning. The focus of it is on the individual sounds, word stress, sentence stress, and intonation.

On the other hand, the understudy textbooks mostly deal with the structuring and conventions of language in a sentence level, for instance hardly ever can you find about how to take part in conversations?, how to structure a piece of extended writing?, and Finally how to identify the main points in a reading passage?

### ***Practical consideration***

Practical considerations refer to the factors such as; the attractiveness in appearance, publication information, cost, good value for money and availability. The book has a wide variety of up to date pictures from around the worlds, but not Iran. Adequate information about the publishing company such as the contact address and telephone numbers can be found on the front cover of the textbook. Background information about the authors and their experiences in teaching, administration, and curriculum development are available in the formal website of the book, presented on the front cover of the book. Another important factor is the cost of textbook package. Whilst some might feel that price is not necessarily an important factor in a textbook evaluation the fact that EFL/ESL materials are prepared and published in wealthy English speaking countries such as England and the US but mostly are used in developing countries implies that price could play an important role in selecting a particular textbook. Comparing with the equivalent textbook package Worldview series is a bit more expensive in Iran. The final factor to be discussed here is the availability of the book and supplementary materials. In this regard the investigated textbook, has a lot of weakness since it was so difficult to find all of the supplementary materials altogether.

### ***Periodic review and test section***

After each four units of the textbook there are review sections. Their focus is mostly on listening and speaking activities which are based on the topics presented in previous units. Nevertheless, there is not adequate review for the presented grammar. It is also worth mentioning that in the workbook after each 4 units, Self-Quiz, which tests the vocabulary and grammar presented in the previous units, is compatible with the testing methods which will be used in the midterm and final exams.

After each review there is *World of Music* section, which is an outstanding feature of this book and cannot be found in the similar course textbooks. In this part we can find a test of vocabulary, most of which are tested in real context like a conversation. The listening and speaking actives in the *World of Music* are related to music, song, which is interesting and creates a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere in the classroom. Since it is one of the elements of effective teaching (Brown and McIntyre, 1983), it can be noted here that the understudy textbooks have potentiality to create a non-strict and delightful situation.

### ***Authentic language***

When plans regarding the role of materials in a language program are made, an initial decision concerns the role of authentic materials versus created materials (Richards, 2001, p.252). Johnson and Johnson

(1999) define authenticity as gaminess instances of language use, and it is opposed to exemplars devised specially for language teaching purposes. Richards (2001) differentiate between *Creative materials* and *authentic one*. In his definition authenticity is using texts, photos, video selections, and other teaching materials that are not specifically prepared for pedagogical purposes. On the other hand by *Created materials* he means textbooks and other materials, which specially are developed for instructional resources.

Authentic materials are preferred over created materials, advantageous for these claims are: (Philips and Shettlesworth 1978; Clarke 1989; peacock 1997, cited in Richard 2001)

- They have a positive effect on learner motivation.
- They provide authentic cultural information about the target culture.
- They provide exposure to real language rather than the artificial texts.
- They relate more closely to learners' needs.
- They support a more creative approach to teaching.

On the other hand, critics of the use of authentic materials point out:

- Creative materials can also be motivating for learners.
- Authentic materials often contain difficult language.
- Creative materials built around a graded syllabus, and then have a systematic coverage of teaching items.
- Using authentic materials is a burden for teachers.

In the Worldview mixtures of created and authentic materials have been used but the distinction between authentic and created materials is blurred.

### ***Cultural and social factors***

Culture has always been an indispensable part of language teaching. Considering the cultural and social factors, it is inevitable to take both the target and local culture into account. In terms of the target culture Worldview covers a wide variety of interesting topics such as *interesting places, celebrations, travelling* from different cultures and customs. On the other hand when we consider the local culture, here Iran, I couldn't find anything related to the facts about our culture, country, history, and customs. Since this textbook is taught in our country, it seems that presenting some examples in topics and tasks from our culture brings a kind of respect and identity. Worldview in this respect is not an exception, due to the fact that many other English textbooks provide examples mostly from rich and developed nations. Then we can say these English textbooks in presenting materials of each section have a bias towards rich nations and developed countries.

In recent years there has been a lot of debate throughout the ELT profession on the actual role of materials in teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language. This role has been illustrated better by Richards (2001).

The use of commercial textbooks in teaching has both advantages and disadvantages among the principal advantages are:

- They provide structure and syllabus for a program.
- They help standardized instruction.
- They maintain quality.
- They provide a variety of learning resources.
- They are efficient.
- They can train teachers.

- They are visually appealing.

However, there are also potential negative effects of commercial textbooks:

- They may contain inauthentic language.
- They may distort content.
- They can dislike teachers.
- They are expensive.

Considering the mentioned factors, it is obvious to have textbook evaluation. One of the most common ways of textbook evaluation is using checklists. However, checklist has its advantages and disadvantages.

The disadvantages of checklists are that:

- They may “blind” the observer from seeing other important features that are not on the list.
- They tend to become out of date as theory changes.
- Many checklists are based on the assumption that summing the parts is equal to the whole.

The advantages of checklists are that:

- They ensure that there is a systematic coverage of what is important,
- They allow comparison between different courses, lessons, teachers etc., and
- They can act as a basis for the improvement of a course through formative evaluation. (Nation & Macalister, 2010)

#### 4. Conclusion

The reports of these kinds of evaluations can be shared among teachers and the authors of the textbooks to prepare more effective EFL materials. Overall, considering the mentioned factors for a textbook evaluation; it seems that the understudy textbook works for the designed course. However, for a comprehensive textbook evaluation it is suggested that the role of teacher, learner and context of learning must be taken into account, which are the neglected part of many textbook evaluation checklists. Furthermore, for further exploration of the role of a particular textbook in an English learning course and determining the overall pedagogical value and suitability of it, a kind of survey like that of Litz (2005) is of great importance.

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