

# AN EVALUATION OF THE TEXTBOOK “NEW ENGLISH FILE” UNDER TEACHERS’ AND STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES AT THANH DO UNIVERSITY

Dinh Thi Thanh Huyen<sup>1</sup>  
Nguyen Thi Van Anh<sup>2</sup>

Trường Đại học Thành Đô

Email: <sup>1</sup>[dtthuyen@thanhdowni.edu.vn](mailto:dtthuyen@thanhdowni.edu.vn); <sup>2</sup>[ntvanh@thanhdowni.edu.vn](mailto:ntvanh@thanhdowni.edu.vn)

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## Abstract:

*This article aimed to identify the strengths and weakness of the course book New English File by Clive Oxenden, Christina Latham- Koenig, and Paul Seligson published by Oxford University Press after its two-year use for non-major post- graduate students at Thanh Do University. Data were collected from the questionnaire responses from three teachers and sixteen students, and the semi-structure interview results of the teachers. Based on the collected data, the authors performed thorough analysis and produced recommendations for a better English teaching and learning using the course book.*

**Key words:** Textbook; New English file; Textbook evaluation; English teaching and learning.

## 1. Introduction

Textbooks and instruction materials have always played an essential role in ESL/ EFL classrooms and programs as well as in learning English successfully. According to Tomlinson (1998), a textbook is a core material for teaching that provides as much knowledge as possible, which is essential to students during the course, including work on grammar, vocabulary, function, and four language skills. As a result, textbooks are valuable in language classrooms because they serve several functions in the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum and aid in the process of language teaching and learning (Ahmadi and Derakhshan, 2016). However, it is also noticeable that there is no single book that can satisfy all learners’ needs (Alemi & Mesbah, 2013) so selecting an appropriate textbook for a specific EFL/ESL teaching and learning objective and context is

very crucial for language instructors. It is, therefore, vital and necessary to carry out textbook evaluation in the process of teaching and learning.

In this paper, the textbook “New English File” was evaluated to find out its strengths and weakness on an EFL context at Thanh Do university. Since then some recommendations were given to help enhance an effective teaching and learning.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The role of textbook evaluation

According to researchers such as O’Neil (1982), Hoang (2012), and Ahmadi & Derakhshan (2016), textbooks are a magical tool that gives learners a sense of system, cohesion and progress to help them acquire consistency and continuation. They assist in solving problems by providing opportunities for students to use the target language in their learning process (Grant, 1987). Due to their

crucial role in language teaching and learning, the selection of textbook, as a result, usually involves a textbook evaluation process (Awasthi, 2006; Tomlinson, 2003).

The evaluation of book is stated as an attempt to measure the potential value of textbooks (Tomlinson, 2011). It involves making assessment about the takebook effects on their users including learners, instructors and administrators.

Ellis (1997) points out two main reasons for carrying out materials evaluation listed as follow: the need of choosing the most suitable material for a particular situation, and the need of evaluating materials to determine whether or not the materials work effectively in teaching and learning process.

It can be exposed that language instructors and learners can enjoy benefits for their teaching and learning process while evaluating textbooks. Alemi & Mesbah (2013), for instance, conducted a study with the aim to evaluate Top Notch series widely used in Iranian EFL contexts. According to the findings, the series obtain some benefits for language learners such as encouraging the students to communicate successfully by offering numerous opportunities for interaction, and demonstrating culture-based aspects through lively and authentic unbiased visual images.

In 2005, Liz evaluated a university level textbook used in a language course in a university in South Korea to know how the textbook can match students' and teachers' requirements. Having analyzed the data, the researcher found that in spite of a few reservations and shortcomings, this particular textbook was relatively compatible with the university's language-learning aims (intermediate communication skills) and suitable for small, homogeneous, co-ed. classes of senior Korean students.

On the other hand, Nguyen (2010) carried out an in-depth examination of Market Leader using for the first-year students at Hai Phong University to get evaluative feedback from the teachers and students. The finding indicated that there were some dissatisfactions in using the material meanwhile points out some suggestions for further study.

Obviously, textbook evaluation can uncover the merits and deficiencies of textbooks in general and their suitability in a specific context. It helps teachers understand the textbook so that they can adjust their teaching to meet learners' needs and the course outcome.

According to Nguyen and Huynh (2018)'s study, Life Pre - intermediate was rated as good one reflected in its diverse content, grammatical structure and in listening, speaking, reading and writing activities. The study also implied that teacher can provide extra study techniques in listening, speaking, reading and writing to enhance the students' learning process.

Likewise, Nguyen (2020) identified teachers' and students' perspective of Network Get Connected used for first-year students at a private university context. The responses from 111 first-year students and 6 teachers of English showed that the coursebook is suitable to the need of the majority of students. However, teachers should design various tasks for each skill in order to help students practice their English.

One additional benefit of textbook evaluation was mentioned by Hutchinson in 1987. Teacher can enjoy benefits for their professional development as it provides teachers with information to analyze their own presuppositions about the nature of language and learning.

In terms of administration, textbook evaluation, Moreover, enables the administrators and teachers to differentiate between the available textbooks in the market, establish a clear distinction between a great number of textbooks, and obtain an overview of the textbook market. (Sheldon, 1988)

In conclusion, textbook evaluation plays a vital and necessary role in teaching and learning English process (Cunningsworth, 1995; Sabzalipour & Koosha, 2014, Ahmadi and Derakhshan, 2016).

## ***2.2. The types and criteria of textbook evaluation***

Cunningsworth (1995), McGrath (2002), and Tomlinson (2003) classify textbook evaluation into three types as follow: pre-use,

in-use and post-use (Cunningsworth, 1995; McGrath, 2002; and Tomlinson, 2003).

Pre-use evaluation often focuses on the prediction of potential values to select a coursebook for a particular class (Tomlinson, 2003)

In-use evaluation is designed to assess the appropriateness of the course book against a specific requirement including the learner’s objectives, the learner’s background, the resources available, etc. (Cunningsworth, 1995).

Finally, post-use evaluation is designed to access the suitability of the coursebook after implementing. Post-use evaluation, according to Ellis (1998) and Tomlinson (2003), is considered the most valuable as it can measure the actual effect of the material on the users.

Moreover, Hutchison and Water (1987) emphasize that the decision in material evaluation is more effective by using a systematic check of all the important variables. Accordingly, the checklist of materials evaluation consists of items which are related to subjective and objective analysis as below:

The first section of checklist is questions about learners related to their age, sex, nationalities, study or work specialism, language background and interests.

The aims of the materials and the course are displayed in the next parts, which helps learners enhance language skills. Therefore, the objectives’ and aims’ satisfaction are needed to evaluate in the language course.

The content part uses questions to measure the material’s content such as: language descriptions, language elements, proportion of work, micro-skills, macro-skills, text types, level of knowledge, topics, organization, or content sequence.

Methodology section consists of questions about theory of learning, learner’s attitudes, kinds of exercises, teaching-learning techniques, aids, guidance/support for teaching and the flexibility of materials.

This research used the evaluation checklist adapted from Hutchison & Water’s (1987) to shed more light upon the strengths and weaknesses of New English File after two-year use.

### 3. Methodology

This study uses both quantitative and qualitative research method to identify the strengthen and weakness of New English File. The instruments for collecting data in this study are survey questionnaire and interview which were strongly believed to help the researcher have reliable and valuable information for the evaluation.

### 4. Research results

#### 4.1. The evaluation of the textbook’s aim

In general, most of teachers and students felt pleased at the course book’s aim.

**Table 1. Students’ and teachers’ opinions of the aims of the textbook**

Criteria		Percent of responses				
		1	2	3	4	5
The textbook helps students learn basic grammar and vocabulary in daily life.	T %				33	67
	S %	25	0	6	50	6
The textbook helps students improve listening and speaking skills.	T %				33	67
	S %	0	0	6	44	50
The textbook helps students improve reading and writing skills.	T %				33	67
	S %	0	0	6	44	50
Students can practice speaking by using real conversations in the textbook.	T %				67	33
	S %	0	0	25	69	6
Students can expand their knowledge of communication, culture and team work.	T %		33	67		
	S %	0	0	0	50	50
The textbook helps students improve pronunciation	T %		33	67		
	S %	0	0	0	50	50

From the figure in Table 1, 100% of teachers agreed that the textbook helped students learn basic grammar and vocabulary in daily life. Meanwhile, students had different responses: agree (56%), neutral (3%) and disagree (26%). For the next questions, not only students but also teachers agreed that the textbook helped students improve their reading, writing listening, and speaking. However, teachers didn’t really agree that the

textbook helped students enhance their pronunciation as well as their knowledge of communication, culture and team work. In fact, students' pronunciation was slowly improved, commented by teachers, the reason for which is that there were not many tasks or activities related to pronunciation in the textbook. Similarly, there was little knowledge of culture in the textbook. Thus, teachers using this material need to make adaptation by designing more tasks and exercises in order to help students have environment as well as activities to practice more their pronunciation and expand their culture knowledge. Students, on the other hand, expressed their agreement that this textbook matched their goals of improving pronunciation and broadening their knowledge of communication, culture and team work.

**4.2. The textbook's content**

**4.2.1. The difficulty of textbook**

The level difficulty of the textbook's content was evaluated in Figure 1 and Figure 2 according to students' and teachers' perspectives.

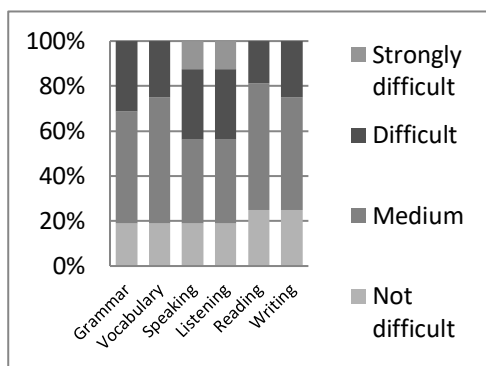


Figure 1. Students' opinions about the difficulty of the textbook's content.

According to Figure 1, most students indicated that the content of New English File was medium and not difficult for them except listening and speaking skills, which was in the same line as the teacher's. 43.7% of students demonstrated that they had difficulty in listening and speaking while only 18.8% found them not difficult. In addition, 33.3% teachers pointed out that the practice of listening and speaking represented a challenge to students, especially to those aged over 45 (Figure 2). According to teachers and students, students still struggled with listening and

speaking practice due to their lack of vocabulary, poor pronunciation and limited background knowledge or ideas. However, the contents of the textbook, in general are quite suitable for students. It's the difficulty in listening and speaking that enforced the students to conquering the challenge and make students to learn and explore the language.

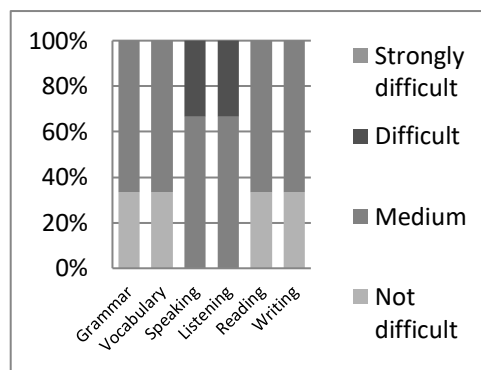


Figure 2. Teachers' opinions about the difficulty of the textbook's content.

In order to investigate the situation clearly, the follow-up interview was given to three teachers. It is revealed that the reasons that made the book quite difficult are teachers and students didn't have enough time for teaching new vocabulary carefully in the listening section as well as practice pronunciation or prepare ideas for speaking. Moreover, they didn't have enough time for their students to practice and listen the audio file carefully in class and checking students' speaking error as well.

**4.2.2. Linguistics characteristics**

**Table 2. Teachers and students' opinions about the linguistics covered in the textbook**

Criteria		Percent of responses			
		A lot	Ade-quate	Not much	Not at all
Grammar	T%	0	100	0	0
	S%	31.2	56.3	12.5	0
Vocabulary	T%	0	100	0	0
	S%	25	62.5	12.5	0
Pronunciation	T%	0	33.3	66.7	0
	S%	25	62.5	12.5	0

In terms of grammar, all the teachers indicated that the textbook provided “adequate” of grammar items. On the contrary, 12.5 % of the students chose “Not much”, and the rest chose “Adequate” and “A lot”. Most of the students (81.1%) and 33.3% teachers agreed that the material afforded with “adequate” of grammar items. Moreover, 66.7% teachers and 13.5% students showed their opinions that the grammar covered “not much” in the textbook. It can be seen clearly that the proportion of grammar here is quite appropriate to teachers and students’ expectation.

Secondly, relating to vocabulary, 25% students claimed the vocabulary covered in this book was too much for them to learn whereas there was no teacher expressing their opinion that the vocabulary covered in this textbook “a lot”. However, the majority of students (62.5%) and 100% teachers agreed that the proportion of vocabulary was adequate in the textbook and only 12.5% of the students said that the textbook didn’t cover enough vocabulary. Therefore, this textbook generally satisfied both teachers and students with the ranges of new words.

In the pronunciation section, students indicated the same rate as one in the section of vocabulary while teachers had different points of view. Most of the teacher (66.7%) pointed out that the proportion of pronunciation covered in this material was not much. According to them, it was necessary to have more pronunciation activities in the class.

In conclusion, as shown Table 2, the linguistics characteristics covered in this coursebook seem to be suitable for teachers and students at my university.

4.2.3. Skills

**Table 3. Teachers and students’ opinions about the skills covered in the textbook.**

Criteria	Percent of responses				
		A lot	Adequate	Not much	Not at all
Listening	T%	0	33.3	66.7	0
	S%	12.5	81.3	6.2	0
Speaking	T%	0	33.3	66.7	0
	S%	6.2	87.5	6.3	0
Reading	T%	0	100	0	0
	S%	12.5	81.3	6.2	0
Writing	T%	0	66.7	33.3	0
	S%	12.5	81.3	6.2	0

When being asked about the language skills in the textbook, students shared their same ideas in listening, writing and reading skills. Most of students indicated that the proportion of listening, writing and reading skills were adequate in this book (81.3%). Conversely, teachers revealed the different opinions about two groups of skill. Firstly, most of teacher (66.7%) surprisingly voted “Not much” for listening and speaking, and there was no one thought speaking spend a lot of time. In terms of reading and writing, on the contrary, only 6.2% teacher expressed the reading and writing skill covered in the textbook “not much” and 81.3 % teacher said that they were adequate.

In summary, basing on the author’s experience, the textbook was considered lacked of speaking and listening tasks and exercises to master students’ skills. Hence, teachers need to give more time and activities for students to practice these two skills in class.

4.2.4. Topic

In New English File, all topics are familiar with students’ life such as subjects, weather, classes, etc. In addition, there are some practical English topics of real-life situations such as at the airport, or at the conference hotel, etc. In summary, the textbook has suitable topics and contents in order to enhance students’ learning in terms of speaking and communication skills.

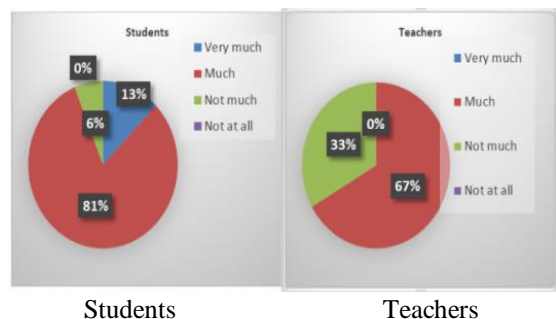


Figure 4. Teachers and students’ evaluation on topics.

In order to improve communicative skills in daily conversations, the topic is one of the most important factors to the success of teaching and learning the textbook’s content. As can be seen in Figure 4, all the participants agreed that the topics in the

textbook are familiar with their real life and they satisfied with these topics displayed in this evaluated textbook.

#### 4.2.5. Evaluation on the students' progress

As can be seen clearly in Figure 5 below, most of the teachers (66.7%) thought that their students improved much their English skills after learning the course. Only one teacher (33.3%) evaluated that their students made progress not much after the course. Meanwhile, 81.2% students said that they enhance their language proficiency much. Among these students joined in the survey, 12.5% of them believed that the course helped them be better than their learning in the past. Only one student in the survey were disappointed at the positive changes of their learning after the course.

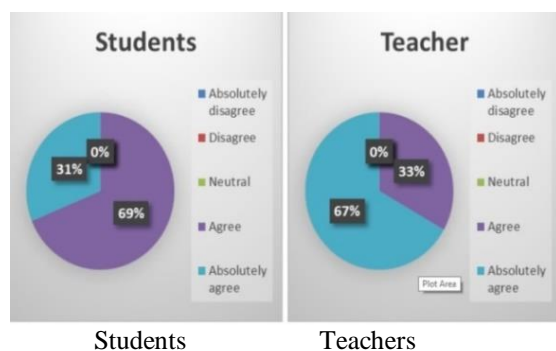


Figure 5. Evaluation on the students' progress

As can be seen clearly in Figure 5, most of the teachers (66.7%) thought that their students improved much their English skills after learning the course. Only one teacher (33.3%) evaluated that their students made progress not much after the course. Meanwhile, 81.2% students said that they enhance their language proficiency much. Among these students joined in the survey, 12.5% of them believed that the course helped them be better than their learning in the past. Only one student in the survey was disappointed at the positive changes of their learning after the course.

### 4.3. Teaching methodology

Although the methodology requirements in the course were not mentioned in the official syllabus, the methodology appropriateness to the course's requirements was evaluated by analyzing the materials in categories of tasks,

guidance for doing task and learning and teaching aids.

#### 4.3.1. Teaching methodology

##### 4.3.1.1. Types of tasks

In terms of task classification, all participants were asked to evaluate according to tasks or activities of language elements and skills.

The evaluated tasks or activities of language elements includes giving the right tense of the verbs, rearranging the word orders, gap-filling, changing the word form, using grammar to practice speaking, speaking out loud, reading with rhythm and intonation, and writing letters/ emails/ composition.

In addition, the tasks or activities of skills were evaluated according to the variety of tasks/exercises of each skill.

The results revealed that the textbook gives diversity of tasks and activities for grammar such as rearranging the words orders in activities 3a, 1A on Pages 5, and giving the right tense and gap-filling in most of the units.

Tasks for speaking skills also were designed diversely in types through the textbook for example working in pairs/groups found in most of units. Besides, role - play activities were asked to practice in all Practical English.

Similarly, by the end of each unit, students spent time doing writing task. In this part, students got familiar with some kinds of writing like letters, emails, or compositions beside question answering or sentence rearrangement.

The responses from the students showed that most of tasks or activities of skills were made use of in the class. However, according to teachers (13.3%), the textbooks didn't include a variety of tasks and exercise of listening skills and they had to modify the tasks to be suitable for the students' level.

##### 4.3.1.2. Guidance for doing tasks

A majority of the respondents expressed their agreement with practicing speaking, listening, reading and writing activities at first, then working in pairs and in groups. In general, the textbook supported effectively not only teachers' teaching but also students' learning process in term of guidance for doing task. However, it is vital that teachers

constantly need to change and adapt the material to suit students' knowledge.

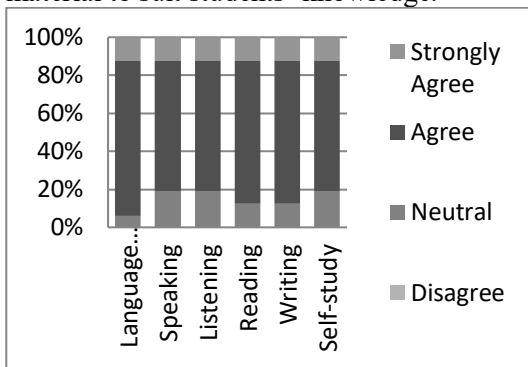


Figure 5. Students' evaluation on the guidance for doing tasks.

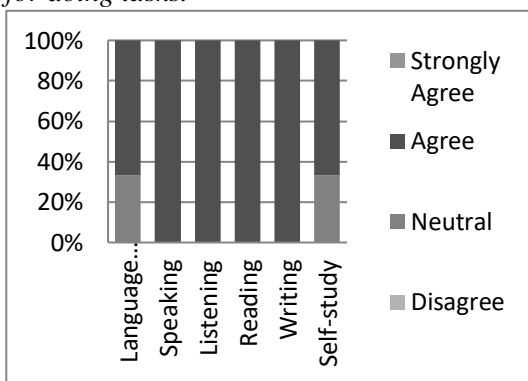


Figure 6. Teachers' evaluation on the guidance for doing tasks.

**5. Discussion**

The results from the collected revealed the pros and cons of the textbooks. In general, the textbook was probably satisfied both teachers and students' expectation. However, there were still some shortcomings that should be mentioned. These current situations can result from the textbook itself, or the way the teacher complemented, or even the learners as well.

Analyzing the findings, three teachers who directly participated in this survey have revealed several explanations and solutions for future improvement of the textbook.

First of all, teachers should understand their students' needs and interest in terms of the students' level, learning styles and their expectation with this course. Thus, teachers will find suitable ways to motivate their students to conquer the language.

Second, to overcome some shortcomings of the textbook, teacher should draw up learning strategies based on students' need, learning styles and ability.

Besides, despite the lack of tips or learning strategies in the textbook, the teachers with teaching and learning experience should share their learning strategies by giving clear instructions or delivering handouts with necessary tips for students.

Furthermore, teachers always need to be flexible in the way of amending the textbook in order to make it suitable for students' ability. In order to have appropriate modification, teachers ought to analyze the textbook before using and determine whether or not the textbook need be changed, edited or modified. As a result, teachers will design suitable lesson plans, activities and strategies for students to develop their learning.

**6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, New English File was evaluated to be a good textbook with diverse activities of language elements in spite of some tiny limitations. The textbook first is quite relevant to students' needs in terms of topics, grammar and vocabulary and seems to be appealing to both teachers and students because of its reading, speaking, listening and writing sections. Moreover, most respondents have positive feedback on the textbook in terms of meeting the students' needs and the program's outcome.

The recommendation to get better use of this book in the future is that it needs various tasks for each skill especially listening in order to help students practice their language. That's why teachers be encouraged to adapt their existing practices and bring the supplementary materials to the classroom to improve their teaching process.

However, the number of post-graduate students is not large so this research was conducted within a small sample, which becomes a limitation of the study. Hence, the future researcher should a larger of raters to increase the validity of the results.

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## ĐÁNH GIÁ GIÁO TRÌNH NEW ENGLISH FILE DƯỚI QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA HỌC VIÊN VÀ GIẢNG VIÊN TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC THÀNH ĐÔ

**Đinh Thị Thanh Huyền<sup>1</sup>**  
**Nguyễn Thị Vân Anh<sup>2</sup>**

Trường Đại học Thành Đô

Email: <sup>1</sup>[dtthuyen@thanhdowni.edu.vn](mailto:dtthuyen@thanhdowni.edu.vn); <sup>2</sup>[ntvanh@thanhdowni.edu.vn](mailto:ntvanh@thanhdowni.edu.vn)

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**Tóm tắt:** Bài báo được viết với mục đích nhằm chỉ ra những điểm mạnh và điểm yếu của giáo trình New English file - Pre-Intermediate do các tác giả Clive Oxenden, Christina Latham-Koenig và Paul Seligson viết được xuất bản bởi nhà xuất bản đại học Oxford sau hai năm được đưa vào để giảng dạy cho các học viên cao học khối không chuyên ngữ tại trường Đại học Thành Đô. Bài nghiên cứu sử dụng dữ liệu được thu thập từ kết quả khảo sát của ba giảng viên và mười sáu học viên cao học cũng như kết quả phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc được thu thập từ các giảng viên giảng dạy. Dựa vào kết quả dữ liệu thu được, các tác giả đã thực hiện một phân tích kỹ lưỡng và đưa ra các khuyến nghị để việc dạy và học được tốt hơn khi sử dụng cuốn sách này.

**Từ khóa:** Giáo trình; New English file; Đánh giá giáo trình; Dạy và học tiếng Anh.