

An Investigation into the Use of the Course Book for Non-English Major Students at the Tertiary Level

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Abstract: *This study reports part of a larger study that aims to investigate the effectiveness of the EFL curriculum in a non-public university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. This part only focuses on how the coursebook is selected and used for the curriculum and what the teachers' and students' levels of satisfaction with the coursebook are. The results of the study revealed that the coursebook used as the content of the curriculum was selected without being based on students' needs analysis; and in the class it was used and exploited inadequately and ineffectively. In addition, the coursebook had shortcomings regarding the five categories investigated, including general attributes, language areas, language skills, language functions and context appropriateness. Obviously, it had negative effects on the implementation of the curriculum. That is why not all of the teachers and students were satisfied with it although their perspective on the coursebook was a little bit different. The study also made some recommendations to improve the quality of the use of the coursebook in the university in particular and at the tertiary level in Vietnam in general.*

Keywords: *EFL curriculum, coursebook, satisfaction, tertiary level, Vietnam*

1. INTRODUCTION

The coursebook is a key component as well as an important source of input of an EFL curriculum in non-English speaking contexts. It provides the content of the curriculum regarding language knowledge, skills, and culture. It not only supports teachers in their instruction, but also helps both teachers and students achieve learning objectives. Selecting an appropriate coursebook and using it effectively are of vital importance. Apparently, so far many studies have attempted to investigate whether the coursebook is appropriate and how it is used in the class in different contexts. However, it is not the case of the context of this study. Although the coursebook has been used for long, no study related to the way it is selected and used has been conducted. It is necessary to call on teachers and students to raise their voice about this issue. It is expected that this paper will provide invaluable insights for language course designers, managers and teachers in the context and make a small contribution to enhancing the teaching and learning of English in Vietnam.

2. COURSEBOOKS

2.1. The Role of Coursebooks

Materials are one of the six major components of an EFL curriculum, including needs analysis, goals and objectives, tests, materials, teaching, and evaluation (Brown, 1995). Anything which presents the language being taught and learned is considered materials. Teaching materials are a key component in most language curriculum (Richards, 2001). In non-English speaking contexts, the basis for language input and practice which occurs in the classroom are based on instructional materials, especially the coursebook (Tomlinson, 1998; Ur, 1996). The coursebook covers and provides work on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, functions and all the four macro skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing for language students. The coursebook has a variety of roles, including a) it serves as the syllabus; it covers the language content and skills, and reflects learning objectives; b) it provides a framework for both teachers and students; based on the coursebook they know where they are going and what is coming next; c) it provides a variety of learning resources, effective language models and

input through texts and learning tasks, activities, and visuals for student practice and communicative interaction; d) it helps students learn new materials, review and monitor progress and supports teachers in assessing students' learning; e) it provides useful guidance and support for less experienced teachers; and f) it provides consistency within a curriculum across a given level (Coombs, 1995; Cunnings worth, 1995; Ur, 1996; Graves, 2000; Richards, 2001).

2.2. Criteria for Coursebook Selection

The selection of the coursebook will depend on the curriculum's overall orientation in terms of approaches and syllabuses. Approaches are interpreted as ways of defining what the students need to learn and syllabuses cover all instructional objectives, techniques, and exercises, language items as well as the four skills (Brown, 1995). That is to say, the coursebook reflects the aims, methods and values of the curriculum (Cunningsworth, 1995), so it is of vital importance that the coursebook must be carefully selected. Its aims should seek to meet the needs of the students to the highest degree. Furthermore, when selecting a coursebook, managers or teachers should take into consideration some factors such as context, beliefs about how people learn languages, students' needs, interests and diversity (Graves, 2000; Butcher et al., 2006). What is more, the coursebook should be appropriate to the level of study; make clear the expectations on students; help students relate their learning to their existing knowledge or experience; provide opportunity for students to fill in gaps in their learning; and allow students to engage in meaningful interaction with one another for communicative purposes (Wajnryb, 1995; Cunningsworth, 1995; Graves, 2000).

2.3. Coursebook Adaptation and Exploitation

Coursebooks are not written for any specific non-English speaking context. That is why it is essential for any EFL teacher to have ability to adapt the coursebook which they are using to suit their students' needs and the curriculum goals. Also, when selecting a coursebook, managers and teachers usually pay attention to its strong points. They may think that the coursebook is suitable to their context. However, during classroom practices, defects will arise. Graves (2000) indicates that coursebooks may have some defects. The content may not always meet the course objectives or students' needs. For example, activities or tasks are boring and inappropriate; reading and listening texts are so long and difficult. Therefore, adaptation is inevitable. Richards (2001) and Nation and Macalister (2010) identify some types of adaptations that teachers may use. For example, modifying the content of the coursebook to suit students' needs and levels; adding or deleting some parts of each unit in order to balance activities used for developing language components and skills; reorganising tasks or activities to make appropriate order; and changing the focuses of activities. In case the coursebook is selected by someone else, and teachers and students are not willing to use it, it is necessary that teachers know how to exploit it effectively and choose appropriate tasks or sections that are useful for their students. Doing so, teachers will be able to make the coursebook work for their course and their lessons more interesting and motivating and students will have a chance to experience fruitful learning.

2.4. Coursebook Evaluation

The coursebook used for a General English (GE) curriculum may be considered as a global coursebook because it is not written for any specific context or for students from a particular culture (Tomlinson, 1998). Therefore, it is the managers', teachers' and students' responsibility to judge how effectively it has performed in the context. Cunnings worth (1995) states that one of the major reasons of evaluating a coursebook is to identify its strengths and weaknesses. As a result, weak points will be overcome through the use of adapted and supplementary materials taken from other books. Also, Graves (2000) and Nation and Macalister (2010) emphasise that any coursebook must be evaluated in order to determine whether it: a) is suitable for a particular curriculum or the context of teaching and learning; b) meets the needs of the students; c) matches the goals of the course and suits the level of the students; and d) is interesting and uses effective techniques.

Coursebook evaluation must be based on criteria. A good coursebook should reflect the goals and objectives of the curriculum. It must have a variety of topics, texts, tasks and activities such as information or opinion gap activities, discussions, problem-solving which require the students to use

the target language to achieve the goals of the curriculum (Tomlinson, 1998). Another criterion is that it must have attractive presentation and appealing content. Also, it must provide different types of texts and activities that cater for all learning styles and attitudes so that students will feel at ease, and develop confidence. Through activities, the teacher can assess the students' progress in learning. In addition, supplementary materials must be provided such as the workbook or CDs for the students. Besides the above criteria, the coursebook should also reflect or be related to the students' culture, with a variety of activities, and illustrations so that it will help them to learn more (Tomlinson, 1998).

The coursebook can be evaluated at three stages of use: pre-use, in-use or post-use, depending on the purpose of the evaluator (Cunningsworth, 1995). Also, teachers' and students' opinions and comments or reactions to the coursebook should be included (Tomlinson, 1998; Harmer, 2001), and it is best for evaluators to draw up their own checklist (Cunningsworth, 1995).

In conclusion, the coursebook is considered as the core content of an EFL curriculum. To achieve the goals and objectives of any EFL curriculum, managers and teachers should comply with some criteria: the selection of the coursebook must be based on students' needs analysis; adaptation needs to be performed when it is in use; and evaluation should be conducted to point out its strengths and weaknesses for improvement.

3. THE STUDY

This paper is a part of a larger study entitled "An evaluation of the English as a foreign language curriculum at the tertiary level-A case study of a non-public university". The study was conducted in a non-public university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam with the participation of managers, teachers, and students. The study employed various data collection techniques, including documents analysis, interviews, classroom observations and questionnaires to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data.

This part only focused on the coursebook used as the content of the curriculum. The study attempted to answer the two questions below:

- How is the coursebook selected and used for the EFL curriculum?
- What are the levels of satisfaction of the teachers and the students with the coursebook?

3.1. Data Collection

The data for this study were gathered from a) the interview with the head of the Foreign Language Centre (FLC); b) the analysis of the syllabus content of the five GE courses and the coursebook; c) an open-ended questionnaire administered to 10 EFL teachers; d) a closed-ended questionnaire employed a five-points Likert-scale ranging from "very dissatisfied" (**VD**), dissatisfied (**D**), neutral (**N**), satisfied (**S**) to "very satisfied" (**VS**) administered to 32 teachers and 304 second-year students to investigate how much the teachers and students were satisfied with the coursebook. The questionnaire had five sections with 43 items relating to five major categories: General attributes, Language areas, Language skills, Language functions, and Context; and e) classroom observations. Eleven classes from different disciplines were randomly selected for non-participant observations, and each observation lasted 90 minutes. A framework was used for the classroom observation. Through classroom practices, such dimensions as how the teachers exploited the content of the coursebook in the class and how the coursebook was adapted were investigated.

3.2. Data Analysis

The methods used to analyse the data collected from the interview, the analysis of the syllabi, classroom observations and the open-ended questionnaire were based on "Content analysis". Categories and sub-categories were figured out based on the review of literature about coursebook selection, use and adaptation. The data were coded according to the categories, and the content of the categories was described through subcategories. The participants of the open-ended questionnaire were coded as T1, T2 and so on. The syllabus content of the five courses were coded in identification numbers as SC1 for course 1; SC2 for course 2; and so on. The classroom observations were coded in identification numbers as shown in the table below.

Table1. *Coding for Classroom Observations*

Classes observed	Identification numbers	Observation dates
Class 1	CL1	3 rd October, 2014
Class 2	CL2	10 th October, 2014
Class 3	CL3	15 th October, 2014
Class 4	CL4	17 th October, 2014
Class 5	CL5	31 st October, 2014
Class 6	CL6	10 th November, 2014
Class 7	CL7	15 th Novemebr, 2014
Class 8	CL8	20 th Novemebr, 2014
Class 9	CL9	21 st November, 2014
Class 10	CL10	Morning, 5 th December, 2014
Class 11	CL11	Afternoon 5 th December, 2014

The data gathered from the closed-ended questionnaire were analysed through the use of SPSS. Cronbach's alpha reliability calculated index for the questionnaire ranged from 0.839 to 0.927, which is a very high value (See Table 2).

Table2. *Cronbach's Alpha of Coursebook Evaluation Criteria*

Coursebook Evaluation Criteria	Cronbach's Alpha
I. General Attributes (5 items)	0.839
II. Language areas (13 items)	0.927
III. Language skills (15 items)	0.909
IV. Language functions (4 items)	0.845
V. Context (6 items)	0.882

Descriptive Statistics were employed to present the results of the closed-ended questionnaire, the means, standard deviations and percentages of each item were calculated to describe and summarise the responses of the teachers and the students.

The results of the interview, the analysis of the syllabus content and coursebook, classroom observations and the open-ended questionnaire were interpreted in narrative passages. Responses from the interview, from the open-ended questionnaire and some parts of the field notes from classroom observations were extracted and quoted in this paper to support the analysis of the findings. For example, the extract coded as "Observation excerpt CL2.10.10.2014.02" means that the excerpt was extracted from page 2 of the observation sheet from Class 2 observed on 10th October, 2014, or "SC1" means syllabus content of course 1. The results of the closed-ended questionnaire were presented in tables according to the evaluation criteria accompanied by explanations and discussion.

3.3. Results and Discussion

3.3.1. How the Coursebook was Selected and Used for the Curriculum

3.3.1.1. How the Coursebook was Selected

The teaching and learning of English in Vietnam largely takes place in the classroom and language input is based on coursebooks. At the tertiary level, coursebooks are not compiled by a government-appointed or institutional panel of experts. Instead, coursebooks used as the content of the curriculum are written in native-speaking countries like the UK or the US and are available on the market, and that makes it difficult to select a coursebook that matches the aim of the course and meet students' English proficiency levels and preferences. In reality, each university in Vietnam has the right to select the coursebook they think is suitable to the curriculum goals and objectives. In the context of the study, three books: book 2, book 3, and half of book 4 of the American Headway series (2nd edition) (henceforth called the "coursebook") were selected for the EFL curriculum. They were selected by a group of managers, i.e. a member of the Board of Rectors together with the head of the EFC. This was proven through the data collected from the interview with the head of the FLC and the teachers' open-ended questionnaire. For example:

- FLC head said: "The coursebook selected for the five GE courses is the 2nd ed American Headway series including book 2, 3, and half of book 4. The Council of Experts decides to select this

coursebook. After every term, a meeting is organised to get feedback from the teachers about the coursebook.”

- Or, T1 answered, *“The vice-rector who manages all the training programmes of the university and the Council of Experts of the FLC are responsible for the selection of the coursebook.”*

According to Brown (1995), teaching materials must be selected based on students’ needs analysis. However, it was evident that the coursebook of the current EFL curriculum was selected based on the managers’ personal experience and decisions, and on the perceptions that all the students had learned English in secondary school; and that no needs analysis was conducted before the first-year students started their English courses. For example:

- T1 answered, *“At present, the university has not had any criteria to test the students’ start-up English proficiency level, learning objectives and learning preferences. All the students are placed in their English classes according to their majors rather than their English proficiency level.”*

It was apparent that many factors relating to the students were not dealt with, such as their language proficiency, and their learning objectives or expectations. What is more, there was no evidence that the teachers participated in the selection of the coursebook. For example:

- T2, T3,...T10 answered, *“ Teachers do not take part in the selection of the coursebook for the courses.”*

Teachers are curriculum implementers. Their opinions about the coursebook are really necessary (Harmer, 2001; Tomlinson, 1998). Before deciding which coursebook was suitable, the managers should have taken into account the teachers’ opinions by organising a meeting or a seminar to talk about the curriculum goals and objectives, the content, teaching methods and assessment methods. Doing so, teachers could have made a great contribution to the achievement of the curriculum goals and objectives.

3.3.1.2. The Use of the Coursebook

Inappropriate Time Allocation for Units and Courses

Based on the analysis of the syllabus content and the data gathered from the interview with the head of the EFC, each course covered six units and lasted 30 hours or 45 periods (45 minutes per one period); and the teachers and students had to complete one unit within 6 periods in the class. The number of units and the time amount allocated to each course are illustrated in the table below.

Table3. *Number of Units and Time Allocation for Courses*

Course	Coursebook	Number of Units	Time Allocation	Academic Terms
Course 1	Book 2	Unit 1-6	45 periods	1 st term
Course 2	Book 2	Unit 7-12	45 periods	2 nd term
Course 3	Book 3	Unit 1-6	45 periods	3 rd term
Course 4	Book 3	Unit 7-12	45 periods	4 th term
Course 5	Book 4	Unit 1-6	45 periods	5 th term

Source: *SC1-SC5 of academic year 2014-2015*

Only some teachers thought that the time amount allocated to each unit and to each course was acceptable; and that they could manage to deal with what was assigned in the syllabus.

- T2, T3, T6 answered, *“The time allocation for each unit is quite relevant to the students in the class.”*

That might be because most of the students in these teachers’ classes had high English proficiency level. They had learned English well in secondary school, so they took the English test for the university entrance examination. Therefore, teaching these classes might cause the teachers little trouble.

However, most of the teachers were not very satisfied with the time allocation. They thought that the time allotted to each unit as well as to the whole course was insufficient to achieve the curriculum goals. The result was consistent with Graves’s point of view that the time for completing the

coursebook or part of it may be unrealistic (Graves, 2000). For example, some teachers raised their opinions as follows:

- T1, T4, T8, T9 answered, “With English classes of mixed ability students, the time allocation for each unit is not very relevant to the students.”
- T5, T10 answered “The time allocation is only relevant to about 50% of the students in the class.”
- T7 answered, “The content of Course 5 is so difficult for most of the students. The time allocation is not enough for the teacher to implement the course.”

It was apparent that the students’ language needs were not analysed and they were not placed in the right level class, and that most of them had not been very good at English in secondary school; therefore at university they still encountered difficulties, which might demotivate them in learning. Consequently, due to the students’ low English proficiency and demotivation, many teachers thought that the coursebook was more difficult compared to the students’ level, so more time allocation would be better for them.

Imbalanced Division of the Content

The data gathered from the analysis of the syllabus content revealed that one unit was divided into 2 three-period lessons (three periods = 135 minutes) and learned in two weeks. According to the syllabus, to complete one unit, it was required that the students have 6 periods for self-study outside the classroom. The table below shows an example of the way the content of “unit one in book 3” was divided and the time amount was allocated to it.

Table4. Content Division and Time Allocation

Week	UNIT 1: A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE	Class periods	Self-study
1	I Didn’t Know That: Tenses and auxiliary verbs (pp.2-3) Practice: You’re so wrong!’s = is or has? & Talking about you (p.3) Practice: A class survey & Check it (p.5) Making Conversation: Short answers (p.4)	3 periods	6 periods
2	Reading and Speaking: Worlds apart (pp.6-7) Listening and Speaking: A world in one family (p.8) Vocabulary: What’s in a word?, Pronunciation, Word formation, Words that go together, Keeping vocabulary records (pp.8-9) Everyday English: Everyday situations (p.9) Writing: An informal letter (p.99)	3 periods	6 periods

Source: *Extracted from SC3*

As can be seen in the table, the first three-period lesson covered sections of language areas and the second lesson covered all the four macro skills. The question raised for discussion here is “Was it possible for the students to read a long text of about 700 words with some follow-up activities, to listen to two conversations of about 600 words with speaking activities, to involve in making small talk and to write a letter within three periods in the class?” As a matter of fact, it was impossible for a large mixed-ability English class to fulfil a lesson with overloaded language and skills within 135 minutes like the above lesson. If the teachers tried to force the students to do so, it would result in a failed lesson. Also, it can be inferred that the course content was given much language-focused attention instead of skills-focused attention. Or, there might be no negotiation among managers, teachers and students about the syllabus content before and during the course. Imbalanced division of the content took place in SC1, SC2, SC3 and partly in SC4 and SC5. If the course wanted to balance the time for both lessons, it can be said that the time for one unit was not sufficient for the students to digest and acquire the language knowledge and skills provided in one unit. Reading and listening texts provide language input. If they were incomprehensible and uninteresting or only superficially taught, language acquisition would not take place (Krashen, 1989), which might result in a failure in the implementation of the curriculum.

This situation draws an attention to the fact that the English curriculum designers might not be realistic when they divided the content and set the objectives of the course. It is believed that it was impossible for the teachers to achieve the course objectives.

Lack of Modification or Alteration of Language Tasks and Activities

The data gathered from classroom observations revealed that there was lack of modification or alteration of language tasks or activities to fit the students' levels and to promote learning. For example, in one class, it took both the teacher and students 55 minutes to complete a listening activity. The listening text was a conversation of about 900 words and was about "Space Tourism" which was considered to be strange and not easy for the students to understand. After listening to the CD five times, it seemed that only a few of the students could understand some parts of the conversation. It might be because the conversation was so long and the follow-up questions provided were very general. Besides, the level of English proficiency of most students was low. Meanwhile, no simplification or omission to the activities were made. The teacher only used those questions to check the students' understanding of the text (Observation excerpt CL5.15.11.2014.02). According to Ur (1996), teachers need to substitute or add if the texts are too easy and omit difficult bits or provide supplementary activities if the texts are too difficult. In fact, this listening activity could have been altered or simplified so that different purposes could be achieved. For example, more specific questions could have been added for weaker students to answer, or more activities could have been supplemented so that the students could understand the whole text. It can be concluded that the listening text was irrelevant to the students' level. However, the teacher still tried his best to fulfil his duty. The same situation took place in other classes, i.e. no changes were made to such activities as reading skills development on page 14, book 3 (CL2.10.10.2014.04), or listening skills development on page 24, book 3 (CL3.15.10.2014.02), or grammar practice activities (CL6. 10.11. 2014.02). Also, a single coursebook cannot meet the diverse needs of the students in the class (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Nonetheless, there was no evidence that teacher-made materials were introduced to the students during the class.

The above situations took place due to some reasons. That might be because according to Nation and Macalister (2010), the teachers might be largely untrained, or they might think that there was security in following the coursebook closely. Particularly, the teachers might have no idea about how to adapt the coursebook.

Insufficient Exploitation of the Coursebook

The data gathered from classroom observations revealed that the teachers did not effectively exploit the tasks and activities designed in the coursebook. Teachers placed so much importance on grammar presentation or practice activities, but neglected productive activities. In one class, the teacher spent thirty minutes of a 135-minute lesson on a simple presentation activity (listening activity). The activity was about "Favourite day of the week". It required the students to listen to people talking about their favourite days and fill in the gaps. Language input and communication situations were provided to the students. However, instead of asking the students to work in pairs to talk about their favourite day (activity 4, page 10, unit 2-book 3), the teacher passed it over and moved to another activity. What is more, when finishing activity 1 and 2 in the "Practice" section on page 11, once again, the teacher ignored the section "Talking about you" and "Project" on page 12 (Observation excerpt CL1.03.10.2014. 01-02). Furthermore, "Everyday English" is the section designed for the students to engage in using language functions in real-life situations. However, some teachers also neglected it in the class. In another class, when the students finished activity 7 on page 16, unit 2-Book 3, the teacher asked them to open the book on page 14 to do the "Reading and speaking" section. (Observation excerpt CL2.10.10.2014. 04). More "dangerously", although in each unit, there is the section "Writing" with a topic provided to develop the students' writing skills, no writing activities were carried out in many classes. Most of the teachers asked the students to do this section at home, but there was no evidence that this job was done.

The above situations showed the evidence that the exploitation of the coursebooks had a problem. As illustrated in table 3, the first three-period lesson contains "Talking about you" and "Project" and the second lesson contains "Everyday English" and "Writing". These sections required the students to engage in speaking and writing activities to use the target language. In the class the students should be pushed to produce the language in both speaking and writing (Nation & Macalister, 2010). However, several speaking and writing activities were ignored or ineffectively dealt with. The main reason

might be that the time available for the course did not fit comfortably into the syllabus content; meanwhile many students' level of English proficiency was low. Therefore, the teachers spent more time and effort on easy and short activities.

3.3.2. *Levels of Satisfaction of Teachers and Students with the Coursebook*

This section presents the teachers' and the students' levels of satisfaction with the coursebook in terms of its major categories, including general attributes, language areas, language skills, language functions and context appropriateness. The results of the analysis of mean score (M) and standard deviation (St.D) obtained for each category are displayed in the tables in the sections below:

3.3.2.1. *Teachers' and Students' Levels of Satisfaction with General Attributes*

This section consists of five items mainly investigating the levels of satisfaction of the teachers and students with general attributes of the coursebook, consisting of five subcategories: whether the illustration and organisation of the coursebook are clear and appropriate (GA1); whether the printing quality, cost-effectiveness and durability are appropriate for the students (GA2); whether the authors' teaching methodology is comparable to the one proposed by the university (GA3); whether the coursebook is an integrated-skill one (GA4); and whether the coursebook has supplementary materials (GA5).

Table5. *Descriptive Statistics for the General Attributes*

Items		GA1	GA2	GA3	GA4	GA5
Teacher (N = 32)	Mean	4.03	3.91	3.66	4.28	3.91
	St.D	0.647	0.689	0.787	0.457	0.588
Student (N = 304)	Mean	3.43	3.22	3.30	3.40	3.25
	St.D	1.032	1.077	0.984	1.020	1.025

As indicated in Table 5, nearly all the teachers were satisfied with the design, illustration and organization of the coursebook and with its printing quality, cost-effectiveness and durability. The mean scores are 4.03 and 3.91 respectively. With regard to teaching methodology, the majority of the teachers thought that the authors' view was comparable to the one proposed by the university, i.e. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is suitable to modern foreign language learning theory (M=3.66). Specially, all of them (100%) were satisfied with the integration of the four skills in the coursebook (M=4.28), and nearly all of them were happy with the supplementary materials such as audio CDs, the teacher's manual and student workbook (M= 3.9). It was evident that the results of the study were consistent with the results of the analysis of the coursebook content that revealed that language input, texts or activities in each unit are organised systematically from easy to more difficult. Furthermore, different pictures or images are illustrated in each unit to help students to acquire the input language more easily and to support teachers in organising interesting warm-up activities, which facilitates the process of learning and makes students more motivated. The coursebook has the "Skills Development" section with subsections specifically designed to provide students with texts and activities for developing the four macro language skills. Furthermore, it was evident that an integration of the four macro skills is one of the authors' proposed testaments to support teaching methodology and underlie foreign language learning theory.

In terms of the levels of satisfaction of the students with the above subcategories, the results displayed in Table 5 show that their ratings mostly spread from "neutral" to "very satisfied", which means that not many of them were dissatisfied with those five subcategories. The mean scores are 3.43, 3.22, 3.30, 3.40 and 3.25 respectively. Those students could have thought that the coursebook did not meet their expectations at some extent. For example, the coursebook was a little bit expensive or the printing quality was poor. Or, they did not learn much from the coursebook because some skills or sections might be difficult for them or neglected in the class.

3.3.2.2. *Teachers' and Students' Levels of Satisfaction with Language Areas*

This section consists of 13 items mainly measuring the levels of satisfaction of teachers and students with language areas: Grammar, Vocabulary and Pronunciation (See Table 6A, 6B, 6C).

Grammar Area

Table6A. *Descriptive Statistics for the Language Areas- Grammar*

Items		G1	G2	G3	G4	G5
Teacher (N = 32)	Mean	3.69	3.84	3.69	4.22	3.66
	St.D	0.780	0.448	0.896	0.491	0.865
Student (N = 304)	Mean	3.27	3.32	3.39	3.45	3.32
	St.D	0.911	0.954	0.976	0.950	0.959

This section measures the following subcategories: whether grammar points are contextualised (G1); whether there are sufficient and interesting examples (G2); whether grammatical rules are presented in order of complexity (G3); whether there are a variety of practice exercises and activities (G4); and whether there are activities for grammar reinforcement (G5). As indicated in Table 6A, most of the teachers had similar opinions about and were satisfied with these subcategories. The mean scores are 3.69, 3.84, 3.69, 4.22, and 3.66 respectively.

Regarding the levels of satisfaction of the students with the above subcategories, their ratings mostly spread from “neutral” to “very satisfied”. The mean scores are 3.27, 3.32, 3.39, 3.45 and 3.32 respectively, which means that not many of them were dissatisfied with those subcategories.

The analysis of the coursebook content also showed similar results, i.e. grammar points are contextualised and introduced repeatedly in different sections of each unit, from “presentation” activities to “production” activities for enforcement. The strongest point is that the coursebook leads students from simple controlled grammar activities to guided activities, and gradually expose free activities. Language input is introduced in listening or reading texts, which helps students learn grammar points in contexts rather than isolatedly; and then exercises are provided for the students to practise; and finally free activities such as “Talking about you” are designed for students to use the target language. Furthermore, grammar points reappear in listening and reading texts in the section “Skills development”, which help students, acquire the language more easily. In addition, the coursebook provides students with wide grammar knowledge. Each unit contains one or two grammar points which are introduced through listening texts (unit 1, 2, 5, 6, 11-book 3) and reading texts (unit 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12-book 3). Especially, there is the section “Grammar spot” which summarises the main grammar points covered in each unit and “Grammar reference” at the end of the book for the students to revise what they have learned.

Vocabulary Area

Table6B. *Descriptive Statistics for the Language Areas- Vocabulary*

Items		V1	V2	V3	V4	V5
Teacher (N = 32)	Mean	3.78	3.19	2.84	3.41	2.94
	St.D	0.706	1.091	1.081	0.756	0.982
Student (N = 304)	Mean	3.33	3.38	3.33	3.36	3.31
	St.D	1.045	0.985	0.960	0.961	0.989

This section measures the following subcategories: whether vocabulary items are contextualised (V1); whether there are sufficient vocabulary practice exercises (V2); whether the level of complexity is suitable to students’ proficiency level (V3); whether new vocabulary items are introduced systematically (V4); whether there are exercises for vocabulary reinforcement (V5). As indicated in Table 6B, most of the teachers (M=3.78) were happy with the subcategory that vocabulary items were contextualised rather than introduced isolatedly. However, only half of the teachers (M=3.19) were satisfied with vocabulary practice exercises. The level of complexity of vocabulary items was considered by the majority of the teachers to be at the higher level compared to the students’ proficiency level (M=2.84). In terms of whether vocabulary items were introduced systematically, there was almost a balance of their ratings between “neutral” and “satisfied”. Only nearly half of them were satisfied with this subcategory (M=3.41). With respect to exercises designed for reinforcing vocabulary, half of the teachers were dissatisfied with this subcategory (M=2.94).

Regarding the level of satisfaction of the students with these vocabulary subcategories, the results of the study showed an average level of satisfaction among the students. About half of them were satisfied with the five subcategories. The mean scores are 3.33, 3.38, 3.33, 3.36 and 3.31 respectively.

It was apparent that according to most of the teachers, vocabulary items in the coursebook are contextualised which help students easily understand their meaning. New vocabulary items are sparsely presented in listening and reading texts, which not only help the students develop meaning-guessing skill but also enrich their vocabulary knowledge. However, with respect to other subcategories, nearly half of the teachers and students were dissatisfied. Although the coursebook provides students with different lexical categories, parts of speech and other categories such as word building, words with similar meaning, and compound words, it was found that not many vocabulary practice exercises are designed for the students in each unit. As can be seen in the coursebook content, some units only introduce new vocabulary items in sentences (unit 1-book3) or even do not have many vocabulary exercises (unit 2, 3-book3); especially, the teachers and students might also think that many vocabulary items seemed to be more difficult, especially in listening and reading texts. The results also imply that Vietnamese students may need more controlled vocabulary activities or exercises to do to help them revise, memorise and internalise vocabulary items because the process of learning English only takes place in the class.

Pronunciation Area

Table6C. *Descriptive Statistics for the Language Areas- Pronunciation*

Items		P1	P2	P3
Teacher (N = 32)	Mean	3.22	3.31	3.19
	St.D	0.792	0.931	0.988
Student (N = 304)	Mean	3.07	3.08	3.08
	St.D	1.094	1.055	1.105

This section measures the following subcategories: whether all English consonants and vowels are introduced in the coursebook (P1); whether there are sufficient exercises for the students to practice pronunciation (P2); and whether there is equipment to support students in practicing pronunciation (P3).

As indicated in Table 6C, the teachers’ ratings mostly spread from “neutral” to “satisfied and very satisfied”, which means about half of them were dissatisfied with these subcategories. The mean scores are 3.22, 3.31 and 3.19 respectively.

Contrary to the teachers’ perceptions, most of the students were not satisfied with the three pronunciation subcategories. The mean scores are 3.07, 3.08 and 3.08 respectively.

The results seemed to indicate that among the three language areas, the pronunciation area caused more problems for both teachers and students. As a matter of fact, not all of English consonants and vowels are covered in the coursebook and not many units contain sufficient exercises to support the teaching of word stress and sentence intonation. For example, unit 2,3,4,5 in book 2 do not cover any English sounds or pronunciation exercises. Besides, it might be because the teachers rarely used the CDs for the students to practice English sounds and stress, or exercises in the workbook were rarely dealt with. Vietnamese students are said to be afraid of English pronunciation because most of the English sounds are different from the Vietnamese ones. It was apparent that with few pronunciation exercises designed in the coursebooks, without teachers’ adaptation and with time constraints, negative attitudes to the three subcategories are inevitable.

3.3.2.3. Teachers’ and Students’ Levels of Satisfaction with Language Skills

This section consists of 15 items mainly measuring the levels of satisfaction of the teachers and students with the language skills in the coursebook (See Table 7A, 7B, 7C, 7D).

Listening Skill

Table7A. *Descriptive Statistics for the Language Skills-Listening*

Items		L1	L2	L3
Teacher (N = 32)	Mean	2.00	3.88	2.91
	St.D	0.440	0.554	1.058
Student (N = 304)	Mean	3.30	3.32	3.38
	St.D	0.918	0.891	0.981

This section measures the following subcategories: whether listening activities are appropriate for students' proficiency level (L1); whether the instructions of listening activities are clear and simple (L2); and whether listening texts are authentic (L3). As indicated in Table 7A, almost all the teachers were dissatisfied with the level of appropriateness of listening activities (M=2.00); and not many of them were satisfied with the authenticity of listening texts (M=2.91). However, most of them were satisfied with the instructions of the listening activities (M=3.88).

Interestingly, almost half of the students were satisfied with the three listening subcategories. The mean scores are 3.30, 3.32 and 3.38 respectively. It was evident that according to most of the teachers and half of the students, listening activities were not appropriate for the students' proficiency level. As a matter of fact, listening texts in the coursebook are rather long and complex; meanwhile, most of the Vietnamese students do not have much chance to develop this skill in secondary school. It is inevitable that at university they encounter a lot of difficulties. Obviously, as observed, it was not easy for the teachers to carry out listening activities in the class. Many students could not have been able to fulfill the assigned tasks. Furthermore, if listening texts were not very authentic, the students could be demotivated, which might be the reason why they felt learning listening was difficult. It was evident that this result was consistent with the results of classroom observations, which showed that most of the listening activities carried out in the class were not very successful.

Speaking Skill

Table7B. *Descriptive Statistics for the Language Skills-Speaking*

Items		SP1	SP2	SP3	SP4
Teacher (N = 32)	Mean	3.12	3.06	2.06	4.06
	St.D	1.100	1.045	0.564	0.354
Student (N = 304)	Mean	3.15	3.14	3.04	3.19
	St.D	1.112	1.111	1.071	1.083

This section measures the following subcategories: whether speaking activities are suitable for pair work and group work (SP1); whether speaking activities are close to daily communication (SP2); whether speaking activities are interesting enough to motivate students (SP3); and whether the instructions of speaking activities are clear and simple (SP4). As indicated in Table 7B, the first and the second subcategories were not highly-rated by the teachers. Almost half of the teachers were not satisfied with them. The mean scores are 3.12 and 3.06 respectively. Particularly, almost all of the teachers did not think that speaking activities were interesting enough to motivate the students (M=2.06). However, the instructions of the speaking activities were highly rated by the teachers. The mean score is 4.06.

Regarding the level of satisfaction of the students with speaking skill, the results showed that over one-fourth of them were dissatisfied with the four subcategories. The mean scores are 3.15, 3.14, 3.04 and 3.19 respectively. These results revealed that although the instructions are very clear and easy to understand, most of the teachers thought that speaking activities might not be close to daily communication.

They seemed to be rather difficult for the students, especially “What do you think” or “Discussion” sections following a reading or listening text. In order to perform these activities effectively, the students had to understand the text they read or listen to. It was apparent that those who were less able students might encounter difficulties in learning speaking. The results were consistent with the results of classroom observations that revealed that most of the speaking activities were implemented superficially in the class. Many students could not say anything due to their low level of English proficiency. That might also be why the responses of the teachers and students showed that many speaking activities were uninteresting and inappropriate for the students.

Reading Skill

Table7C. *Descriptive Statistics for the Language Skills-Reading*

Items		R1	R2	R3	R4
Teacher (N = 32)	Mean	3.12	3.47	3.81	3.97
	St.D	1.129	0.842	0.821	0.400
Student (N = 304)	Mean	3.47	3.47	3.48	3.49
	St.D	0.886	0.874	0.930	0.982

This section measures the following subcategories: whether there are a variety of reading topics (R1); whether reading topics are interesting and challenging to students (R2); whether reading texts are accompanied by follow-up activities (R3); and whether the instructions of reading texts are clear and simple (R4). As indicated in Table 7C, the results showed that only half of the teachers were satisfied with reading topics (M= 3.12). However, most of them thought that reading texts were interesting and challenging to the students, especially almost all of them were satisfied with the instructions of the reading texts. The mean scores are 3.47, 3.48 and 3.97 respectively. Interestingly, more than half of the students were satisfied with the four reading subcategories. The mean scores are 3.47, 3.47, 3.48, and 3.49 respectively. It was evident that the instructions of reading texts were clear and simple enough for the students, which helped them, understand what to do with the reading texts. In addition, with diverse follow-up activities could help facilitate the process of digesting reading texts. Diverse and authentic reading topics motivate students. However, as a matter of fact, not many authentic reading texts such as brochures, advertisements, instructions or passages adapted from different sources like newspapers or magazines used for real-life communicative purposes are provided in the coursebook. Instead, the reading topics mostly mention characters in literature or history (Unit 2, 3, 7, 8, 11, 12-Book 3) or Western stories, which might be considered not to be interesting to the students. It might be because those topics had nothing related to their life and culture, or that they needed something more realistic. Also, there were texts which were above their level of proficiency, which demotivated them. It can be said that the results are consistent with the results of the classroom observations. Although the teachers asked the students to read the texts at home, almost no students did the assignment, or the performance of the reading texts in the class were a little bit boring and ineffectively.

Writing Skill

Table 7D. *Descriptive Statistics for the Language Skills-Writing*

Items		W1	W2	W3	W4
Teacher (N = 32)	Mean	2.53	2.69	3.59	2.25
	St.D	0.950	0.896	0.756	0.959
Student (N = 304)	Mean	2.93	3.06	3.14	3.12
	St.D	1.062	1.028	1.018	1.105

This section measures the following subcategories: whether there are a variety of writing activities in the coursebook (W1); whether writing activities are interesting to the students (W2); whether the instructions of writing activities are clear and simple (W3); and whether writing activities are appropriate for the level of the students (W4). As indicated in Table 7D, the results showed that most of the teachers did not think that the coursebook has a variety of writing activities and writing activities are interesting to the students and appropriate for the students' level of proficiency. The mean scores are 2.53, 2.69 and 2.25 respectively. However, most of the teachers were satisfied with the instructions of writing activities (M=3.59). Regarding the level of satisfaction of the students with the four writing subcategories, their ratings for satisfaction were not very high. The mean scores are 2.93, 3.06, 3.14 and 3.12 respectively, which means writing could be seen as their least satisfaction of all skills. It was apparent that most of the students encountered difficulties in learning writing. As a matter of fact, unlike the other macro skills which contain specific tasks or activities in each unit for the students to acquire and internalise the language, the "Writing section" is placed at the end of the coursebook. Therefore, it is easy to be neglected as the results of the classroom observations stated. Also, there is lack of diversity of controlled writing activities and follow-up writing activities after reading or listening texts to consolidate language input. Another reason might be that the students themselves were not used to writing because in secondary school writing skill might not be effectively taught. However, the most satisfactory point of the coursebook is that each unit contains an authentic writing topic such as writing a letter, telling a story, describing a place or a person, which provides students with real-life communication situations in writing.

3.3.2.4. Teachers' and Students' Levels of Satisfaction with Language Functions

This section consists of 4 items mainly measuring the levels of satisfaction of teachers and students with the language functions (See Table 8).

Table8. Descriptive Statistics for the Language Functions

Items		LF1	LF2	LF3	LF4
Teacher (N = 32)	Mean	4.00	4.09	4.00	4.03
	St.D	0.440	0.296	0.440	0.309
Student (N = 304)	Mean	3.13	3.31	3.31	3.31
	St.D	1.038	1.016	1.013	0.989

This section measures four subcategories in relation to whether there are activities reflecting *personal and interpersonal subcategory*, such as expressing feelings or classifying ideas, accepting and refusing invitations or making appointments (LF1); whether there are activities reflecting *directive subcategory*, such as requesting information, persuading people (LF2); whether there are activities reflecting *referential subcategory*, such as describing or reporting about things and people (LF3); and whether there are activities reflecting *imaginative subcategory*, such as discussing or solving problems (LF4).

As can be seen in Table 8, it was evident that almost all the teachers were satisfied with the four subcategories. The mean scores are 4.00, 4.09, 4.00 and 4.03 respectively.

With regard to the level of satisfaction of the students with these subcategories, their ratings were a little bit different from the teachers. About half of them were satisfied with the four subcategories. The mean scores are 3.13, 3.31, 3.31 and 3.31 respectively. The results of the study showed an average level of satisfaction among the students. It was evident that “Language functions” was the most highly-rated. That is because every unit of the coursebook has the section “Everyday English” designed to enhance the students’ ability to use the target language. It contains short conversations to require the students to work in pairs to deal with different real-life communication situations. What is more, the coursebook also has speaking and writing activities requiring the students to use those language functions, for example activity “What do you think?” for speaking or writing a letter to express feelings. The results also showed that about half of the students were dissatisfied with these subcategories. That might be because during the class, the teachers did not clearly indicate the objectives of the activities to the students. In this case, the results were consistent with the results of classroom observations that showed that sometimes the “Writing section” was neglected or superficially performed.

3.3.2.5. Teachers’ and Students’ Levels of Satisfaction with Context Appropriateness

This section mainly measures six subcategories in relation to whether cultural aspects are appropriate for the students (C1); whether the coursebook prepares the students for communicating in different cultural communities (C2); whether the coursebook is appropriate for the students’ start-up proficiency level (C4); whether the coursebook can meet the curriculum goals (C5); and whether the coursebook is relevant to Vietnamese context (C6) (See Table 9).

Table9. Descriptive Statistics for the Context

Items		C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
Teacher (32)	Mean	2.75	2.41	2.28	2.16	2.94	2.84
	St.D	0.984	0.837	0.772	0.628	0.801	1.019
Student (304)	Mean	3.28	3.26	3.35	3.21	3.24	3.30
	St.D	0.980	1.048	0.994	0.998	1.003	0.985

As indicated in Table 9, most of the teachers were dissatisfied with the six subcategories. The mean scores are 2.75, 2.41, 2.28, 2.16, 2.94 and 2.28 respectively. With regard to the level of satisfaction of the students with these subcategories, the results showed that around half of them were satisfied with the six subcategories. The mean scores are 3.28, 3.26, 3.35, 3.21, 3.24, and 3.30 respectively.

The results showed that most of the teachers and half of the students did not think that the coursebook would meet the students’ needs and the curriculum goals and might not be suitable to the Vietnamese context. That might be because students’ language needs were not analysed at the beginning, and the students were placed in the same class according to their majors instead of their start-up level of proficiency. Consequently, it was really difficult for the teachers to implement the curriculum effectively due to mixed-ability students. The coursebook might be suitable to more-able students;

meanwhile, there were still half of them were less-able students. Those students could not follow what was being carried out in the class. They might feel that the language input was too complex for them to acquire. These results were consistent with the classroom observations that showed that many students did not actively participate in the process of learning.

The results also revealed controversial issues about cultural aspects. Nowadays, English is considered as a global language. Students in contexts like Vietnam not only learn English to communicate, work and study with native English speakers living in "inner circle", but with non-native English speakers in "outer and expanding circles" as well. However, the language input and communication situations provided in the coursebook seems not to provide exposure to using English as a lingua franca. The coursebook is written in a Western country, which means most of the reading and listening topics, communication situations, and the ways to use the language reflect Western culture rather than multicultural contexts, especially ASEAN cultures. Studying this coursebook, Vietnamese students are only exposed to the typical USA English accents that they listen to on English coursebook cassettes / CDs. However, nowadays many foreign tourists, business people, professors, etc. are living and working in Vietnam, such as Korean, Chinese, Malaysian, Indian, Taiwanese, and Japanese. Students' exposure to those different spoken 'Englishes' would be necessary and useful because of their interaction with these people in daily communication, in study and in the workplace.

In conclusion, the results of the evaluation of the coursebook were consistent with the results of classroom observations that reflected problems caused by no students' language needs analysis at the beginning of the courses. The results seemed to reveal that the coursebook's pedagogic values and positive attributes and its shortcomings and drawbacks are balanced. Regarding the merits, it is worth mentioning that the categories which the teachers and students were most satisfied with are "Language Functions" and "General Attributes"; and that the coursebook provides a spiral multi-skills syllabus and integrates the four macro skills without neglecting any language areas such as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation; especially, the grammar area was rated the most satisfactorily. Despite its merits, the coursebook cannot avoid several negative characteristics. Most teachers and students actually responded unfavorably to the appropriateness of some listening, speaking and writing activities. Difficult listening activities and lack of controlled writing activities might also demotivate the students and make the teachers neglect these skills. In terms of cultural aspects, the coursebook does not reflect multicultural aspects through learning activities. The above-mentioned demerits might lead to the fact that many teachers and students did not think that the curriculum goals could be achieved only based on the use of the coursebook.

3.4. Recommendations

Aiming at making a small contribution to enhancing English language education at the tertiary level in Vietnam, the current study has employed different research methods to productively address the proposed research questions and made some practical recommendations in relation to the use of the coursebook as the content of the EFL curriculum for stakeholders, as specifically stated below:

For the Curriculum Managers / Course Designers

In non-English speaking contexts, the coursebook is usually used as the core content of English curricula, so the selection of the coursebook needs to be given careful consideration. The results of the study revealed that the coursebook was selected without being based on students' needs analysis. Consequently, many students encountered difficulties in studying it. The syllabus content must be as flexible as possible. It must be created on the basis of data yielded by the analysis of language needs (Yalden, 1987). It is recommended that students' needs be analysed before the coursebook is selected for the curriculum.

Students should be placed in the right class in accordance with their English proficiency level rather than their majors. A thorough investigation into what students need to learn and how the target language is to be learned needs to be conducted (Graves, 2000). This job must be done not only by the institutional Council of Experts or by a group of two or three people, but by teachers and students as well. Teachers should be invited to participate in the selection of the coursebook because they are the main curriculum implementers.

The results of the study also revealed that problems existed in time allocation and content division to each lesson, unit and course. “American Headway” is an integrated-skill series. The teachers and students need sufficient time to achieve the curriculum goals and objectives. In the researcher’s opinion, at least 10 or 12 periods should be allocated to one unit so that the teachers and students can perform major tasks and activities more effectively. Because the coursebook is not designed by local authors, the course designer should place importance on the degree of matching between the amount of materials offered and the number of teaching periods assigned to the English subject (Davcheva & Sercu, 2005).

More specifically, time allocation for skills development should be increased. As much time as possible should be spent focusing on students’ using the target language (Nation & Macalister, 2010). If increasing the amount of time is impossible, it is advised that the number of units for each course be reduced. It is impossible to force students to develop the four skills with a large amount of language input within 135 minutes as illustrated above. A lesson with a large amount of language input and just with the teacher’s explanation, but without practising using the language will certainly result in a “disaster” in foreign language education.

Furthermore, teachers are the main curriculum implementers. It is required that they clearly know how to deal with the course content and be flexible in the exploitation of the coursebook. However, the results of the classroom observations revealed that the teachers “stuck” to the coursebook. It seemed that they were forced to do so, or they were not trained to adapt the coursebook. Teachers must be trained to adapt the coursebook to match the class (Richards & Farrell, 2005). The study suggested that in-service training courses or seminars relating to how to perform the course syllabus and how and when to adapt the coursebook be organised for the teachers so that they can implement the courses more effectively.

For EFL Teachers

The results of the study revealed that the teachers were not successfully in the use of the coursebook in their classes. They neglected some sections designed for developing productive skills in the unit, but paid much attention to language or receptive skills development. The course content includes the four strands of meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output and fluency activities (Nation and Macalister, 2010). It is advised that the four strands be balanced. The neglect or over-emphasis of a strand is a major failing in many language courses (Nation and Macalister, 2010). If any strand is overloaded and takes much time, it is recommended that some parts be omitted in order that receptive skills or productive skills are not being neglected at the expense of the other. What is more, a coursebook seems to be unable to set clear objectives and to choose suitable approaches for a specific context (Tomlinson, 1998), and very few coursebooks actually fully cover a syllabus. As no coursebook is perfect and its tasks or activities are not always interesting, motivating and suitable to students’ diverse levels of proficiency, EFL teachers should assume responsibility for compensating any deficiencies of the coursebook including supplementing tasks for developing speaking and listening skills, particularly offering natural examples of non-native speaking accents through the use of authentic supplementary materials. Teachers should know how to choose the content appropriate for their class and its syllabus (Krashen, 1989) so that they can engage all the students in the process of learning.

3.5. Conclusion

The American Headway series (2nd edition) is used as the core content of the EFL curriculum in the context of study, a non-public university, which is a part of the tertiary level in Vietnam. The study sought to investigate how it was selected and used and how much it satisfied the teachers and students. The results of the study were consistent with other previous studies that found that the selection of the coursebook was not based on students’ needs analysis (Tsiplakides, 2011), and the teachers did not adapt the coursebook to fit the students’ expectations and proficiency levels (Luu, 2012); or the coursebook had shortcomings. For example, cultural aspects were sometimes irrelevant to the context (Alemi & Sadehvandi, 2012), and the levels of complexity and inappropriateness of listening and speaking activities might demotivate the students. The study has provided an insight of how the teachers implement the EFL curriculum in relation to the use of the coursebook and how much the coursebook satisfies them and their students. It is undeniable that to enhance the quality of

English language teaching and learning in the university in particular as well as at the tertiary level in Vietnam in general, managers or course designers and teachers should have an innovative view on selecting and using the coursebook.

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