

TEXTBOOK EVALUATION AND ADAPTATION: A CLOSER LOOK AT “GREAT WRITING 3” FOR SECOND-YEAR ENGLISH-MAJOR STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS - TECHNOLOGY FOR INDUSTRIES

ĐÁNH GIÁ SỰ PHÙ HỢP CỦA GIÁO TRÌNH “GREAT WRITING 3”
DÀNH CHO SINH VIÊN NĂM THỨ HAI NGÀNH NGÔN NGỮ ANH
TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC KINH TẾ - KỸ THUẬT CÔNG NGHIỆP
VÀ MỘT SỐ ĐỀ XUẤT SỬ DỤNG SÁCH HIỆU QUẢ

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Abstract: In recent years, evaluating textbooks has been one of the most striking educational tasks not only to ensure training quality but also to enhance the effectiveness of using textbooks. This article presents an evaluation of the textbook “Great Writing 3” that is used for second-year English-major students at University of Economics – Technology for Industries (UNETI). The results indicate that the textbook is essentially relevant to the training objectives and the university’s teaching-learning context. Additionally, based on the results of the evaluation, implications for better use of the textbook are proposed, which could improve the quality of English learning and teaching in the EFL context, and achieve the learning outcome according to the six-level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework for Vietnam.

Keywords: Evaluation, textbook, Great Writing 3.

Tóm tắt: Những năm gần đây, đánh giá giáo trình luôn là một trong những công tác giáo dục nổi bật nhằm đảm bảo chất lượng đào tạo và nâng cao hiệu quả của việc sử dụng giáo trình. Nghiên cứu này được tiến hành nhằm đánh giá sự phù hợp của giáo trình “Great Writing 3” dành cho sinh viên năm thứ hai ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh tại Trường Đại học Kinh tế - Kỹ thuật Công nghiệp. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy giáo trình cơ bản đáp ứng được mục tiêu của chương trình đào tạo cũng như nhu cầu học tập của sinh viên ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh về việc xây dựng và phát triển kỹ năng viết. Đây cũng là cơ sở để đề xuất đưa ra các gợi ý sử dụng cho việc hiệu chỉnh và sử dụng giáo trình nhằm nâng cao chất lượng môn học, đáp ứng chuẩn đầu ra theo Khung năng lực ngoại ngữ 6 bậc dùng cho Việt Nam.

Từ khóa: Đánh giá, giáo trình, Great Writing 3.

1. INTRODUCTION

In learning EFL, writing is considered one of the most difficult skills for a learner, especially to master academic writing. The difficulty is due to the need to generate and organize ideas using appropriate vocabulary,

sentence, and paragraph organization and to turn such ideas into readable text (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Since 2020, “Great Writing 3”, which is in line with the “Great Writing” series published by the National Geographic Learning, has been chosen to help students at

UNETI write better sentences, paragraphs, and essays, develop and master academic writing skills. “Great Writing 3” is the main textbook that is used for second-year English-major students; thus, it is believed that they need to achieve the output standard of level 4 according to the six-level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework for Vietnam. In the textbook, the teaching and learning process focus on the basic elements of paragraphs, the connections between these paragraphs and longer essays, and the introduction to essay writing using various rhetorical patterns. This text contains a wide variety of extensive practical exercises and activities in both paragraph and essay writing at the high-intermediate level.

According to Mukundan, Nimehchisalem, and Hajimohammadi (2011), textbooks can be seen as central to teaching and learning, and the quality of the textbook is also a determining factor in improving the quality of language activity. Therefore, a question is whether “Great Writing 3” meets the expected outcome of the targeted level. As a matter of fact, no “textbook is perfect” for all contexts. Thus, an attempt to critically evaluate “Great Writing 3” is crucial to formulate the principles for its quality improvement and further adaptation. With the above-mentioned concerns, the study “Textbook evaluation: a closer look at “Great Writing 3” for second-year English-major students at University of Economics - Technology for Industries” has come into conception with the main aim of investigating the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook and their compatibility with the intended learning. From that, some suggestions are going to be proposed to promote the effective uses of the material to help students to achieve the level 4-oriented output standards.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to Tomlinson (1998), a textbook is a book including work on grammar, vocabulary, functions, and the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, which provides the core material for a course.

Textbook evaluation is essential for the improvement of a language course as it helps to identify particular strengths and weaknesses of the materials in use. Varied concepts of materials evaluation have been formulated. Dudley (1998) argued, “Evaluation is a whole process which begins with determining what information to gather and end with bringing about the change in the current activities or influencing future ones”. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) defined evaluation as a matching process designed to establish the degree of match between the needs and available solutions. It attempts to assess the value and suitability of materials. In summary, though researchers have their viewpoints, they still agree that materials evaluation is a process of collecting data, giving judgments based on collected data, and most importantly, it must identify whether the materials are relevant to the training objectives of a curriculum. The results of evaluation normally embrace actions of changes.

Concerning types of evaluation, Cunningsworth (1984) and McGrath (2002) divide into three types: pre-use, in-use, and post-use evaluation, of which post-use evaluation refers to an assessment of a textbook’s fitness throughout continual use. According to Tomlinson, evaluation of this kind can be “the most valuable as it can measure the actual effect of the material on the users”. Based on the data analysis, evaluators can make reliable decisions about

the use, adaptation, or replacement of the materials. Concerning methods of evaluation, researchers have classified into three primary zones: the impressionistic method, checklist method, and in-depth method. The impressionistic method is to gain an impression of a book by looking rather than more carefully at representative features or more specific features such as the treatment of particular language elements (Cunningsworth, 1984). McGrath (2002) argued, "A checklist is likely to need tailoring to suit a particular context, and this can involve a good deal more than simply deleting checklist items which are applicable". The in-depth method consists of a focus on specific features, close analysis of one or more extracts, or the examination of two units using predetermined questions.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Methods

The study employed the descriptive research model to find out respondents' perceptions of the suitability of the textbook "Great Writing 3" for second-year English-major students and the course's intended learning outcome at UNETI.

3.2. Participants

In reference to finding out how well the textbook matches the training objectives, five academic writing teachers at UNETI's Faculty of Foreign Languages were chosen. All of the participants have over 5-year experience in teaching writing. Their perceptions help to propose adjustments to enhance the use of "Great Writing 3" as well as the learning-teaching quality of the course at UNETI. Besides, this study also involved 20 second-year English-major students of the mentioned program. The twenty students were

chosen randomly, and all passed the course "Writing 3". The results from the data analysis reflect the evaluation of the suitability of the textbook for the target students.

3.3. Instrument

In this textbook analysis, the writer used the Textbook Evaluation Checklist, which elicits the criteria of a textbook for an English course. The "Textbook Evaluation Checklist" was adapted from the textbook evaluation checklist developed by Mukundan, Nimehchisalem, and Hajimohammadi (2011). The checklist covers two major categories, namely general attributes and learning content, in which there were 31 questions dealing with the evaluated textbook. For the statements in the checklist, a Likert -type of equal range was used. The statements in the inventory have been labelled as; "Completely Agree (5)", "Agree (4)", "Partly Agree (3)", "Disagree (2)", and "Completely Disagree (1)". In order to guarantee the reliability of the data, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also done among the respondents and the researcher.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data of this study were gathered from the checklist distribution to 5 writing teachers at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and 20 second-year English-major students of UNETI. The criteria in the textbook evaluation checklist were divided into two major categories: general attributes and learning-teaching content. The general attributes cover the book concerning syllabus and curriculum, methodology, suitability to learners, physical and utilitarian attributes, and supplementary materials. The learning-teaching content covers general aspects, academic writing aspects, vocabulary, grammar, and exercises.

4.1. General Attributes

The first major category that was evaluated in the textbook entitled “Great Writing 3” is general attributes. In this part, five aspects were evaluated. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Textbook Evaluation in Terms of General Attributes

No.	Criteria	Score				
		5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
A.	The book concerning syllabus and curriculum					
1	It matches the specifications of the syllabus	28	72	0	0	0
B.	Methodology					
2	Activities can be exploited fully and can embrace the various methodologies in ELT	100	0	0	0	0
3	Activities can work well with methodologies in ELT	100	0	0	0	0
C.	Suitability to learners					
4	It is compatible with the background knowledge and level of students	4	64	32	0	0
5	It is culturally accessible to the learners	0	4	60	36	0
6	It is compatible with the needs of the learners	28	60	12	0	0
7	It is compatible with the interests of the learners	28	36	28	8	0
D.	Physical and utilitarian attributes					
8	Its layout is attractive	64	24	12	0	0
9	It indicates efficient use of text and visuals	4	48	48	0	0
E.	An efficient outlay of supplementary materials					
10	There is a teacher’s guide to aid the teacher	4	92	4	0	0

From table 1, it is seen that, of all respondents, 5 teachers and 2 students (28%) agreed with the statement that says about the suitability of

the textbook with the syllabus and curriculum, while 18 teachers and students (72%) agreed. Therefore, it is concluded that the textbook matches the syllabus and curriculum of the academic writing course.

The second aspect is methodology. There are two statements dealing with this aspect. The statements deal with the activities in the textbook whether or not can be exploited fully and can embrace the various methodologies in ELT, and whether activities can work well with methodologies in ELT. In both the first and the second statements, 100% of respondents completely agreed with the statements. It means that on this point (methodology), the textbook is excellent.

The third aspect is the textbook’s suitability for learners. This aspect covers four statements, i.e. the compatibility of the textbook with students’ background knowledge and level, the textbook accessibility of the culture to the learners, the textbook compatibility to the needs of learners, and the textbook compatibility to the interests of learners. The results show that one student (4%) of 25 teachers and students expressed his complete agreement with the first statement, 16 (64%) agreed, and 8 (32%) of them partly agreed. Then, for the second statement, 16 respondents (64%) agreed, and 9 (36%) of them did not. For the third and the fourth statements, almost participants agreed with the statements. Only two students expressed no interest (8%) in the content of the textbook. Therefore, the conclusion is that the aspect of textbook suitability to learners has good suitability to learners. The textbook not only introduces basic elements of paragraphs and shows the connections between these paragraphs and longer essays but also contains a wide variety of exercises

that offer practice in both working with the writing process and developing a final written product. These features help students understand the basis of paragraph writing and fulfill their needs.

The fourth aspect is the physical and utilitarian attributes. This aspect involves two statements. The first statement is whether or not its layout is attractive and the second one is whether or not it indicates efficient use of texts and visuals. The results reveal that 100% of respondents agreed with the first statement. While for the second statement, it was seen that one teacher (4%) totally agreed, 48% of teachers and students agreed and 48% of them partly agreed. In conclusion, it can be said that the textbook has good enough physical and utilitarian attributes, especially its layout.

The last or the fifth aspect of the general attributes is supplementary materials. There is only one statement proposed to the respondents dealing with this aspect. The statement is whether or not the textbook provides a teacher's guide to help the teacher in using the textbook. 100% of participants answered that there is a lot of information and suggestions in the Teachers' Book which can provide a teacher's guide.

4.2. The learning-teaching Content

The second major category that was evaluated in the textbook is learning-teaching content. In this part, five aspects were evaluated. They are general aspects (such as the move of the task, etc.), academic writing aspects, vocabulary, grammar, and exercise.

The first aspect that was evaluated in this part is general aspects. They deal with whether or not (1) tasks move from simple to complex; (2) task objectives are achievable; (3) cultural

sensitivities have been considered; (4) the language in the book is natural and real; (5) the material is up-to-date; (6) it covers a variety of topics in ELT; (7) It offers step-by-step guidelines for the writing process and products; and (8) the book covers materials of writing paragraphs and essays. The results show that for the first statement, 25 respondents completely agreed. The second statement was answered by respondents with the results that 44% of respondents completely agreed 52% agreed and 4% partly agreed with the statement. The next was replied with the results that 48% of respondents completely agreed and 32% agreed. There was only one student (4%) who partly agreed with the statement. Along with culture, images from "National Geographic" have been considered to connect learning to the greater world. However, there were 1 teacher and 3 students (16%) who showed negative judgments about cultural sensitivities. It is reasonable because language and culture are inherently inseparable. Some cultural patterns of the English language are unfamiliar to Vietnamese students, so it is quite hard for them to recognize these patterns. Then, the fourth statement was answered. It received 15 (60%) and 10 (40%) students' and teachers' agreement and total agreement, respectively. The fifth statement deals with the novelty of the material. All the teachers and students expressed their positive attitudes toward the statement. New and updated paragraphs and essays acted as springboards and models for writing. For the next one, most of the participants (96%) thought that the textbook has not covered a variety of ELT topics. The seventh statement deals with step-by-step provided guidelines for the writing process and products. 80% of

respondents agreed and 20% of them agreed with the statement. For the last aspect, all students agreed with the statement. Finally, it can be concluded that the textbook is good enough in terms of learning-teaching content. The textbook is relevant to the curriculum when it is used to teach academic writing courses in the terms of transitions from paragraphs to essays. All units feature clear step-by-step explanations, student writing models, meaningful practice tasks along with natural language. They focus much on the composing process, which meets the needs of high-intermediate students to master academic writing skills, especially longer essay writing. However, “Great Writing 3” also has some disadvantages. Although the words from the “Academic Word List” are highlighted in the “Brief Writer’s Handbook with Activities” and integrated into vocabulary activities, the textbook does not cover a variety of topics in ELT and all cultural sensitivities.

Table 2. Textbook Evaluation in Terms of The Learning-Teaching Content

No.	Criteria	Score				
		5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
A.	General					
1	Tasks move from simple to complex	100	0	0	0	0
2	Task objectives are achievable	44	52	4	0	0
3	Cultural sensitivities have been considered	48	32	4	16	0
4	The language in the book is natural and real	60	40	0	0	0
5	The material is up-to-date	8	80	12	0	0
6	It covers a variety of topics in ELT	0	0	4	76	20
7	It offers step-by-step guidelines for the writing process and products	80	20	0	0	0

No.	Criteria	Score				
		5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)
8	The book covers materials for writing paragraphs and essays	88	8	4	0	0
B. Academic Writing						
9	Tasks have achievable goals and take into consideration of learner	12	64	24	0	0
10	Models are provided for different genres	100	0	0	0	0
C. Vocabulary						
11	The load (number of new words in each lesson) is appropriate to the level	52	44	4	0	0
12	There is a good distribution (simple to complex) of vocabulary load across chapters and the whole book	4	56	40	0	0
13	Words are efficiently repeated and recycled across the book	0	72	28	0	0
D. Grammar						
14	The spread of grammar is achievable	32	68	0	0	0
15	The grammar is contextualized	20	40	28	12	0
16	Examples are interesting	4	60	20	16	0
17	Grammar is introduced explicitly	32	36	24	8	0
E. Exercises						
18	They have clear instructions	100	0	0	0	0
19	They are adequate	100	0	0	0	0
20	They help students who are under/over-achievers	0	76	24	0	0

The second aspect that was evaluated from the textbook is academic writing. This aspect reveals two statements. The first statement deals with the achievable goals of the tasks and whether or not it has been taken into consideration by learners. It received 64%, 12%, and 24% of participants’ agreement, total, and partly agreement. The second

statement deals with models of different genres provided by the textbook. All (100%) of the respondents completely agreed with the statement. In order to fulfill students' ability to write different kinds of paragraphs and essays, "Great Writing 3" offers a variety of example paragraphs and model essays. Each presents a rhetorical mode and provides editing activities. Many models are preceded by schema-building questions and followed by questions about the organization, grammatical structures, or other composition features. Additionally, the textbook also recommends some specific suggestions for writing different types of paragraphs, including how to write a good topic sentence, supporting details, and concluding sentences. This helps students to better understand the connections between these paragraphs and essays and easily move on to the creation of original essays. Therefore, it can be concluded that the textbook is very good in terms of academic writing aspects.

The third is the vocabulary aspect. There are 3 statements dealing with this aspect. The first statement is whether or not the load (number of new words in each lesson) is appropriate to the level. 52% completely agreed, 44% agreed and 4% partly agreed with this statement. Respondents expressed that a list of words that appeared in texts and the "Academic Word List" make the needs of level 4-oriented output standards. The second statement is whether or not there is a good distribution (simple to complex) of vocabulary load across chapters and the whole book. Through the results, all the participants showed their positive reflections. Both teachers and students revealed that the vocabulary in the textbook is logically arranged, which helps students grow their vocabulary more quickly and easily choose appropriate language for the

different rhetorical models. The last statement is whether or not words are efficiently repeated and recycled across the book. The answers reflected that 72% of respondents agreed and 28% of them partly agreed with the statement. It is seen that the vocabulary in "Great Writing 3" belongs to the list of highest-frequency academic word families. To sum up, the textbook is designed in a way that the vocabulary is compatible with teachers' and students' needs in the writing process. Each unit in "Great Writing 3" involving two vocabulary activities helps students learn specific word combinations or collocations. It is helpful to enhance the quality of written products.

Since good writing requires a working knowledge of the mechanics of English, the grammatical aspect is the fourth evaluative indicator. There are four statements dealing with this aspect. The first statement is whether or not the spread of grammar is achievable. The answers of respondents show that 32% of them completely agreed and 68% of them agreed with the statement. The textbook is found to cover a variety of grammatical points needed for academic writing. The second statement is whether or not the grammar is contextualized. It is revealed that most of the respondents (88%) agreed with this statement. The section "Grammar for Writing" provided clarified explanations of grammatical functions which were then contextualized in paragraph and essay models. However, this has not satisfied all participants. There are still 12% expressing their disagreement. The next statement is whether or not examples are interesting. Most respondents agreed that examples of grammatical features are clear and compelling, of which 4%, 60%, and 20% totally agreed, agreed, and partly agreed, respectively. 16% reported that the textbook

needs more fun elements. The last investigates if the grammar is introduced explicitly or not. Statistics in Table 2 showed the number of participants giving negative evaluations (8%) for this criterion was the lowest. Consequently, from the results above, although “Great Writing 3” includes clear charts and detailed instruction along with numerous activities that relate directly to the writing assignment, students had difficulties in learning grammatical structures for building better sentences in comparison with other aspects.

The last criterion that was evaluated from the aspect of teaching-learning content is exercises. It is argued that the appropriate arrangements of exercises with clear instructions can help students to learn and reinforce easily and bring about effectiveness for the learning process. “Great Writing 3” contains numerous activities for additional essay writing assignments, and supplemental activities in “Brief Writer’s Handbook with Activities”. These writing, grammar, and vocabulary activities gradually build the skills students need to write well-crafted essays and provide learners with more input in composition, paragraph organization, and cohesion. Besides offline materials, there are online resources, which provide another option to use the textbook in a traditional or blended learning environment. As a result, exercises seem to be the biggest advantage of the textbook. All participants agreed with the exercise’s 3 criteria of clear instructions, adequacy, and helpfulness. In which, 100% of respondents had a positive evaluation for the first and second statements. Generally, the last aspect is completely relevant to the training objectives.

5. ADAPTATION

Based on the synthesis, analysis, and results,

the following adaptations are given for better employing the textbook.

As indicated in the findings, the textbook is not very much compatible with the interests of the learners and does not cover a variety of topics in ELT. However, no textbook is perfect and can suit all language teaching contexts and learners’ needs. Therefore, the roles of EFL teachers in a language course are to investigate the textbook’s strengths and weaknesses in order that they can exploit the textbook effectively. Additionally, teachers should explore students’ characteristics, learning styles, and interests, then adapt the writing activities to better suit their interests and capabilities. The adaptation can be done by (1) understanding learners’ differently personal characteristics and performance; (2) promoting self-assessment activities at the end of the class so that learners can improve their awareness of their potential aspects; (3) making the supporting materials updated and adding engaging texts on a variety of topics in ELT which could include written texts, photos, and infographics; (4) taking advantage of the online resources, which are often more engaging than printed versions, for example, introducing students to the website <https://www.writeandimprove.com> where they can produce pieces of writing with immediate editing suggestions.

As reported, in “Great Writing 3” cultural elements are contextualized and localized, which embrace the culture of other countries rather than Vietnam. It is advisable that teachers pay more attention to cultural content. While teaching, teachers should explain target culture patterns clearly, compare and contrast with Vietnamese culture, and adapt tasks with substitutes of Vietnamese cultural contents.

In the light of findings gathered in the study,

the grammar aspect in “Great Writing 3” is not sufficiently contextualized, and explicitly introduced. Therefore, teachers should (1) design grammatical handouts for classroom use to be easier and more familiar to Vietnamese students; or (2) introduce them to some software like *Grammarly* for their practice outside the classroom; or (3) check grammatical errors on free websites such as <https://www.grammarcheck.net/>; or (4) design practices on grammatical exercises on the website <https://www.quizizz.com>, which can motivate students to participate in the lessons.

Furthermore, in order to efficiently exploit the textbook and develop students’ writing skills, it is advisable that teachers design and provide a wide range of activities in the form of self and peer evaluation. Students enjoy working with partners to share ideas. Also, teachers should brainstorm the ideas from the students and highlight the main points in a lesson, which helps students remember the lesson logically. Similarly, frequent feedback from the teachers with careful correction and clear comments is of importance.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, “Great Writing 3” has proven to be a suitable writing textbook for second-year English-major students at UNETI, which is shown by relevant contents, academic writing aspects, and activities of vocabulary and grammar. The data also shows that the topics in the book are realistic and rich; and the content is consistently suitable for students’ interests, age, and background knowledge. Notably, the integrated curriculum is relevant to the training objectives and teaching-learning context at UNETI. Therefore, following the lesson progression and the alignment between lessons, students can develop their academic writing *in the terms of sentences, paragraphs, and essay writing* to achieve the expected language proficiency standard. That is why the main criteria to evaluate, general attributes and learning-teaching content, were received positive feedback. Despite some weaknesses in ELT topic covering, grammar aspects, and cultural content, the study indicated that the textbook should be continued to be used for UNETI students.

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