



EFL teachers' evaluation of the textbook "I Learn Smart World 6": A study at Pathway School

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Abstract— Textbooks are the main sources that can convey knowledge and information to learners in an organized way, so textbook evaluation plays a key role in any language teaching or learning program. This can help meet the learners' needs in the best way. The present research set out to investigate teachers' perspectives towards the textbook "I Learn Smart World 6", which was used at Pathway School (PS), and teachers' personal points of view on how to improve better the textbook "I Learn Smart World 6". The investigation elucidates the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook itself, and recommendations are made for both designers and teachers. The 12 teachers from the 2 campuses at Pathway School participated in this research. The research instruments were a textbook evaluation questionnaire adapted and modified from a variety of checklists developed by previous researchers, as well as semi-structured interviews. A 40-item questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale rating from "1=Strongly Disagree" to "5=Strongly Agree" was employed to elicit participants' responses to six main categories including Overall Assessment, Practical Considerations, Language Skills, Topic and Language Content, Layout and Design, and Culture. Descriptive statistics were carried out to interpret the quantitative data by utilizing the mean and standard deviation. The data analyzed from the semi-interviews was analyzed based on cross-case analysis. The results showed that teachers had active perspectives regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook, and they thought that it was consistent with the English teaching and learning process at their school. In addition, it also revealed that the teachers had some problems and suggestions with the use of the textbook "I Learn Smart World 6" in the classroom.



Keywords— perspectives, points of view, textbook evaluation, evaluated criteria, suggestions

I. INTRODUCTION

Textbooks have become one of the obligatory materials supporting teaching and learning in the English language. It is believed that English plays a paramount role in society, so the number of English teaching textbooks on the market has been increasing to meet the users' needs. This makes it a challenge to make a good choice of a good textbook. Besides, textbooks are designed for different contexts or different audiences, like ESL and EFL situations. This has made it difficult for teachers to choose the right book. In addition to updating changes according to the needs of society, and the need for textbook reform as required by the Ministry of Education, a series of new textbooks have been published. These textbooks are

consumed by lots of learners, but to know if their quality is suitable and good for learners or not, users must also go through a period of use and verification. In particular, teachers who have little or no teaching experience in language teaching or even experienced teachers might find selecting a suitable textbook challenging. According to Ellis (1997), a textbook evaluation would assist teachers in honing their talents and advancing their careers. Additionally, he contends that textbook evaluation aids educators in moving beyond impressionistic assessments and in gaining practical, precise, systematic, and contextual understandings of the general character of the textbook and subject matter. Therefore, how educators and teachers select

a good textbook for students drives a trend known as textbook evaluation.

Based on the new general education curriculum in Vietnam, sixth graders have been asked to use a reform textbook starting in the 2021-2022 school year. According to the official decision from the Department of Education and Training of Ho Chi Minh City, there were eight English textbooks for sixth graders from four publishing houses, namely Vietnam Education Publishing House, Pedagogical University Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education Publishing House, and Ho Chi Minh City National University Publishing House, all approved for use in general education institutions. The textbook which was chosen to be used mostly in public and private secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City was I Learn Smart World 6 (ILSW6). This textbook has also been chosen and used to teach the 6th-grade students in the 2021-2022 school year at Pathway School. After a year of use, a lot of teachers also reflected on the quality of the book in terms of form, presentation, and content compiled in the book. The teachers will be pleased if there are improvements to this textbook. This book has just been published and put into use for the reform school year 2021-2022, so there were factors that need attention and improvement. Moreover, this year is the second year that Pathway School (PS) has remained using this textbook for grades 6. Hence, it is necessary that an evaluation of this textbook from teachers' perspectives should be conducted to discover whether it really matches the aims and requirements of the curriculum and learners' needs. The evaluation will also identify whether the book is appropriate within the context of teaching and learning in Ho Chi Minh City in general and Pathway School in particular. Expectedly, the findings of the study will improve the textbooks' quality and will help teachers learn ways to adapt and renew teaching methods to meet student's needs and use the textbooks effectively in the current situation. Therefore, the researcher focused on investigating teachers' perspectives on the textbook "ILSW6."

II. A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Tomlinson (2003) defined materials evaluation as "a procedure that involves measuring the value (or potential value) of a set of learning materials. It involves making judgments about the effect of the materials on the people using them and it tries to measure some or all of the following" (p.107-129). As stated by Brown (1995), "textbook evaluation is the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of a curriculum and assess its effectiveness within the context of the particular institution involved" (p.272). Textbook evaluation can show the strengths and

weaknesses of this textbook. This helps users choose an appropriate textbook for their teaching and learning progress. McGrath (2002) mentioned that evaluation is a significant proposal for the development and administration of language learning programs.

A lot of previous researchers identified criteria and checklists to evaluate textbooks. Tucker (1978) divided his checklist into internal and external criteria. Regarding external criteria (a broader view of the book), there are eight items to evaluate: authenticity of language; availability of supplementary materials; adequate guidance for non-native teachers; competence of the author; appropriate level for integration; durability; quality of editing and publishing; price and value, while pronunciation, grammar, and content criteria are showed in internal criteria. Similarly, Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979) concluded a checklist that consists of five aspects related to internal and external criteria. They are subject matter, vocabulary and structures, exercises, illustrations, and physical make-up with 25 items being clear and straightforward and addressed qualitatively. As noted by Cunningsworth (1995), a basic quick-reference checklist of the most important general criteria for textbook evaluation and selection purposes consisted of aims and approaches; design and organization; language content; skills; topic; methodology; teacher's guide; practical considerations. Likewise, Litz (2005) affirmed some evaluative criteria with a total of 40 items for all domains as follows:

A/ Practical Considerations:

1. The price of the textbook is reasonable.
2. The textbook is easily accessible.
3. The textbook is a recent publication.
4. A teacher's guide, workbook, and audio tapes accompany the textbook.
5. The author's views on language and methodology are comparable to mine.

B/ Layout and Design:

6. The textbook includes a detailed overview of the functions, structures, and vocabulary that will be taught in each unit.
7. The layout and design are appropriate and clear.
8. The textbook is organized effectively.
9. An adequate vocabulary list or glossary is included.
10. Adequate review sections and exercises are included.
11. An adequate set of evaluation quizzes or testing suggestions is included.
12. The teacher's book contains guidance about how the textbook can be used to the utmost advantage.

13. The materials objectives are apparent to both the teacher and the student

C/ Activities:

14. The textbook provides a balance of activities (Ex. There is an even distribution of free vs. controlled exercises and tasks that focus on both fluent and accurate production).

15. The activities encourage sufficient communicative and meaningful practice.

16. The activities incorporate individual, pair, and group work.

17. The grammar points and vocabulary items are introduced in motivating and realistic contexts.

18. The activities promote creative, original, and independent responses.

19. The tasks are conducive to the internalization of the newly introduced language.

20. The textbook's activities can be modified or supplemented easily.

D/ Skills:

21. The materials include and focus on the skills that I/my students need to practice.

22. The materials provide an appropriate balance of the four language skills.

23. The textbook pays attention to sub-skills - i.e. listening for gist, note-taking, skimming for information, etc.

24. The textbook highlights and practices natural pronunciation (i.e.- stress and intonation).

25. The practice of individual skills is integrated into the practice of other skills.

E/ Language Type:

26. The language used in the textbook is authentic - i.e. like real-life English.

27. The language used is at the right level for my (students') current English ability.

28. The progression of grammar points and vocabulary items is appropriate.

29. The grammar points are presented with brief and easy examples and explanations.

30. The language functions exemplify English that I/my students will be likely to use.

31. The language represents a diverse range of registers and accents.

F/ Subject and Content:

32. The subject and content of the textbook is relevant to my (students') needs as an English language learner(s).

33. The subject and content of the textbook are generally realistic.

34. The subject and content of the textbook are interesting, challenging and motivating.

35. There is sufficient variety in the subject and content of the textbook.

36. The materials are not culturally biased and they do not portray any negative stereotypes.

G/ Conclusion:

37. The textbook is appropriate for the language-learning aims of my institution.

38. The textbook is suitable for small-medium, homogeneous, and co-ed. Classes of university students.

39. The textbook raises my (students') interest in further English language study.

40. I would choose to study/teach this textbook again.

Each author will create different evaluation criteria that are appropriate for the context and their expectations. The majority of the previous evaluation criteria focused on practical aspects, layout and design, language content, and skills. In this study, the researcher mixed and adapted the previous evaluation criteria of the previous researchers to give the final evaluation items used in the questionnaire and semi-structured interview that fit the research site.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research site and participants

The study was carried out on two campuses of Pathway School, a private high school in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. This study was conducted with 12 teachers who utilized *I Learn Smart World 6* in the school year 2021-2023. Convenience sampling was used to survey the opinions of 12 teachers because the size of the sample was relatively small (less than one hundred learners) and these participants were readily and easily available to the researcher. Besides, this sampling was used to deeply collect the perspectives of 12 teachers in semi-structured interviews. Female teachers represented 92% while male teachers represented only 0.8%. Concerning their qualification or educational background, all 12 teachers (100%) hold a bachelor's degree as their highest qualification. There were no teachers who held the Master

of Arts degree or were studying for the doctoral program at that time.

3.2. Research instrument

In the study, the researcher used two popular instruments to collect survey information, including the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. To make sure that the researcher may get accurate answers from the teachers, the questionnaire items and interview questions were translated into Vietnamese, which ensured the teachers' comprehension. The researcher employed a questionnaire adapted from many different evaluative checklists and items for evaluating textbooks by authors, such as Tucker (1975), Daoud & Celce-Murcia (1979), William (1983), Sheldon (1988), Cunningsworth (1995), Liz (2005), Mukundan, Hajimohammadi and Nimehchisalem (2011), and Mahmoud (2013) to suit the researcher's expectations and the context at Pathway School. Moreover, the questionnaires in this study were written for 12 teachers to discover the strengths and weaknesses as well as teachers' perceptions and suggestions toward textbook improvement. The questionnaire consisted of 40 close-ended question items following a 5-point Likert scale and was utilized to discover teachers' perspectives about the ILSW6 textbook in terms of Overall Assessment, Practical Considerations, Language Skills, Topic and Language Content, Layout and Design, and Culture. The applied 5-point Likert scale was ranked from the lowest score (1) to the highest score (5): strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree. The questionnaire was designed with two main parts: the demographic profile and the body of the survey. The open questions in the semi-structured interviews are based on the items in the questionnaire table and the evaluation checklists from 1979-2005 of many researchers, including Cunningsworth, 1995; Williams, 1983; Sheldon, 1988; McDonough & Shaw, 2003; Litz, 2005; Daoud & Celce-Murcia, 1979; Ellis, 1987. In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to interview 12 EFL teachers. The participants were interviewed to answer ten open questions, and they may use Vietnamese to feel more at ease and convey the most effective message.

3.3. Procedures for data collection and analysis

The questionnaire was handed to the teachers in each campus and the researcher explained the purpose of the questionnaire to them. The participants of the two campuses had 20 minutes to complete and hand the questionnaire back to the researcher on the same day. The data was gathered during the first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 teachers in a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere at each campus. All of the interviews were conducted individually,

and each teacher was interviewed for about 30 minutes to answer 10 open questions. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to make sure the interviewees can fully understand all the questions and express themselves. The teachers of each campus were expected to be completed in one week. Normally, audio-recording or video-recording interviews are usually utilized in the research to collect the data. However, there will be several reasons why audio and video recordings are impossible, such as the participants' refusal and noisy or crowded locations. Therefore, the researcher made the decision to use note-taking skills during and after the interview to save as many of the participants' actual words as possible.

The teachers were assigned the codes T1, T2, and so on. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0 was used to evaluate the information acquired from the closed-ended items in the questionnaires. Through descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviation, the valid data gathered from the questionnaires were coded, and the numerical data were statistically analyzed to illustrate the general trend of views of the textbooks' learners. The responses from semi-structured interviews were coded by listing out all individual responses to each question, grouping those similar responses together, and coding them under new words to represent the meanings of all the responses. So, the data in the semi-structured interviews were also analyzed by thematic analysis, and the responses from semi-structured interviews were summarized and interpreted into paragraphs focusing on the main ideas.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

In the questionnaire, the six main factors consisting of Overall Assessments, Practical Considerations, Language Skills, Topic and Language Content, Layout and Design, and Culture were analyzed using expressions from the questionnaire. The six mentioned perspectives were listed as follows: There were five questions relating to Overall Assessments (items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) and four items (6, 7, 8, and 9) regarding Practical Considerations, 10 items concerning Language Skills were marked from item 10 to 19, 11 items from items 20 to 30 related to Topic and Language Content, items 31 to 36 presenting Layout and Design, and the last four questions (37, 38, 39, and 40) regarding to Culture toward the textbook "I Learn Smart World 6". The descriptive statistics results of the teachers' perspectives were displayed in Table 4.1 to show a general view of the perspectives that teachers perceived.

Table 1: The General Statistics Results of Teachers' perspectives toward the textbook "I Learn Smart World 6"

Themes	Teachers' perspectives	M	St. Deviation (SD)
1	Teachers' Overall Assessments perspectives	3.76	0.52
2	Teachers' Practical Considerations perspectives	3.79	0.60
3	Teachers' Language Skills perspectives	3.68	0.55
4	Teachers' Topic and Language Content perspectives	3.66	0.52
5	Teachers' Layout and Design perspectives	3.95	0.41
6	Teachers' Culture perspectives	3.58	0.48
Total		3.73	0.51

Table 1 showed the data about the perspectives that English teachers perceived. It could be seen that the mean is 3.73 and the standard deviation is .51 which is by far higher than scale 3 on the five-point scale of the questionnaire. This result meant these teachers had relatively positive perspectives toward the textbook "I Learn Smart World 6". Besides, it also revealed information on the specific perspective of the textbook. Among the elements, Layout and Design perspectives seemed to be the most positive perspective with a mean of 3.95 and a standard deviation of .41, which meant that the teacher was satisfied with the Layout and Design of the textbook. Other categories were also perceived relatively positively, with mean scores equal to each other, Practical Considerations (M = 3.79; SD= 0.60), Overall Assessments (M = 3.76; SD = .52), Language Skills and Topic and Language Content (M = 3.68; SD= 0.55). On the other hand, culture tended to be the least positive to the teachers because its mean was 3.58 and its standard deviation was .048, which meant the teachers thought that the culture in the textbook might not be more interesting than the other elements even M= 3.58 was higher than the average score.

Regarding results of teachers' points of view on how to improve better the textbook through evaluating items

First, the Practical Considerations had the agreement of the all of teachers. The price of the textbook was reasonable and easily accessible. Besides, the textbook size was also suitable to carry. Moreover, the Overall Assessment has also received the agreement the textbook is suitable for the particular language teaching and learning context of the school. And some of them thought that the textbook should be used in future classes. Regarding Language Skills, the textbook provided an appropriate balance of four language skills. Additionally, the Topics and Language content of the textbook are generally realistic. Grammar and vocabulary as well as pronunciation were suitable to students' level. Regarding the Layout and Design of the textbook, the teachers perceived that every unit and lesson was given an appropriate title, and the pictures illustrated matched the content of the lesson. Finally, the results of descriptive statistics demonstrated that Culture tended to be the least positive to the teachers although there were also many positive perspectives about culture items in the textbook. However, the proposed improvement has been presented. Firstly, the textbook should improve longer readings for students to practice reading skills. Secondly, there should be cultural elements of other countries in the readings to increase students' curiosity to learn. The content of the book incorporates local, regional, and international cultural elements, but is not diverse. There should be more articles about Vietnamese culture, helping students confidently introduce Vietnam to foreign guests. Thirdly, the textbook should focus on designing more grammar because the exams are often quite difficult, but the grammatical content of the book is a bit easy compared to the level. And more practical communication sentences and practical exercises should be edited to help students practice using language more naturally. More exercises are needed because one lesson unit only has two application exercises at most. In addition, diverse exercises to practice skills based on the Cambridge Key English Test format were not enough. Besides, there should be a part to teach word forms in the textbook and should review and correct spelling and grammar errors in the textbook. Finally, the content of the question in the listening part needs to be designed appropriately so that students can listen and answer because some of the questions were designed to be asked adjacently. This made students difficult in listening.

4.2. Discussion

"I Learn Smart World 6" is the textbook that was published and used for the first time in the school year 2021-2022 under the 2018 general education program. Therefore, there has not been any research on evaluating this textbook before, although there have been many studies on textbook evaluation. This study also found that the teachers showed positive perspectives toward the textbook "I Learn Smart

World 6". In terms of Overall Assessments, the textbook is suitable for the particular language teaching and learning context of the school. Teachers also appreciated Layout and Design and Practical Considerations. And more than 70% of participants agreed that written exercises relate to the structures and vocabulary practiced in terms of language skills. Moreover, Topic and Language Content were evaluated as being interesting, challenging, and motivating, and the exercises in vocabulary were rich and adequate and only received 2 disagrees. Relating to Culture, although culture tended to be the least positive for the teachers, the teachers thought that the culture in the textbook was acceptable. No textbook is perfect and can be used in all language education circumstances. Therefore, it is the responsibility of EFL teachers to research the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook in order to make the most of it. In order to properly adapt their instruction, teachers must also look into the requirements and interests of their students.

In summary, it can be concluded that the interviewees had a positive opinion on the 6 evaluation items, of which the most positive in terms of layout and design and the least positive in terms of culture. Besides the positive views, the interviewees also expressed some suggestions to meet the requirements of their intended use. Based on the research results as expected above. Teachers and representatives of the school can choose to continue using the book in the next school year or not. Or, based on the suggestions that teachers stated when being interviewed, teachers who use this textbook later will have methods or ways to make up for those shortcomings through their teaching experience. And the results are also useful information for your publishers to update, republish and learn from the experience of writing textbooks.

V. CONCLUSION

Most of the teachers interviewed gave positive responses on the criteria mentioned in the questionnaire; however, there were also some suggestions that needed improvement related to vocabulary, grammar, culture, word form, and designed exercises.

No textbook is ideal or appropriate for all language teaching situations. Therefore, the role of EFL teachers in a language course is to investigate the textbooks' strengths and weaknesses in order to exploit them appropriately. Moreover, teachers should also investigate the requirements and interests of their students to effectively adapt. The evaluation might also help teachers adapt textbooks in their classrooms. More particularly, the evaluation will support teachers in modifying activities in the textbooks to teach more successfully.

One of the limitations of this study is that the sample size was not particularly large. Especially, the present study was carried out with the participation of a total of 12 EFL teachers at Pathway School, which may have an effect on the reliability of the data. Additionally, because of a limitation on the amount of time available, the scope of this study had to be narrowed. As a result, the author merely used two different research instruments to compile all of the necessary information. If more than two research instruments were employed in this study in a sufficient amount of time, it is without a doubt that the findings of this research would be more reliable and valid. Furthermore, the current review is limited to only the discussion section of EFL teachers; further studies could look at the discussion sections of native and non-native teachers. Moreover, this is a book published and put into teaching for the first time in the school year 2021-2022 for 6th-grade students under the new general education program in 2018. This textbook is also one of the books accepted by the Ministry of Education for use under the reform program. Therefore, it will be difficult to have really accurate evaluation information, and there is no previous evaluation study on it for comparison.

The study was only conducted in one teaching context of Pathway School with 12 EFL teachers, so it cannot generalize the perception of students and teachers who have used this textbook. Therefore, for teachers who would like to make further assessments of this textbook, they should conduct a bigger scope study with a larger sample. In addition, the researcher did not conduct the students' perspectives because of limited time and the 6th graders' limited understanding. Hence, for teachers who would like to make further evaluations of the textbooks, they should analyze learners' needs prior to evaluating the textbook and get participants in different settings involved in their study, and give specific criteria to find out which aspects of the textbook need improving to meet learners' needs and interests with every different English teaching situation. Moreover, further studies could look at native teachers' perspectives who have taught the textbook in the same setting.

The study aimed to determine how the textbook was chosen, how it was utilized, and how satisfied users were with it. There is no denying the need to improve the standard of English language instruction in Vietnam, particularly at the pre-intermediate level and in high school. In general, managers, course designers, and teachers need to have a creative perspective on how to choose and employ textbooks more appropriately and successfully in a given situation.

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