

## BOOK REVIEW

Book: **CHOICES** (PRE-INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS' BOOK)

Authors: **Michael Harris and Anna Sikorzynska**

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By San Shwe Baw

### OVERVIEW

CHOICES (Pre-Intermediate Students' Book) is an English textbook intended to develop the four language skills, grammar and vocabulary of the students at the pre-intermediate level. Though no written explanation of the aim of the book can be seen anywhere in the book, a careful study of the three content pages is enough to help an observer notice both the layout of the book and its aim as clearly as he may be able to understand them from a written explanation. Lessons are designed based on twelve thematic modules, through which the language and skills the students are intended to learn are taught to them.

The student book consists of;

- Topic Talk
- Grammar Skills
- Writing Workshop
- Speaking Workshop
- Text Builder

- Grammar Practice
- Language Review
- Listening
- Culture Choice
- Skills Builder
- Language Choice booklet

### REVIEW

The ways the activities are designed are not very complicated, and yet very effective. Each section of the textbook mentioned above will be critically examined in this part.

Topic talk, which can be seen at the opening page of each thematic unit, introduces the students the module topic through guided choice and a listening activity. The activities are intended to stimulate the learners to think about the theme of the lesson to be studied. Doubtlessly, this section prepares the student to study the unit with some sort of expectation.

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However, it looks a bit odd to see this lesson at the beginning of each unit. It creates an impression that the students are made to learn the lesson without a warm up. The actual warm up appears at the next page, which does its purpose of motivating the students to think about the topic to be studied. This 'Topic talk', therefore, may benefit the students better if it is conveniently mixed with the 'Warm up' section inside.

From the design of the grammar activities, it can be assumed that the book intends to teach grammatical skills to the students from context (i.e., through written and spoken texts). However, it is also found out that the tradition method of teaching grammar is also not altogether neglected: we can still find out the explanations of some grammatical rules whenever doing so is felt necessary. In this way, the students are able to learn grammar both from the communicative and traditional approaches to language teaching.

As language teachers, we often see our students wearing a blank look when they are assigned to write about something. 'Writing workshop' in this book takes this ugly scene permanently away from our writing classes. Throughout the textbook, the students are trained to write different types of writings such as invitation, email, formal letter, postcard, short note and so on, but no student writes anything until or unless they are well grounded in the format to be employed through step by step explanations and preliminary exercises. These exercises and explanations come under what is called 'Text Builder'.

Speaking workshop, on the other hand, encourages the students to speak the way

we naturally do. All of us do a lot of listening before we finally learn to speak. Following this trend, 'Speaking workshop' provides the students with sufficient input in the form of listening before they are asked to speak, helping them to talk in a meaningful way.

The textbook, as a whole, contains a lot of language forms for the students to study. So, it is thoughtful of the textbook writers to include 'Language review', a section for self assessment, which appears every other module to give the students revision exercises and further practice.

The most effective help comes from 'Skills builder', which gives the students support with strategies and language while doing listening, reading, writing and communicative activities. The instructions and explanations in this sections are so helpful that it even takes away some of the teacher's burden, while facilitating the learning process at the same time.

Having a special section called 'Culture choice' makes the textbook unique. In this section, the students are introduced to great events, stories and songs in the target culture. This cultural input comes either in the form of written texts or audio CD. Occasionally, the students are also given a chance to relate their own culture with those in the target culture. Since language and culture are two inseparable things, the inclusion of this section can boost the cultural awareness in the students.

The textbook conveniently ends with an attachment of a language choice booklet at the back cover, which gives the students further practice with vocabulary and grammar, something that must remain with

the students at the end of the course.

To sum up, CHOICES (Pre-Intermediate Students' Book) is a resourceful book both for the teacher and the students. However, any school that is going to use this book as their prescribed English textbook may need to allocate sufficient class hours as it will take a considerable amount of time to digest the whole book. To judge the suitability of this book in English classes according to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), the learners need to be at B1 level to study this book. They will need to be able to understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, leisure, etc. Combining contemporary, cultural and educational topics with a wide range of activities involving students' imagination and creativity and their international cultural awareness, Choices meets the challenge of motivating older teenagers and also gives teachers the power to adapt to their classrooms.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

This textbook is well-designed as well as well-planned. However, the activities in the book seem to be indicating the fact that the book can benefit the students only from schools where English is used as a medium of instructions. So, the schools that use the students' mother tongue to teach English should start using English once this book is introduced. Since the learners may be helped to become more proficient in the target language only with the constant practice, it is best if all the lessons in the book could be covered within the academic year. Therefore, if necessary, more class hours should be added into to the English program. Otherwise, it will be like a patient who cannot fully recover from a symptom due to the scanty dosage given to him.