

English Language Instructors' Perspectives on the Pedagogical Effectiveness of the Curriculum: A case Study from King Abdulaziz University

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the pedagogical effectiveness of the Unlock coursebook series from the perspectives of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors at King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. A quantitative descriptive survey design was adopted to collect data from 38 instructors with diverse academic backgrounds and teaching experience. The data were gathered using an adapted questionnaire consisting of 42 items distributed across six domains: pragmatic factors, structure and arrangement, linguistic components, language capabilities, practices and ventures, and cultural elements. The findings indicate that the Unlock series received an overall positive evaluation, with higher mean scores in pragmatic aspects and structure and arrangement, reflecting the clarity, organization, and usability of the materials. Similarly, linguistic components, language skills, and classroom activities were evaluated favorably, suggesting that the coursebook effectively supports language development, interaction, and critical thinking. However, the cultural elements domain received comparatively lower ratings, particularly regarding the representation of Saudi culture and alignment with local values. The study concludes that while the Unlock coursebook series is generally suitable for the Saudi EFL context, certain adaptations are necessary to enhance its cultural relevance. The findings highlight the importance of aligning instructional materials with learners' sociocultural context and involving instructors in the evaluation and development of coursebooks to improve their effectiveness in higher education settings.

Keywords: coursebook evaluation, EFL, Unlock series, instructor perspectives, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

1. Introduction

Coursebooks stand out among these various materials as a universal and widely utilized instrument for language teaching and learning (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017). Gebregeorgis (2017) defined coursebook as “teaching–learning resources containing a series of texts and images aiming at certain educational outcomes, convey knowledge, attitudes and behaviours” (p. 56).

From these definitions it can be said that coursebooks play an essential role in language learning and teaching materials (Tomlinson, 2011) and they continue to do so in English classrooms around the world (Guilloteaux, 2013). Richards (2006) argues that coursebooks form the skeleton of multiple language programs.

In the context of Saudi Arabia, the English language plays a significant role as suggested by Al-Zubeiry (2012) who argues that English “is not restricted only to interests and purposes outside the country. Its importance has been increasingly felt as a catalyst of progress for the country” (p. 17–18). ELIs have typically depended on global coursebooks created by international publishing houses, as opposed to school coursebooks, which frequently represent Saudi culture (Al Houssawi, 2016; Alshammari, 2015). This dependence results from a shortage of national publishing houses that create content especially suited to Saudi university students' requirements (Al Houssawi, 2016). However, It is worth noting that ELIs frequently switch up their teaching materials and coursebooks (Al Houssawi, 2016), and this is in an effort to better suit their students and enhance their academic performance (Alnemri, 2025). One such recently adopted coursebook is the Unlock series, which is the focus of this study.

The Unlock coursebook series has been evaluated by researchers in various contexts, including Japan (Paterson, 2018), Turkey (Katırcı & Karakaş, 2023), and Palestine (Qassrawi et al., 2023). Within Saudi Arabia, a small number of studies have evaluated the series (e.g. Abdala, 2022; Alnofal, 2018), but none so far have examined it at a well-established university such as KAU. This indicates a clear gap in the literature specific to this series.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness and suitability of the Unlock coursebook series for the learning environment in Saudi higher education, and it will focus specifically on the English Language Institute at KAU, which is one of the institutions that use this coursebook in the region. To accomplish this, the study will use the framework of McDonough and Shaw (2003) which attempts to evaluate coursebooks based on its alignment with educational objectives and its overall impact on language learning outcomes. Alshumaimeri and Alharbi's (2024) questionnaire is among the checklists that have utilized this framework in its design to investigate the quality of coursebooks based on six domains which include: pragmatic factors, structure and arrangement, linguistic components, language capabilities, practices and ventures, and cultural elements.

1.1 Research Questions

Q1: What are the views of EFL instructors at KAU on the Unlock coursebook series?

Q2: How do KAU's EFL instructors evaluate the Unlock coursebook series in terms of its

pragmatic factors, structure and arrangement, linguistic components, language capabilities, practices and ventures, and cultural elements?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

McDonough and Shaw (2003) have designed a useful framework for coursebook evaluation that provides a straightforward method for determining the effectiveness of educational materials and identifying the areas where they need improvement. Their approach to evaluation can be split into two major steps: external evaluation and internal evaluation. As the first step of this framework, the external evaluation offers a generalized overview of the coursebook's organization as well as other details such as its stated aims, target audience, and its content. Internal evaluation then delves deeper to determine how well the materials align with the intent of the authors as well as the program's objectives. By using these evaluation checklists, educators can efficiently assess coursebooks to determine whether they meet the learning goals and needs of their students (McDonough et al., 2013).

This framework can be useful for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Saudi Arabia, as it has been implemented previously in a Saudi context as evident by Alshumaimeri and Alharbi's (2024) research, which included the creation of a checklist that is based on this framework. In a similar fashion to McDonough and Shaw's (2003) framework, Alshumaimeri and Alharbi's (2024) questionnaire also investigated external and internal of the coursebook series in their study.

2.2 Teacher's Role in EFL Coursebooks Evaluation

According to Alhamami and Ahmad (2018), teachers are not simply passive participants of the contents of any coursebooks; rather, they accept the inputs after assessing them and determining that they are beneficial in terms of fitting into their classroom. Similarly, Khosiyono et al. (2019) and McGrath (2006) also argue that how a coursebook is utilized in the classroom largely depends on the teacher's attitudes. Thus, given that teachers are the main stakeholders in these coursebooks which are critical to any teaching-learning process, investigating their views on such coursebooks becomes an important task to take (Alhamami & Ahmad, 2018). This is primarily due to the direct involvement that teachers have with curriculum-related issues, which enables them to have a better understanding of what is taking place in their classrooms and to be able to identify issues that policymakers cannot necessarily observe (Alghamdi, 2021).

Turning specifically to the Unlock series, which is the focus of the present study, Abdala (2022) evaluated the coursebook at King Khalid University and found it to be a well-designed textbook that activates basic interpersonal communicative skills and academic English proficiency, applies critical thinking skills, and provides students with suitable communicative and academic skills. However, the study also noted that the coursebook consumes considerable time through its use of video exercises as warm-ups, and that its problem-solving approach

contrasts with students' familiarity-based, rote-learning tendencies. Alnofal (2018) similarly investigated the Unlock series at Al-Imam Mohammad ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), analyzing the cognitive levels of the questions posed in Unlock Reading and Writing 1; the findings showed a tendency toward lower-level cognitive skills in the coursebook. Aside from these two studies, no published research has evaluated the Unlock series in the Saudi context.

2.3 Cultural Issues in EFL Coursebooks

Because of the varying cultural backgrounds of English learners as well as the significant impact that coursebooks could have on the learning process, it becomes an important task for coursebook authors and publishers to be familiar with the cultural aspects of the environment that the coursebook is going to be taught in to provide appropriate materials for specific students (Crawford, 2002). Thus, it is important to decide whose culture and what kind of culture should be included in English learning coursebooks (Chao, 2011). English teachers must therefore evaluate the cultural content of the textbook they use since it might affect how well EFL students understand other cultures (Qi & Derakhshan, 2024).

Despite the potential variety of cultures that could come up in EFL coursebooks, teaching English has usually been associated with the socio-cultural norms and values of English speakers from inner-circle countries such as Britain, North America, and Australia, with the aim of developing bilingual and bicultural learners (Prodromou, 1988; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). One large issue of these cultural models and values is that they can be inappropriate, unacceptable, and unfamiliar to learners from different cultural backgrounds (Prodromou, 1988; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). For example, the findings of Ta'amneh (2019) study revealed that there are some negative points concentrated on the appropriateness of content and pictures to the local culture of the students. Additionally, the absence of national and international cultural elements in EFL textbooks could lead to some misunderstandings throughout the conversation (Qi & Derakhshan, 2024). This might reduce students' ability to use coursebooks to effectively express and understand under suitable conditions (Lee, 2018).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the unlock textbook series using a survey created to get feedback from KAU English instructors. To do this, the quantitative research approach employs a descriptive survey. This method comprises both characterizing the phenomena and gathering, analyzing, and interpreting numerical data pertinent to the discovered phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2007).

3.2 Participants

The survey was administered to the participating ELI Instructors of KAU during the summer semester of the year 2025. The evaluation instrument was completed by 38 out of 65 instructors. These 38 participants had varying degrees of experience and educational backgrounds, and their biographical details can be summarized in Table 1 and Table 2.

The sampling approach employed in this study is convenience sampling, also known as availability sampling, which involves selecting participants based on their ready accessibility and willingness to participate (Cohen et al., 2007). Despite these limitations, the response rate of approximately 58.5% (38 out of 65 invited instructors) is considered acceptable for survey-based research of this kind and the demographic diversity of the participants strengthens the representativeness of the findings within the KAU context.

Table 1. Participants' qualifications

Qualification	N	%
Bachelor's in Education: English	4	10.5
Bachelor's with Education Diploma	5	13.2
Bachelor's in English and Translation	1	2.6
Master's degree	22	57.9
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	6	15.8
Total	38	100

Table 2 Participant years of experience

Years of experience	N	%
Less than 5 years	1	2.6
From 5years to less than 10 years	5	13.2
From 10years to less than 15 years	6	15.8
15 years or more	26	68.4
Total	38	100

3.3 Research Instrument

Alshumaimeri and Alharbi's (2024) questionnaire was used for this study. This review supported the design of an adapted evaluation questionnaire with 42 items evenly distributed across six domains. Using McDonough and Shaw's 2003 framework as a guide, the researchers created the questionnaire with an emphasis on a comprehensive internal review of the textbook series rather than just an external one. The domains were designated as follows in the questionnaire: pragmatic factors and structure and arrangement domains indicate the exterior assessment elements while linguistic components, language capacities, practices and endeavors, and cultural aspects reflect the internal evaluation elements. A 5-point Likert scale was also used to measure the questionnaire items, and the means fell into the following ranges: 1–1.49 for strongly disagree, 1.5–2.49 for disagree, 2.5–3.49 for neutral, 3.5–4.49 for agree, and 4.5–5 for strongly agree.

The questionnaire was adapted from Alshumaimeri and Alharbi (2024), who developed it to evaluate the *Mega Goal* series used in Saudi secondary schools. Because the present study examined a university coursebook, the instrument was adapted in three ways. First, references to the original textbook series were replaced with references to the *Unlock* series, and items were reworded where necessary to suit a university setting (for example, Item 4 in the structure and arrangement domain asks whether the typeface and print size are suitable for university students). Second, the biographical section was revised to reflect the profile of ELI instructors at KAU, with qualification categories ranging from a bachelor's degree to a PhD and four bands of teaching experience. To check that the adapted version remained clear and appropriate, it was reviewed by three specialists, e.g., the study supervisor and two experienced ELI instructors at KAU, who assessed the wording and relevance of each item; minor wording changes were made in response to their comments. The reliability of the adapted instrument was then confirmed with the study sample, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.79 to 0.90 across the six domains (see Section 3.4).

3.4 Instrument Validity and Reliability

The research instrument was designed by Alshumaimeri and Alharbi (2024), and in the process of its design, it has been reviewed by multiple university professors, professional teachers, and teacher supervisors in order to ensure its validity. Aside from this, the mentioned researchers also ran a pilot study to determine the construct of validity and reliability.

The Cronbach alpha values reported for the original instrument by Alshumaimeri and Alharbi (2024) ranged from 0.814 to 0.962 across the six domains, indicating a high level of internal consistency in the original validation study. The alpha values obtained in the present study, ranging from 0.79 to 0.90, fall within a similar range and confirm that the questionnaire maintained satisfactory reliability when administered to the KAU instructor sample.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The questionnaire was administered to EFL instructors in KAU during the summer semester of 2025. In order to reach out to the respondents, an Ethical research form was signed by the researcher. After this, the questionnaire was then sent to the respondents E-mails in the form of a Google Forms online survey. Once the data had been collected, Microsoft Office Excel was then used to analyze the responses. The software was used to calculate information such as the Cronbach alpha, mean scores, and standard deviations.

4. Results

4.1 Overall Evaluation

In order to respond to the initial research question, "What are the views of EFL instructors at KAU on the *Unlock* coursebook series?" The *Unlock* coursebook series was evaluated overall based on various domains. Table 3 displays the total assessment scores' means and standard deviations for each domain.

Table 3. Overall Evaluation on Unlock

Domain	N	Mean	Std. deviation
1- Pragmatic factor	38	4.02	0.552
2- Structure and arrangement	38	4.02	0.693
3- Linguistic components	38	3.96	0.488
4- Language capabilities	38	3.94	0.677
5- Practices and ventures	38	3.90	0.723
6- Cultural elements	38	3.68	0.501
Overall	38	3.92	0.534

The mean scores reflect the average evaluation of each domain, ranging from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating more positive evaluations. The standard deviations denote the variability in the evaluations within each domain. Lower standard deviations suggest less variability, demonstrating a more consistent evaluation across participants.

4.2 Evaluation of Each Domain

This part explores the main results related to the second research question, “How do KAU's EFL instructors evaluate the Unlock coursebook series in terms of its pragmatic factors, structure and arrangement, linguistic components, language capabilities, practices and ventures, and cultural elements?”

4.2.1 Pragmatic Factor Domain

Table 4. Instructors' Evaluation of Pragmatics Factor Domain

Pragmatics Factor Domain	N	Mean	SD
1. The textbook's cover and page appearance are appropriate.	38	4.13	0.77
2. The textbook furnishes ample visual aids such as photographs, charts, diagrams, etc., to help students understand the content.	38	4	0.83
3. The imagery used doesn't just serve an aesthetic purpose, but also enhances and supports the written content.	38	3.92	0.67
4. The presentation of the content is clear.	38	4.13	0.66
5. The subjects within the textbook are engaging.	38	3.94	0.80
6. Indices, glossaries, chapter titles, among other forms of content indicators, simplify the user's task of utilizing the information for review and independent study.	38	4	0.86
7. The accompanying materials (teacher's book, workbook, interactive CD) are informative.	38	4.05	0.73
Overall	38	4.02	0.552

The results indicate an overall mean score of 4.02, reflecting a generally positive evaluation of the textbook's pragmatic aspects. The highest mean score ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.77$) was recorded for Item 1, and Item 4 also received a similarly high mean ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.66$). In contrast, the lowest mean score was reported for Item 3 ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.67$). Overall, the findings suggest that instructors tend to evaluate the pragmatic features of the textbook positively.

4.2.2 Structure and Arrangement Domain

Table 5. Instructors' Evaluation of Structure and Arrangement Domain

Structure and arrangement domain	N	Mean	SD
1. The format and style, concerning imagery and color schemes, are suitable and unambiguous.	38	4.18	0.56
2. The textbook is packed with a range of appealing patterns.	38	3.78	0.66
3. The structure of the textbook is efficiently laid out, such as by topics and skills, among others.	38	3.94	0.80
4. The typeface and scale utilized for the printed material are suitable for university students.	38	4.10	0.68
5. Headlines, section or module titles, and subheadings aid in outlining what one can anticipate in a module.	38	4.10	0.60
6. The text density and variety are appropriate for students' learning levels.	38	3.78	0.90
7. The textbook contains a detailed list of content.	38	4.23	0.63
Overall	38	4.02	0.693

The results indicate an overall mean score of 4.02, suggesting a positive evaluation of the textbook's layout and design features. The highest mean score ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.63$) was recorded for Item 7. In contrast, the lowest mean score was reported for Item 2 ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.66$) and Item 6 ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.90$). Overall, the findings indicate that instructors generally view the layout and design of the textbook favorably.

4.2.3 Linguistic Components Domain

Table 6. Instructors' Evaluation of Linguistic Component Domain

Linguistic components domain	N	Mean	SD
1. The textbook utilizes authentic language.	38	4.07	0.81
2. The vocabulary load is reasonable.	38	4	0.92
3. In subsequent lessons, new words are reiterated for the purpose of reinforcement.	38	3.86	0.93
4. The quantity of grammatical components presented in each lesson is suitable.	38	3.94	0.86

Linguistic components domain	N	Mean	SD
5. New grammar lessons are introduced as students' understanding increases.	38	3.97	0.88
6. New grammatical items are repeated in the lessons that follow for recycling purposes.	38	3.81	0.95
7. Each unit introduces a suitable number of vocabulary and grammar elements.	38	4.05	0.83
Overall	38	3.96	0.488

The results indicate an overall mean score of 3.96, suggesting a generally positive evaluation of the textbook's linguistic features. The highest mean score ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.81$) was recorded for Item 1. In contrast, the lowest mean score was reported for Item 6 ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.95$). Overall, the findings indicate that instructors tend to evaluate the linguistic components of the textbook positively.

4.2.4 Language Capabilities Domain

Table 7. Instructors' Evaluation of Language Capabilities Domain

Language capabilities domain	N	Mean	SD
1. Each unit maintains an equilibrium of all language skills.	38	4.13	0.87
2. The text excerpts provided align with the students' levels and interests.	38	3.73	0.94
3. The textbook offers sufficient material on exercises to be done before and after reading.	38	3.84	0.88
4. The textbook sufficiently emphasizes the development of listening skills.	38	4.02	0.75
5. The textbook sufficiently emphasizes the development of writing skills.	38	4	0.95
6. The textbook sufficiently emphasizes the development of speaking skills.	38	3.94	0.92
7. The practice of individual skills is assimilated with the practice of other skills within the textbook.	38	3.92	0.94
Overall	38	3.94	0.677

The results indicate an overall mean score of 3.94, suggesting a generally positive evaluation of the textbook's treatment of language skills. The highest mean score ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.87$) was recorded for Item 1. In contrast, the lowest mean score was reported for Item 2 ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.94$). Overall, the findings indicate that instructors tend to evaluate the textbook's coverage of language skills positively.

4.2.5 Practices and Ventures Domain

Table 8. Instructors' Evaluation of Practices and Ventures Domain

Practices and ventures domain	N	Mean	SD
1. The activities within the textbook captivate the interest of the students.	38	3.55	0.89
2. There are sufficient activities that encourage meaningful language usage.	38	3.73	0.92
3. The activities offer a wide range of opportunities for interaction (group work, pair work, etc.).	38	4.07	0.88
4. The activities encourage students to think critically (analysis, synthesis, interpretation).	38	4.13	0.93
5. The textbook contains a suitable number of activities for practicing the language.	38	4	0.95
6. The activities are appropriate for the students' proficiency level.	38	3.68	1.01
7. The textbook includes activities that encourage student participation.	38	4.15	0.78
Overall	38	3.90	0.723

The results indicate an overall mean score of 3.90, suggesting a generally positive evaluation of the textbook's activities and practices. The highest mean score ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.78$) was recorded for Item 7. In contrast, the lowest mean score was reported for Item 1 ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.89$). Overall, the findings indicate that instructors tend to evaluate the activities and practice opportunities provided in the textbook positively.

4.2.6 Cultural Component Domain

Table 9. Instructors' Evaluation of Cultural Component Domain

Cultural component domain	N	Mean	SD
1. The textbook offers sufficient coverage of target cultures.	38	3.63	0.75
2. The individuals depicted in the textbook embody persons from a diverse range of social statuses, ages, and professions.	38	3.97	0.59
3. The figures within the educational text are included in a social network such as a family, a circle of friends, or a work environment, and they are not found in seclusion.	38	4.05	0.51
4. The characters in the study book are represented authentically (that is, just like real-life individuals, their anxieties, aspirations, and aversions are mirrored in the textbook).	38	3.86	0.70

Cultural component domain	N	Mean	SD
5. In each textbook, both men and women are equally represented.	38	4	0.61
6. The content expresses various Saudi traditions and customs.	38	2.86	1.06
7. The textbook's material aligns with the tenets of Islam and the cultural norms of Saudi Arabia.	38	3.42	1.05
Overall	38	3.68	0.501

The results indicate an overall mean score of 3.68, suggesting a moderately positive evaluation of the textbook's cultural content. The highest mean score ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.51$) was recorded for Item 3. In contrast, the lowest mean score was reported for Item 6 ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.06$). Overall, the findings indicate that instructors' evaluations of the cultural elements in the textbook are comparatively lower than those of other domains.

5. Discussion

5.1 External Evaluation

In McDonough and Shaw's (2003) framework, external evaluation refers to the presentational and physical features of a coursebook, such as its cover, layout, organization, and overall format, rather than the language content itself. Notably, these two domains that make up the external evaluation received the two highest mean scores of all six domains in this study, and this suggests that Saudi EFL instructors found the Unlock coursebook series most convincing at a surface level.

5.1.1 Pragmatic Factor Domain

The pragmatic factors show how satisfied Saudi EFL instructors are with the practical aspects of the Unlock coursebook series. The instructors were generally satisfied with the quality of the coursebook's structure, which is an aspect that can enable more concentrated learning by decreasing the cognitive load on both the instructors and the students (Sozio et al., 2024). The cover and pages of the textbook were well-received by the instructors. While the coursebook series was generally well-received in terms of its visuals, the instructors were relatively less satisfied with the way the pictures connect to the written content. This is a similar issue to the one found by Hurst and Hill (2023), who highlighted that many of the visuals in the coursebooks they reviewed existed purely as decoration as opposed to being tools for learning. Aside from this issue, the presence of engaging content has a similarly low score, which indicates that the topics that the coursebook series covers may not be interesting for the students. This is especially an important issue to address because making the lessons more appealing and relevant is one of the steps that authors can take to make content more comfortable and easier to process for the students (Tomlinson, 2012).

5.1.2 Structure and Arrangement Domain

Additionally, the Unlock coursebook series received positive evaluations from Saudi EFL instructors in the domain of structure and arrangement, leading to an overall high score. This aligns with the findings of Al-Nafisah and Al-Shorman's (2014) study which shows layout and design to be highest ranking item in the Interaction coursebook series. This is an important aspect because it can create positive perceptions of the coursebook (Albiladi, 2022; Alshumaimeri, 1999). While most of the items in this domain have been highly rated, there are some items that are relatively lower than the ones that have been previously discussed. For instance, appealing patterns could use some improvement as it is lowest rated item. Similarly, the mean score for the text density and diversity for students' learning levels is lower, which is consistent with the findings of Alshumaimeri and Alharbi (2024). The percentage of lexical density in the textbooks provided must be modified in accordance with the students' level in order to facilitate the students' learning, and this is because of the important role that text density plays in providing appropriate learning materials for students (Sujatna et al., 2021).

5.2 Internal Evaluation

In contrast to external evaluation, internal evaluation in McDonough and Shaw's (2003) framework concerns the actual content of the coursebook: the language it presents, the skills it develops, the activities it offers, and the cultural material it includes. As shown in the results, there is a pattern in these four internal domains in which the mean scores decline steadily from the linguistic components to the language capabilities, through practices and ventures, and down to cultural elements, which was the lowest-rated domain overall. This downward trend suggests that the instructors were satisfied with the linguistic and skills-based content of the Unlock series. However, their reservations appear to be stronger in the domains of practices and ventures and, most notably, cultural representation.

5.2.1 Linguistic Components Domain

The Saudi EFL instructors praised the Unlock coursebook series for using authentic language in the area of linguistic components. This result aligns with Alshehri's (2016) discovery that the coursebook under review contains real content. Authentic resources are crucial because they teach students how to use the language in real-world contexts (Alshumaimeri & Alzyadi, 2015). However, the lack of repetition of new grammatical items in later classes suggest a need for improvement. This is an important aspect of language coursebooks because exposing adults to the input of a familiar second language on a regular basis might increase their acquisition of salient grammar patterns through incidental learning (Lee, 2002). Similarly, the reinforcement of vocabulary items have a similarly low score, thus indicating that some of the grammar and vocabulary items may not be repeated enough throughout the coursebook series. Overall, the findings suggest that the Unlock series is generally successful in terms of the authenticity of its content. While it is also successful in the sufficiency of its grammatical and vocabulary input, the series does not repeat and recycle some items to an acceptable degree.

5.2.2 Language Capabilities Domain

Additionally, Saudi EFL instructors evaluated the Unlock coursebook series favorably in the

language capabilities domain. The instructors were the most satisfied with the integration of all language skills within each unit. This aligns with the findings of Alharbi's study (2015), which highlighted a similar satisfaction with the balanced representation of the four language skills. This result also demonstrates an example of the broader shift in EFL material design toward an integrated-skills approach, in which listening, speaking, reading, and writing are taught in combination rather than as isolated strands, on the grounds that this mirrors how language is actually used in the real world (Oxford, 2001).

While the integration of skills has received a high score, the quality of some of the individual activities varies. For instance, the instructors have shown less favorable views on the reading exercises of the coursebooks in terms of their sufficiency and alignment with the students' skills and interests. Ensuring that the coursebook's content aligns with the students' interests is important given that it could have an impact on how well they understand it (Arikan, 2008). Thus, if the reading passages in the Unlock series do not sufficiently reflect topics relevant to Saudi university students, instructors may need to supplement the coursebook with additional reading materials chosen specifically for their students' academic interests and proficiency levels, rather than relying solely on the textbook's built-in selection.

5.2.3 Practices and Ventures Domain

The EFL instructors offered mostly positive views on the practices and ventures domain. Although the coursebook contains several exercises that promote student involvement and critical thinking, the results also indicate that there is space for improvement in terms of creating engaging activities that are suitable for the students' skill level. This aligns with findings of Abdala (2022) who also made similar findings that the activities in the Unlock series do not match the general learning styles of the students. Similarly, central coursebooks also have the tendency to not include activities that align with students' needs, and this issue can be addressed by the teacher through modifying the materials to suit their specific contexts (Ayyıldız, 2021). As pointed out by Çiçek and Yavuz (2024), creating a more efficient and understandable learning environment requires considering students' needs and interests.

5.2.4 Cultural Components Domain

In terms of the representation of Saudi traditions and customs, the coursebook series received a lower score. This lower score shows findings that are similar to the ones made by Ta'amneh (2019) and Al Houssawi (2016), who both pointed out similar problems with global coursebooks that hardly include local culture. Aside from these studies, this also appears to be a common issue in Saudi higher education due to the nature of the EFL coursebooks that universities use, which tend to be imported from western countries, and thus they lack the representation of not only the local culture, but also Islamic culture (Alshammari, 2015). In other words, instead of being made for a specific culture, these types of coursebooks tend to be sold and distributed to various different areas, which makes them focus much less on the local culture (Al Houssawi, 2016). Similarly, the issue also extends to the coursebook's alignment with tenets of Islam, possibly for the same reasons mentioned previously.

6. Conclusion

Taken together, the findings reveal a clear pattern across the six domains. The two external evaluation domains, pragmatic factors and structure and arrangement, received the highest mean scores, indicating that instructors found the Unlock series most convincing at the level of physical presentation, organization, and usability. Among the internal evaluation domains, scores declined steadily from linguistic components, through language capabilities and practices and ventures, down to cultural elements, which was the lowest-rated domain overall. This downward trend suggests that while instructors are satisfied with the coursebook's linguistic content and its development of language skills, their reservations grow stronger the closer the evaluation gets to how well the material reflects students' own cultural and social context. This suggests that while the Unlock series can reasonably continue to serve as a core teaching resource, it cannot be adopted without adaptation. Its structural and linguistic quality means instructors do not need to abandon it, but its cultural and pedagogical limitations mean it cannot be used as a stand-alone resource either.

Thus, the implications of this are twofold. First, at the classroom level, instructors should be prepared and supported in supplementing the coursebook with additional reading materials and activities that better match their students' proficiency levels and interests, rather than relying solely on its built-in content. Second, and more significantly, at the institutional level, the persistently low representation of local culture and Islamic values signals a need for coordinated curricular intervention, such as a supplementary cultural module, rather than leaving this gap to be addressed inconsistently by individual instructors. In this sense, the study reinforces a broader principle in EFL material evaluation: that globally produced coursebooks, however well-designed, require deliberate localization to be fully effective in serving the linguistic and cultural needs of Saudi learners.

6.1 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted at a single institution, KAU, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other Saudi universities that may use the Unlock series under different institutional or student conditions. Second, the study relied exclusively on instructors' perspectives; it did not incorporate the views of students, who are the direct users of the coursebook and whose perceptions may differ from those of their instructors. Third, the descriptive quantitative design, while well-suited to measuring the direction and strength of instructors' evaluative perceptions, does not explain why certain domains, such as cultural elements, were rated lower than others; a purely numerical approach cannot capture the reasoning behind instructors' responses.

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