Evaluating "Sunrise 10": An Extensive Appraisal of the Local ELT Coursebook in Kurdistan

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Abstract

This research study delves into the evaluation of the ELT coursebook "Sunrise 10," which is widely used in the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq. The primary objective is to assess the merits and demerits of this coursebook from the perspectives of experienced educators in Kurdistan, employing the evaluative checklist developed by Cunningsworth (1995). The use of this evaluative scheme is justified by its structured, systematic, and efficient approach, offering a thorough, accurate assessment. The study employs a mixed-methods research design to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the coursebook.

The findings highlight several positive aspects of "Sunrise 10," demonstrating alignment with the goals and objectives of the ELT program in Kurdistan. However, certain shortcomings are identified, including the absence of pair-work activities and the need for additional video resources and unit revisions. Additionally, the study raises concerns about the appropriateness of certain cartoon illustrations for the intended age group (16+). Nevertheless, the coursebook effectively incorporates the four main language skills and integrated language skills, maintaining a balanced approach. The study also suggests that "Sunrise 10" is likely to adhere to communicative language teaching (CLT) principles due to its task-based activities. Furthermore, while the coursebook offers a wide range of topics, it may lack sufficient content related to Kurdish contexts. The study concludes that "Sunrise 10" requires an update since it was last revised nearly two decades ago. Importantly, the coursebook is found to avoid negative cultural stereotyping. In summary, the strengths of "Sunrise 10" appear to outweigh its weaknesses, as perceived by the assessors, with an effectiveness rating of approximately 74% and an ineffectiveness rating of around 26%.

Keywords: *ELT coursebook, "Sunrise 10", Textbook evaluation, Kurdistan region, English language teaching, Communicative language teaching, Curriculum assessment.*

Introduction

Within the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT), the choice of coursebook is a decision of paramount importance. A vast array of coursebooks purport to adopt communicative methodological approaches (Crewe 2011: 11). However, these coursebooks often reflect the psychological, linguistic, and pedagogical preferences and biases of their designers, leaving little room for flexibility (Allwright 1982). Furthermore, some coursebooks can present an artificial version of the target language, which may not effectively facilitate communicative language practice (Levis 1999).

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The process of selecting ELT materials holds significant political, professional, and financial implications within the ELT profession (Sheldon 1988). According to Cunningsworth (1995), ELT practitioners bear the responsibility of meticulously selecting coursebooks that align with the values, objectives, and methodologies of their educational programs. Therefore, it becomes imperative to conduct rigorous assessments of ELT coursebooks before incorporating them into the ELT curriculum.

Textbook analysis refers to the systematic evaluation of ELT coursebooks to determine their effectiveness (Tomlinson 2003: 16). As described by Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 97), this evaluation process involves matching the needs of learners with available solutions, emphasizing the importance of finding the most effective and efficient textbooks that cater to learners' requirements.

Coursebooks can be defined as commercially produced materials designed to enhance the communicative abilities and linguistic knowledge of foreign and second language learners. They are considered fundamental resources in the ELT course and are typically accompanied by supplementary materials such as student handbooks, teacher guides, workbooks, audio recordings, videos, mini-reference books, mini-dictionaries, and dictionaries, among others (Tomlinson 2008). These supplementary aids cover various aspects of language learning, including functions, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and both productive and receptive language skills. This study seeks to scrutinize "Sunrise 10" (Mclever, Prowse, and Sprenger 2009) in order to assess its strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of Kurdish educators in the Kurdistan region.

Types of Evaluations

In the realm of educational materials analysis, three distinct modes of evaluation have been established by Ellis (1997): pre-use (predictive) evaluation, in-use evaluation, and after-use (retrospective) evaluation. These approaches serve to assess instructional textbooks across various temporal stages. Pre-use evaluation is concerned with gauging the prospective suitability of coursebooks planned for use in upcoming ELT programs. It seeks to determine whether these materials are suitable for inclusion in the curriculum. In-use evaluation, on the other hand, is focused on an ongoing examination of the effectiveness of coursebooks currently in use. It aims to identify strengths and weaknesses as they pertain to their ongoing role in education. Finally, after-use evaluation occurs post-implementation, revealing both the merits and drawbacks of textbooks after they have been used in an educational program.

Schemes or Evaluative Checklists: An evaluative checklist, as defined by McGrath (2002), is a structured tool for the analytical assessment of coursebooks, addressing various facets, including organization, design, approach, aims, topics, language content, and skills. Relying solely on subjective student perspectives for textbook evaluation is viewed as unscientific and insufficient. Therefore, the adoption of an evaluative checklist is deemed essential for ensuring an objective appraisal of instructional materials. The use of evaluative checklists offers numerous advantages, such as efficiency, systematic coverage of essential criteria, clear categorization, and the ability to record data in a format conducive to meaningful comparisons (Sheldon, 1988).

Methodology

Research Questions: This study seeks to address several critical research questions in the evaluation of the coursebook "Sunrise (10)" within the context of teaching programs in Kurdistan:

1.   Does "Sunrise (10)" align with the aims and objectives of teaching programs in Kurdistan?

2.   Are the organization and design of the "Sunrise (10)" effective coursebook?

3.   Is the language content within "Sunrise (10)" appropriate for its intended purpose?

4.   Does the coursebook adequately cover the four primary language skills with balance and integration?

5.   Are the topics of the coursebook are intriguing and cover a diverse range of topics?

6.   Does "Sunrise (10)" contain content that may be perceived as culturally or socially offensive?

7.   What are the identified strengths and weaknesses of "Sunrise (10)"?

Materials: This analytical investigation is centered on the coursebook "Sunrise 10," authored by Mclever, Prowse, and Sprenger in 2009. The textbook is in use within the public schools of Kurdistan, a region situated in the north of Iraq, and is designed for an intermediate level of learners.

Instrument: To facilitate the evaluation of "Sunrise (10)," a descriptive checklist has been employed. This checklist, informed by Cunningsworth's evaluative method (1995), serves as a structured framework for assessing the coursebook. The evaluation criteria have been applied by experienced educators in Kurdistan, with interviews conducted to obtain additional insights.

Data Collection: The data collection process involves an analysis of "Sunrise (10)" to uncover its strengths and weaknesses. The primary data source is the coursebook itself, with assessments made by educators who have previously used the material. The overarching aim of this evaluative research is to comprehensively analyze the textbook rather than offering specific recommendations or criticisms. The analytical checklist, following Cunningsworth's model (1995), has been deemed the most suitable method for textbook analysis. Assessors, who are actively teaching with the coursebook, have contributed to the scrutiny process. Interviews with these educators have also been conducted to gather their perspectives.

Data Analysis: Quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques are applied to the data collected using the evaluation checklist. This analysis draws upon established theories and concepts within the fields of English language teaching and second language acquisition to provide a comprehensive assessment.

Methodological Approach: A mixed methods approach has been adopted for this exploratory study, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data. This approach serves to reduce subjectivity and enhance the validity of research findings. Mixed methods research offers various advantages, such as bolstering research strengths while mitigating potential weaknesses (Dornyei, 2007).

The Participants: The assessment of pedagogical materials underscores the importance of involving the primary users, in this case, teachers of the coursebooks. ELT instructors possess critical insights derived from their practical teaching experience. As such, assessors of "Sunrise (10)" include teachers from the public schools of Kurdistan, spanning major cities like Duhok, Erbil, and Slemani. The study encompasses a cohort of 30 professional teachers, representing both male and female educators.

Results and Discussion

Within this section, the findings of the analytical research are presented and deliberated upon, with a focus on the seven criteria outlined in Cunningsworth's framework (1995) and their associated sub-criteria, as evaluated by teachers in Kurdistan. These results aim

to shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of "Sunrise (10)." The tabulated data shows the perspectives of the evaluators in terms quality of the textbook.

No	Criteria	Yes	No
1	Is the Sunrise (10) compatible with aim and objective of teaching programs in Kurdistan?	26 (86%)	4 (13.3%)
2	Is the organization and design of the coursebook effective?	21 (70%)	9 (30%)
3	Is the content of the language is appropriate in this textbook?	24 (80%)	6 (20%)
4	Does the textbook cover the four main skills appropriately? Is there a balance? Is there an integration of skills?	20 (66.6%)	10 (33.3%)
5	Are the topics of the coursebook are intriguing? and covers a variety of topics?	14 (46.6%)	16 (53.3%)
6	Is the textbook free from cultural and social offenses?	28 (93.3%)	2 (6.6%)
	Average	(73.8%) effective	(26.2%) Ineffective

In the initial phase of evaluating the "Sunrise (10)" coursebook, it is evident that the majority of analysts (86%) found it to be in alignment with the objectives and aims of the ELT program in Kurdistan. This compatibility suggests that the textbook is well-suited to the teaching and learning context, effectively addressing the language content necessary for learners. While the coursebook effectively integrates individual tasks, it appears to lack pair work activities, which are instrumental in implementing communicative principles in coursebooks (Halliday, 1994).

Furthermore, the organization and design of the coursebook garnered positive feedback from most evaluators (70%). Notably, the coursebook includes supplementary resources such as audio tracks for listening, a teacher guide, sample tests, and a workbook. However, it falls short in incorporating videos, which have become increasingly favored by 21st-century learners (Allam & Elyas, 2016). Additionally, the coursebook's progression from simple to complex topics is acknowledged, although it requires more frequent revisions to enhance its effectiveness (Sheldon, 1988).

Language content within the coursebook was generally deemed effective and efficient by the majority of assessors (80%). The aesthetic design, organization, and the presence of engaging visual elements contribute to its appeal. Design elements play a crucial role in the success of ELT coursebooks, as they impact the overall learning experience (Sheldon, 1988). However, some visuals, reminiscent of cartoons, may not be suitable for the targeted age group of 16+.

With respect to the coverage of language skills, approximately 66.6% of the assessors indicated that the coursebook effectively includes the four main language skills while promoting balance and integration. The incorporation of communicative tasks and integrated skills aligns with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, fostering communicative competence (Littlewood, 1981). The coursebook places a significant focus on real and meaningful communication through tasks that require learners to express, negotiate, understand, and produce target language. It maintains a satisfactory balance between receptive and productive skills, covering subskills like

grammar, phonetics, punctuation and even a short story, as indicated by the responses from teachers in Kurdistan.

Moreover, the coursebook seemingly encompasses a diverse array of topics, including conversations, greeting cards, invitations, recipes, emails, foods and drinks, leisure and free-time activities, sports, travel, inventions, and more. While the coursebook's coverage of these topics is considered efficient by approximately 46% of the evaluators, there is room for improvement in terms of including topics relevant to the Kurdish context. Updating the coursebook to align with communicative language teaching (CLT) and second language acquisition (SLA) principles, according to teachers' perspectives, is recommended.

Lastly, it is noteworthy that the "Sunrise (10)" coursebook does not exhibit negative cultural stereotyping, as confirmed by the majority of assessors (93.3%). It maintains a lack of bias, discrimination, and portrays men and women equally, fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Despite textbook analysis being inherently subjective (Sheldon, 1988), "Sunrise (10)" appears to be effective, with a rating of nearly 74%, surpassing its ineffectiveness, which stands at approximately 26%.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has undertaken the evaluation of the local ELT coursebook, "Sunrise (10)," formally taught in Kurdistan. The study aimed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of this coursebook. The instrument employed in this linguistic analysis was the adapted model (checklist) of Cunningsworth (1995), assessed by experienced teachers. The checklist framework is considered the most suitable instrument for conducting an evaluative study, given its systematic, convenient, explicit, efficient, and accurate nature. The methodological approach adopted for data collection and analysis was a mixed method, facilitating qualitative and quantitative analysis.

In summary, "Sunrise (10)" demonstrates alignment with the aims and objectives of the ELT program in Kurdistan and serves the needs of students. However, there is room for improvement, particularly in the inclusion of pair work activities to enhance communicative competence. The organization and design of the coursebook are generally commendable, but the addition of videos is advisable to better engage learners. The coursebook effectively covers the four main language skills with a focus on communicative tasks, and it maintains a balance between receptive and productive skills. Nevertheless, it could benefit from more topics relevant to the Kurdish context to enhance its relevance. The coursebook has been successful in avoiding negative cultural stereotyping, and fostering an inclusive environment. In short, textbook analysis inherently carries subjectivity, "Sunrise (10)" emerges as largely effective, with a rating of around 74% compared to its ineffectiveness at approximately 26%.

Other related themes and areas of ELT assessments

In addition to the comprehensive evaluation presented in the paper titled "Evaluating 'Sunrise 10': An Extensive Appraisal of the Local ELT Coursebook in Kurdistan," there are several other themes and areas related to the assessment of ELT coursebooks in different educational contexts that are worthy of exploration and analysis:

1.   Cultural Sensitivity and Representation: The representation of different cultures and ethnicities in ELT coursebooks is a significant consideration. Evaluations should assess whether coursebooks promote cultural sensitivity and inclusivity or if they inadvertently reinforce stereotypes or biases (Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

2.   Socio-Political Relevance: The socio-political context in which an ELT coursebook is used can significantly impact its effectiveness. The evaluation of coursebooks may involve considering how well they address local or global socio-political issues and whether they encourage critical thinking and discussion (McDonough & Shaw, 2003).

3.   Teacher's Role and Support: An important aspect of coursebook evaluation is how well they support teachers in delivering effective lessons. The paper could further delve into the extent to which a coursebook provides guidance, suggestions, and resources for teachers, as this can influence instructional quality (Tomlinson, 2003).

4.   Digital Resources and Technology Integration: With the advancement of technology, it's important to assess how well a coursebook integrates digital resources and technology. The evaluation may consider the availability of online platforms, interactive materials, and whether the coursebook keeps pace with the digital learning trends (Chapelle, 2001).

5.   Alignment with Educational Frameworks: Coursebook evaluations may examine how well the content aligns with national or international educational frameworks and standards, ensuring that learners are adequately prepared for exams or further educational opportunities (Cambridge, CEFR, etc.).

6.   Psychological and Pedagogical Considerations: Coursebooks' effectiveness also depends on their alignment with principles of language learning, cognitive psychology, and pedagogy. Assessing how well they incorporate these principles can be a part of the evaluation (Ellis, 2018).

7.   Learner Engagement and Motivation: The paper might address how engaging and motivating the coursebook is for learners, as this directly influences their commitment to learning (Dornyei, 2001).

8.   Inclusivity for Learners with Diverse Needs: The evaluation can also explore whether the coursebook provides support for learners with diverse needs, including those with learning disabilities or English language learners who require additional assistance (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000).

9.   Sustainability and Environmental Impact: As environmental concerns become more prominent, evaluating the environmental sustainability of physical coursebooks (e.g., paper, printing) and exploring options for eco-friendly materials could be a valuable aspect to consider (UNESCO, 2019).

10.   Long-term Impact: Assessing the long-term impact of a coursebook on learners' language proficiency and communication skills is crucial. This might involve conducting follow-up studies to see how well learners retain and apply what they hvae learned (Long, 2005).

These themes can provide additional dimensions to coursebook evaluation and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of ELT materials in various educational settings.

Recommendations:

1.   Incorporate Pair-Work Activities: Given that pair work activities are essential for developing communicative competence, coursebook developers should consider integrating more of these activities into future editions. This recommendation aligns with the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, which emphasizes interactive language use (Littlewood, 1981).

2.   Integrate Video Resources: To cater to the preferences of 21st-century learners, coursebooks should incorporate video resources to enhance engagement and provide authentic listening materials (Allam & Elyas, 2016). Videos can be a valuable addition to support language learning.

3.   Frequent Revisions: To keep coursebooks current and effective, it is recommended that publishers undertake more frequent revisions, particularly in response to pedagogical advancements, educational theory, and societal changes (Sheldon, 1988).

4.   Culturally Relevant Content: To enhance the appeal and relevance of coursebooks, content related to Kurdish contexts and culture should be included, providing learners with a meaningful connection to their own experiences.

5.   Teacher Training and Support: Coursebook publishers and educational institutions should invest in teacher training and professional development to ensure that educators can effectively implement coursebooks and maximize their potential (Tomlinson, 2003).

Further Study Suggestions:

1.   Longitudinal Impact Study: Conduct a longitudinal study to assess the long-term impact of using "Sunrise 10" or other ELT coursebooks on learners' language proficiency, fluency, and communicative competence over time.

2.   Cross-Cultural Comparative Analysis: Compare the effectiveness and suitability of "Sunrise 10" across different cultural and educational contexts. Investigate whether the coursebook can be adapted for use in other regions with similar or different characteristics.

3.   Student Perspectives: While the current study focused on educators' perspectives, a future study could explore learners' perspectives regarding their experiences and preferences related to the coursebook.

4.   Content Adaptation: Investigate the feasibility and impact of adapting the content of "Sunrise 10" to make it more relevant to the unique cultural and linguistic characteristics of the Kurdish region.

5.   Technology Integration Study: Assess the feasibility and effectiveness of integrating digital technology and online resources into the coursebook, potentially as supplementary materials.

6.   Parent and Community Involvement: Examine the role of parents and communities in supporting ELT, as their involvement can greatly influence students' motivation and success (Epstein, 2011).

7.   Sustainability Assessment: Evaluate the environmental sustainability of coursebooks, including options for eco-friendly materials and digital alternatives, and investigate the environmental impact of ELT materials.

8.   Inclusive Education Study: Explore how "Sunrise 10" or similar coursebooks support learners with diverse needs, and investigate ways to enhance inclusivity for all students.

9.   Comprehensive Curriculum Assessment: Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the entire ELT curriculum, including the role of coursebooks, teacher practices, and assessment methods, to identify areas for improvement.

10.   Critical Discourse Analysis: Employ critical discourse analysis to examine how specific language, discourse, and representation within "Sunrise 10" impact learners' understanding of sociopolitical issues and cultural diversity (Fairclough, 2001).

These recommendations and further study suggestions can help advance our knowledge of ELT coursebooks, promote their continuous improvement, and ensure they align with the evolving needs and preferences of both educators and learners.

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