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# **Comprehensive Evaluation of New Headway Elementary Coursebook: Analyzing Effectiveness Through McDonough and Shaw's Criteria**

*Entisar Allafi Mohammed*

Zawia University, College of Education, Abi-Isa, English Department, Zawia, Libya, 00218, [en.mohammed@zu.edu.ly](mailto:en.mohammed@zu.edu.ly)

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## **ABSTRACT**

The evaluation of English Language Teaching (ELT) coursebooks plays a pivotal role in determining their effectiveness in achieving pedagogical goals. This study critically analyses the New Headway Elementary course book, employing McDonough and Shaw's comprehensive evaluation framework. The framework's external and internal evaluation stages are applied to assess the course book's content, organization, cultural relevance, skill integration, and overall adaptability for diverse educational contexts. The study also considers the financial and practical implications of using the course book, particularly in non-native English-speaking countries like Libya. Findings reveal that while the course book demonstrates a strong integration of language skills and modern pedagogical approaches, its cultural specificity and cost may limit its suitability in certain contexts. The study underscores the importance of tailoring course book selection to local needs, emphasizing flexibility and adaptability to enhance learning outcomes. Recommendations for modifying the course book to better suit Libyan educational settings are also provided.

Keywords: Coursebook Evaluation, English Language Teaching, Cultural Relevance, Skill Integration, Adaptability.

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## **1. Introduction**

The evaluation of English Language Teaching (ELT) coursebooks is a crucial process that directly impacts the effectiveness of language instruction. Coursebooks form the core of most language programs, providing a structured approach to teaching and learning. However, the exponential growth in the variety of ELT materials in recent years has made the process of selecting suitable course books increasingly complex. While some course books have gained widespread popularity due to their comprehensive approach to teaching, not all are equally effective or applicable across diverse educational contexts. This underscores the need for rigorous evaluation to ensure their alignment with specific teaching goals and learner needs.

The New Headway Elementary course book, developed by Liz and John Soars, is among the most popular ELT materials used globally. Renowned for its structured integration of traditional and modern teaching methodologies, the course book claims to address the needs of adult and young adult learners. However, questions remain regarding its suitability for non-native English-speaking contexts, such as Libya, where cultural relevance, cost, and adaptability are significant considerations. Additionally, the book's heavy reliance on supplementary materials, its treatment of cultural elements, and its skill integration strategy merit closer examination to determine its practical efficacy in these settings.

This study aims to evaluate the New Headway Elementary course book using McDonough and Shaw's criteria for course book evaluation. By analysing both its external and internal features, this research will provide insights into the book's strengths and limitations, highlighting its applicability and challenges in Libyan educational contexts. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on the selection and adaptation of ELT materials, ensuring that coursebooks effectively meet the diverse needs of learners and educators.

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## **2. Research Problem**

The selection of appropriate English Language Teaching (ELT) coursebooks is a critical factor in achieving effective language instruction. However, the diversity of available materials and their varying levels of cultural and contextual relevance pose significant challenges for educators. The New Headway Elementary coursebook, while widely recognized for its comprehensive approach to language teaching, may not fully align with the linguistic, cultural, and educational needs of learners in non-native English-speaking environments, such as Libya. Additionally, factors such as cost, accessibility, and the integration of skills within the coursebook further complicate its applicability. This study seeks to address these issues by evaluating the New Headway Elementary coursebook using established criteria, identifying its strengths and limitations, and proposing strategies for its adaptation to meet local educational requirements.

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### 3. Research Questions

1. Cultural Relevance: To what extent does the New Headway Elementary coursebook address the cultural and social contexts of learners in Libya, and how does this impact its effectiveness?
2. Skill Integration: How effectively does the coursebook integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills to support comprehensive language learning?
3. Adaptability and Cost: Can the coursebook be feasibly adapted to suit the specific educational needs and resource constraints of Libyan learners and institutions?

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### 4. Research Aims

The primary aim of this study is to critically evaluate the New Headway Elementary coursebook to determine its suitability for English language teaching in Libya, focusing on its cultural relevance, pedagogical effectiveness, and adaptability to local contexts.

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### 5. Objectives of the study

1. Assess the alignment of the coursebook's content with the linguistic and educational needs of adult and young adult learners in Libya.
2. Examine the cultural and social contexts presented in the coursebook to determine their appropriateness and impact on learners in a Libyan setting.
3. Evaluate how well the coursebook integrates the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) to support comprehensive language development.
4. Analyze the coursebook's cost, availability, and resource requirements to assess its feasibility for implementation in Libyan educational institutions.
5. Identify potential modifications to the coursebook to enhance its effectiveness and suitability for Libyan learners and teaching environments.

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### 6. Literature overview

Evaluating English Language Teaching (ELT) coursebooks is a critical process that ensures the selected materials meet the needs of learners and educators. Various criteria for coursebook evaluation exist, with McDonough and Shaw's (2003) classification standing out for its comprehensive coverage. This review examines key approaches to coursebook evaluation, including predictive, retrospective, external, and internal assessments, along with considerations for overall evaluation.

#### 6.1 Approaches to Coursebook Evaluation

##### 6.1.1 Predictive and Retrospective Evaluations

Ellis (1997) categorizes coursebook evaluation into two main types: predictive and retrospective. Predictive evaluation assesses the potential value of materials before their use, relying on expert reviews, such as those published in ELT journals, or on detailed checklists available in the literature. In contrast, Robinson (1991) stated that retrospective evaluation examines the effectiveness of a coursebook after it has been used, identifying areas for improvement or modification for future applications. This dual approach ensures that materials are both suitable at the outset and adaptable based on classroom outcomes.

Tomlinson (2003) offers a similar framework, dividing evaluation into pre-use, whilst-use, and post-use stages. Pre-use evaluation, also referred to by McGrath (2002) as "first-glance evaluation," involves a cursory review of the materials to gauge their potential utility. Stern (1983) concluded that whilst-use evaluation occurs during the teaching process, focusing on practical aspects such as the clarity of instructions, task achievability, and motivational effectiveness. Post-use evaluation is considered the most significant stage, as it assesses the overall impact of the materials on both learners and teachers. This stage addresses questions such as whether the materials enabled learners to acquire new knowledge and skills, prepared them for examinations, and facilitated syllabus coverage for teachers.

##### 6.1.2 McDonough and Shaw's Criteria for Evaluation

McDonough and Shaw (2003) propose a detailed framework for coursebook evaluation, divided into external and internal evaluations, followed by an overall assessment. Their approach provides a structured method to comprehensively assess materials.

## 6.2 External Evaluation

Cunningsworth (1995) stated that external evaluation focuses on the coursebook's outward features, often described by the author or publisher. Key elements include:

1. **Blurb and Table of Contents:** These sections provide insights into the coursebook's target audience, proficiency level, and intended usage context (e.g., general English or English for Specific Purposes).
2. **Presentation and Methodology:** The introduction and table of contents reveal the book's organization, the teaching methodologies employed, and the relationship between language and learning processes.
3. **Supplementary Materials:** Evaluators examine whether the coursebook is a standalone resource or requires additional materials, such as teacher's guides, vocabulary indices, or audio-visual aids.
4. **Visual Elements and Layout:** Diagrams, photographs, and charts are assessed for their effectiveness in enhancing comprehension. A clear layout and presentation can significantly impact user engagement.
5. **Cultural Bias:** Sheldon (1988) highlights the importance of addressing diverse religious and social environments in coursebooks. Materials should avoid inappropriate or offensive depictions of gender, social classes, or cultural norms.

Other factors include the suitability of tests, the use of audio and video materials, and the extent to which functional, national, and grammatical aspects are covered to promote meaningful communication.

## 6.3 Internal Evaluation

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) pointed out that internal evaluation involves an in-depth analysis of the coursebook's content to ensure its consistency with the external description. Key considerations include:

1. **Skill Integration:** Assessing whether the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are presented in an integrated or isolated manner.
2. **Grading and Sequencing:** The logical progression of materials is crucial for facilitating learning.
3. **Authenticity:** Evaluating whether listening recordings and speaking dialogues reflect natural language use.
4. **Exercises and Learning Styles:** The suitability of tasks and their alignment with diverse learning preferences, including self-study, are examined.
5. **Motivational Appeal:** Materials must be engaging to sustain learner and teacher interest.

## 6.4 Overall Evaluation

The final stage assesses the overall suitability of the coursebook based on four key factors:

1. **Suitability:** Determining whether the materials align with the syllabus and teaching objectives.
2. **Generalizability:** Evaluating the broader applicability of the materials across different contexts.
3. **Adaptability:** Identifying opportunities to modify or customize the materials for specific learner needs.
4. **Flexibility:** Examining whether the coursebook allows for variations in sequencing and grading to accommodate diverse classroom settings.

Coursebook evaluation is a multi-faceted process that ensures materials are effective, engaging, and contextually appropriate. McDonough and Shaw's criteria provide a robust framework for both external and internal evaluations, while approaches such as those proposed by Ellis (1997) and Tomlinson (2003) emphasize the importance of pre-use and post-use assessments. These methodologies collectively enable educators to select and adapt materials that best meet the needs of their learners.

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## 7. Methodology

This section outlines the methodological approach employed to evaluate the New Headway Elementary coursebook. By utilizing McDonough and Shaw's framework for external, internal, and overall evaluations, the study systematically examines the coursebook's structure, content, cultural relevance, and adaptability. This comprehensive analysis aims to assess the coursebook's effectiveness in addressing the linguistic and educational needs of learners in the Libyan context.

### 7.1 Evaluation of the New Headway Elementary Coursebook: Rationale for the Selected Criteria

The evaluation of the New Headway Elementary coursebook is grounded in McDonough and Shaw's (2003) comprehensive framework, with specific criteria selected to guide the analysis. The chosen criteria include the blurb and page of content, components and costs, organization and layout, the

presentation of skills, and the social and cultural context. These areas were selected for their relevance in determining the coursebook's practicality, pedagogical value, and cultural appropriateness. The following are the criteria for Evaluation by Harmer (2007):

1. **The Blurb and Page of Content:** The blurb and content page provide essential information about the coursebook's purpose, intended audience, and structure. Evaluating these sections enables the reviewer to confirm or challenge the claims made by the publishers and authors. Familiarity with the content layout offers a preliminary understanding that informs the subsequent external analysis.
2. **Components and Costs:** The financial feasibility of the coursebook is a critical consideration for educators and institutions. McDonough and Shaw (1993) emphasize that "sheer economics will dissuade the evaluator from selecting these particular materials" (p. 70). If the cost of the course components, such as workbooks, teacher guides, and supplementary audio-visual materials, is prohibitive, the coursebook may be unsuitable for widespread adoption. This consideration eliminates the need for further analysis of unaffordable materials.
3. **Organization, Layout, and Presentation:** The organization and layout of a coursebook significantly impact its usability for both teachers and students. A well-structured coursebook enhances teacher confidence and simplifies lesson planning. Conversely, a poorly organized coursebook may hinder effective teaching. Additionally, many coursebooks fail to specify the time required to cover the material, which affects teachers' ability to plan their lessons effectively.
4. **Presentation of Skills in the Material:** The integration and treatment of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are vital in assessing the coursebook's pedagogical value. The analysis considers whether the skills are presented in isolation or integrated and whether this integration aligns with the teaching goals. If the skills are isolated, the review evaluates the feasibility of teacher-led integration.
5. **Social and Cultural Context:** The cultural content of a coursebook can significantly influence its applicability in different teaching contexts. Coursebooks often emphasize specific societies and cultures, which may not align with the learners' background. Teachers unfamiliar with the cultural references in the material may struggle to address learners' questions effectively. As Sheldon (1988) notes, evaluating the cultural appropriateness of materials is crucial to avoid unintended bias or misconceptions.

The selected criteria reflect key areas that influence the practical and pedagogical suitability of the New Headway Elementary coursebook. By focusing on these aspects, the evaluation aims to provide a detailed analysis of the coursebook's strengths and weaknesses, enabling informed decisions about its use in diverse educational settings.

## 8. Results

This section presents the findings of the evaluation of the New Headway Elementary coursebook, focusing on its alignment with the selected criteria. The results highlight the coursebook's strengths and limitations in terms of content, organization, cultural relevance, skill integration, and overall suitability for learners in the Libyan context.

Publication details	
Book title: New Headway. Authors: Liz and John Soars. Oxford University Press. First published 2000.	
Criteria	Evaluation Notes
The blurb and the page of content	The <i>New Headway Elementary</i> coursebook, part of the multi-level Headway series, is a revised version of the original, designed to motivate adult and young adult learners at the beginner level. It aims to help learners communicate fluently and accurately in English, combining traditional grammar-focused methods with modern communicative approaches like role play and group work. The book contains 14 units, requiring about 100 hours of class time, which may not align with educational programs in contexts like Libya, where English is taught alongside other subjects. Clarifying the time needed for each unit would improve its usability.
Components and costs	The New Headway Elementary coursebook costs £19.50, with additional components such as a teacher's book (£16.50), student's workbook (£11.50), class audio cassettes/CDs (£30), and optional resources like a photocopiable teacher's resource book, pronunciation guide, and video materials. These supplementary materials, though valuable for enhancing teaching and learning, significantly increase the overall cost, making the coursebook relatively expensive. Non-native English-speaking teachers

	often find the teacher's book essential as it provides guidance, teaching strategies, and lesson plans to boost confidence in delivering the material.
Organisation, layout, and presentation	<p>1. The New Headway Elementary coursebook has an attractive design with liberal use of colors and photographs, which helps motivate students. The content page is well-organized, detailing the topics in each of the 14 units, which share a consistent structure to support student familiarity. Each unit begins with a warm-up activity, followed by sections like "Grammar Spot" for checking understanding, a grammar reference at the back, vocabulary often linked to pronunciation, and a vocabulary index with phonetic symbols for self-study.</p> <p>2. The "Skills Work" section integrates the four language skills, though writing activities are often relegated to the student workbook. The "Everyday English" section encourages meaningful communication but is more suited to L2 environments, as some content (e.g., "In a café" scenarios) may lack relevance for learners in non-English-speaking countries.</p> <p>3. However, some pages are overly dense, potentially overwhelming for beginners, while others are dominated by visuals, limiting exposure to written text. A balanced mix of text and visuals on each page would improve usability for learners.</p>
The Presentation of skills in the material	The New Headway Elementary coursebook integrates the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, effectively in most activities. Examples include "listen and repeat" (p.10) and "read and listen" (p.6), with a noticeable emphasis on listening skills to expose students to oral language. This aligns with the natural order of second language acquisition: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, the sequencing is not always consistent; for instance, activities like "read and listen" (p.13) followed by "listen and repeat" deviate from this natural progression. Writing tasks are mostly controlled, requiring students to replicate models rather than encouraging creative or independent expression.
Social and cultural context	The New Headway Elementary coursebook incorporates social context primarily through its "Everyday English" sections, such as a phone conversation in Unit 1 (p.6) for practicing greetings like "Hello" and "Goodbye." The content is culturally sensitive, avoiding offensive material and treating women and minority groups respectfully, with occasional references to nationalities like Egypt and Mexico. However, many materials appear tailored to learners in the UK or Europe, as seen in Unit 2 (p.18), where a café menu features predominantly English food and names. This Eurocentric design may limit its relevance for students in non-European contexts, suggesting it is primarily aimed at European learners.

Table 1: New Headway Evaluation Results

### 8.1 Comments on the results

1. **Publication Details:** The provided publication details give an overview of the coursebook, including its authors, publisher, and target audience. However, more specific information about the revisions in this edition could enhance understanding of its updates and improvements. The coursebook being part of a multi-level series is beneficial as it provides continuity for learners and educators. Still, the suitability of this particular level for Libyan learners depends on its contextual and cultural relevance.

2. **The Blurb and the Page of Content:** The blurb effectively outlines the coursebook's purpose and approach, combining traditional methods with modern communicative approaches. However, it is noted that the book's extensive 14-unit structure, requiring approximately 100 hours of instruction, may not align with Libyan educational schedules where English is taught alongside other subjects. This observation highlights the importance of aligning instructional materials with local curricula. Including estimated completion times for each unit would improve its utility for planning.

3. **Components and Costs:** The evaluation emphasizes the financial barriers posed by the coursebook, particularly given the reliance on supplementary materials like workbooks, audio CDs, and teacher guides. These components, while valuable for comprehensive learning, significantly increase costs, potentially limiting access for resource-constrained institutions. The observation that non-native English-speaking teachers often rely on teacher's books underscores the need for affordable and accessible materials tailored to their specific needs.

4. **Organization, Layout, and Presentation:** The book's attractive design, with its use of colors and photographs, is praised for motivating students. The consistent organization of units aids familiarity and reduces cognitive load for learners. However, the review notes two areas of concern:

1. Pages overcrowded with information may overwhelm beginners.
2. Overuse of pictures on some pages detracts from written content, potentially hindering reading practice.

Including a balance of text and visuals would enhance usability. Additionally, while the inclusion of grammar references, vocabulary indices, and the "Everyday English" sections are commendable, their effectiveness may be limited in contexts like Libya, where learners lack opportunities to use such expressions outside class.

5. **The Presentation of Skills in the Material:** The integration of the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—is a strength of the coursebook. Activities like "listen and repeat" and "read and listen" promote the natural acquisition of language skills. However, the sequencing of skills, such as "read and listen" followed by "listen and repeat," occasionally deviates from natural language acquisition processes, as noted on page 13. Writing activities, being primarily controlled, may limit creative expression and independent writing practice. A more balanced approach to skill development would benefit learners.

6. **Social and Cultural Context:** The social and cultural context presented in the coursebook is primarily designed for European learners, which may limit its relevance for Libyan students. Examples such as café menus featuring English food and culturally specific names underscore this bias. While the book avoids offensive cultural depictions and treats women and minority groups respectfully, its Eurocentric focus might challenge teachers and learners in Libya. Supplementing the coursebook with culturally relevant materials could address this issue and enhance learner engagement.

7. **Overall Assessment:** The New Headway Elementary coursebook offers a structured, skills-focused approach to language learning. However, its cultural relevance, cost, and extensive unit structure raise questions about its practicality for Libyan learners. While the book is pedagogically sound in many respects, adapting it to local needs through supplementary materials and modified teaching strategies would make it more suitable for this context.

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## 9. Discussion

The evaluation of the New Headway Elementary coursebook reveals several strengths and limitations, particularly when considered in the context of Libyan learners. The discussion explores these findings, highlighting their implications for the book's pedagogical and practical value.

### 9.1 Content and Skill Integration

One of the major strengths of the New Headway Elementary coursebook is its integrated approach to teaching the four key language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This aligns with best practices in second language acquisition, which emphasize the importance of skill integration for natural language development (McDonough & Shaw, 2003). Activities such as "listen and repeat" and "read and listen" encourage learners to engage with the material in varied ways, promoting comprehensive language exposure. However, some sequencing inconsistencies, such as the order of activities (e.g., "read and listen" preceding "listen and repeat"), deviate from the natural progression of language skills acquisition (McGrath, 2002). Additionally, the writing tasks are largely controlled, limiting opportunities for learners to practice independent, creative expression.

### 9.2 Cultural Relevance

The coursebook's content is predominantly Eurocentric, with cultural examples and contexts tailored to European or UK settings. While this may enhance its relevance for learners studying in such environments, it poses challenges for Libyan learners. For example, as noted in the review, the inclusion of a café menu featuring exclusively English food limits the applicability of the material in a non-native English-speaking context. Sheldon (1988) highlights that cultural relevance is critical for engaging learners and avoiding alienation, especially in multicultural classrooms. Teachers using this coursebook in Libya may need to supplement it with locally relevant materials to bridge the cultural gap and ensure learner engagement.

### 9.3 Organization, Layout, and Presentation

The coursebook's organization and design are strong points, with a consistent layout and visually appealing elements that motivate learners. The use of colours, photographs, and clear content pages facilitates ease of use for both students and teachers. However, some pages are overloaded with information, which may overwhelm beginner-level learners, while others rely excessively on pictures, reducing exposure to written text. McDonough and Shaw (1993) emphasize that a balance between visual and textual elements is essential for maintaining learners' focus and providing adequate reading practice.

### 9.4 Practicality and Cost

The cost of the New Headway Elementary coursebook and its supplementary materials is a significant limitation, particularly for resource-constrained institutions in Libya. McDonough and Shaw (2003) argue that affordability is a critical factor in the selection of teaching materials, as it directly impacts accessibility. The reliance on additional components such as teacher's guides, audio CDs, and workbooks, while enhancing the comprehensiveness of the course, further increases the financial burden on institutions and learners.

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### 9.5 Adaptability and Flexibility

Despite its limitations, the New Headway Elementary coursebook demonstrates adaptability, allowing teachers to modify its content to better suit the local context. As McDonough and Shaw (2003) note, a good coursebook should be adaptable to different teaching and learning contexts. In the Libyan setting, teachers can incorporate culturally relevant examples and adjust the material to align with the limited instructional time available.

### 9.6 Implications for Teachers and Learners

The findings suggest that while the New Headway Elementary coursebook has pedagogical value, its full potential can only be realized through careful adaptation. Teachers must supplement the material with culturally relevant examples and balance its reliance on supplementary resources with local needs and constraints. For learners, the book provides a solid foundation for developing integrated language skills, but additional support may be required to address cultural gaps and enhance engagement.

The New Headway Elementary coursebook offers a structured, skills-focused approach to English language teaching. However, its cultural bias, high cost, and dense unit structure pose challenges for Libyan learners. To maximize its effectiveness, teachers must adapt its content to suit the local context, ensuring that the material is both relevant and accessible.

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## 10. Conclusion

The evaluation of the New Headway Elementary coursebook using McDonough and Shaw's framework reveals a balanced combination of strengths and limitations. The coursebook demonstrates pedagogical soundness with its integrated approach to language skills and visually appealing design, which effectively supports language acquisition. However, its Eurocentric content, financial inaccessibility, and dense structure present significant challenges, particularly for use in non-native English-speaking contexts like Libya.

The findings highlight the importance of contextualizing teaching materials to meet the cultural and logistical realities of learners. While the coursebook is a robust tool for structured English instruction, its potential in Libyan classrooms can only be realized through thoughtful adaptation, such as the inclusion of locally relevant cultural examples and adjustments to its pacing and structure. By addressing these areas, educators can enhance the relevance, accessibility, and effectiveness of the coursebook, ensuring it aligns with the diverse needs of Libyan learners and institutions.

Ultimately, this evaluation underscores the broader need for ELT materials to prioritize flexibility and cultural inclusivity, ensuring their applicability across diverse educational settings.

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