

EVALUATION OF THE ENGLISH TEXTBOOK SOLUTIONS PRE-INTERMEDIATE: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: The Solutions series is one popular English textbook series and has been used in English as a foreign language (EFL) courses at higher education institutions in Vietnam. However, there is limited evidence of whether the Solutions textbooks are suitable and effective, and no prior studies have evaluated the textbooks from student perspectives. This study, therefore, investigated students' evaluation of Solutions Pre-intermediate, one textbook belonging to the Solutions series. 256 non-English majors at a public university in Vietnam participated in the study and completed an online 29-item questionnaire which examined their perceptions of the organization, activities, linguistic aspects, and subject and content and their overall evaluation of the textbook. The results showed that overall, students had a high opinion of the textbook and chose to use it again for learning English. These suggest that Solutions Pre-intermediate appears to meet tertiary level EFL students' language learning needs and objectives.

Keywords: Textbook evaluation, Solutions Pre-intermediate, student evaluation, non-English majors

1. Introduction

Textbooks play a significant role in most language programs (Richards, 2001; Sheldon, 1988). They can be custom-designed to fit the aims and objectives of a particular language course or selected from available commercial textbooks. Given the complexity and the cost of designing a textbook as well the massive choices of textbooks, many language courses nowadays tend to use commercial textbooks as the main teaching and learning materials.

The Solutions series is among the popular choices of the ELT textbooks for English language teaching (ELT) programs. The series is written by Falla and Davies (2019) and published by Oxford University Press. It comprises of five-level English course books designed for teenagers and young adults and accompanied by CDs, student workbooks and teacher manuals. Each course book has 10 units which cover different aspects of language learning, including vocabulary and grammar, four language skills, and language use in real-life and culturally specific situations. Speaking is integrated into all lessons, with step-by-step guidance leading to real-life practice (Falla & Davies, 2019).

The Solutions series has been used as the textbooks in English language programs for non-English majors at higher education institutions in Vietnam (e.g., Ha Tinh University, see Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh, 2022). However, there has been very limited evidence of evaluation of this textbook in the Vietnamese context or elsewhere in the world, with an exception of a recent study (Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh, 2022) concerning teacher evaluation of Solutions Pre-intermediate. The study found that English teachers have fairly positive evaluation of the textbook and recommend to keep using it. While both teachers and students are the two main

users of textbooks and are most influenced by them, it is necessary to consider the suitability and effectiveness of the textbook from the perspectives of not only teachers but also students. Therefore, this study aimed to examine students' evaluation of the textbook Solutions Pre-intermediate. The study answered the following research question: Are students satisfied with the quality of the textbook Solutions Pre-intermediate used in English courses for non-English majors? Different aspects of the textbook including its layout and design, activities and tasks, skills, linguistic aspects, and subject and content as well as its suitability to the university's language training objectives were considered.

2. Literature review

2.1 The role of textbooks in ELT programs

Nowadays, textbooks are an essential component in many ELT programs throughout the world (Richards, 2001; Tomlinson, 2020; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004). They offer a number of advantages to course designers, teachers and learners. Textbooks contribute to developing a systematic and well-structured syllabus for a language course and provide the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom. The use of a textbook also contributes to standardizing classroom instruction and assessment as students in different classes receive similar content and therefore, can be assessed in the same way. In addition, the availability of textbooks in a given course may greatly save teachers' time on material creation, thus allowing them to devote time to teaching. For learners in the English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, textbooks are probably the major source of contact they have with the target language apart from input provided by the teacher.

Despite a great number of their benefits as mentioned above, English textbooks may have disadvantages. One major problem of many English textbooks is that they may lack authenticity (Tomlinson, 2012). Texts, dialogues and other aspects of content tend to be written to incorporate teaching points and are often not representative of real-life situations and language (Richards, 2001). In addition, many textbooks may contain distorted content. In order to make textbooks acceptable in many different contexts, controversial topics are avoided and instead, an idealized view of the world is portrayed. Furthermore, textbooks may not correspond to individual learners' interests and needs since they are often written for global markets and they may contain unfamiliar cultural content and/or negative gender and race stereotypes. Concerning these drawbacks of commercial English textbooks, it is important that the selection of textbooks for a particular ELT program must be subject to careful evaluation.

2.2 Textbook evaluation

Textbook evaluation plays an important role in the teaching and learning process. It can uncover the strengths and weaknesses of textbooks in general and their relevance to a particular teaching and learning context (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004). It helps teachers understand the textbook so that they can amend their teaching to suit the course aims and learners' needs. Textbook evaluation takes place at different stages throughout a course (Cunningsworth, 1995). A predictive evaluation takes place during the stage of course designing and it aims at assessing the potential value of available textbooks. This pre-use evaluation helps course designers make the decision of selecting an appropriate textbook for a particular course. The whilst-use evaluation allows teachers and educators to observe strengths and weaknesses of the textbook

being used and take actions if needed. The post-use evaluation takes places after the textbook being used throughout a course and measures the actual effect of the textbook on its users (Ellis, 1997; Tomlinson, 1998). This type of evaluation helps identify strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks already in use. Based on post-use evaluation, teachers and educators can make reliable decisions about the use, adaptation, or replacement of the textbooks.

Evaluation of a textbook is often based on checklists of criteria which cover various aspects of the textbook, ranging from its physical appearance to its subject and content (Sheldon, 1988; Tomlinson, 2012, 2020). Some criteria assess a textbook's aims, methodology, and approaches and the degree to which they fit the goals of the institutions' overall curriculum. Some evaluate the physical characteristics of textbooks such as layout, organizational, and logistical characteristics. Other criteria concern the authenticity of the language used in the textbooks, the effectiveness of activities for language practice, the balance of language skills, the appropriateness and diversity of subject and content as well as the representation of cultural and gender components.

2.2 Evaluation of ELT textbooks

Along with the massive availability of ELT course books, there has been a growing interest in ELT textbook evaluation around the world (e.g., Ahmed, 2016; Alemi & Sadehvandi, 2012; Bal, 2020; Böcü & Razi, 2016; Mohammadi & Abdi, 2014; Litz, 2005; Nguyen Pham Thanh Van & Huynh Thi Long Ha, 2018; Tok, 2010; Tran Minh Thanh, Nguyen Thuy Linh, & Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc, 2020; Wuttisrisiriporn & Usaha, 2019). Many popular commercial ELT textbooks such as English Firsthand 2, Pacesetter, Top Notch, and Life have been evaluated in prior research.

Litz's (2005) study evaluated English Firsthand 2 (Helgesen et al., 2010), the textbook of an intermediate EFL course at a South Korean university. Eight teachers and 500 students responded to a teacher and a student evaluation questionnaire, respectively. Both questionnaires were based on the specific concerns and priorities of the university. They contained questions that pertained to the layout and design, range and balance of activities, skills appropriateness and integration, social and cultural considerations, subject and content, and language types represented in the textbook. The results showed that overall, both teachers and students recognized that the textbook offered few weaknesses (i.e., inadequate pronunciation practice and lack of an ESP focus) but a great number of advantages. Particularly, the organization of the textbook was coherent and effective and the textbook applied a topic-based and multi-skill syllabus to integrate the four skills along with the development of vocabulary and grammar. There were discrepant opinions over some aspects of the textbook between the teachers and the students. For example, the students thought that the activities in the textbook were both motivating and interesting and could promote meaningful exchanges and genuine communication in realistic contexts. The teachers, however, believed that the textbook was partially lacking in authenticity on all counts.

Alemi and Sadehvandi (2012) conducted a study to evaluate the Pacesetter Series (Strange & Hall, 2005) and determine the appropriateness of the series in Iranian EFL contexts. Using Litz's (2005) teacher evaluation form, sixty-four EFL teachers rated the quality of different aspects of the textbooks. They found that, although the teachers agreed that Pacesetter

could be suitable ELT textbooks in the Iranian context, the series did not provide adequate speaking practice and the incorporation of European culture in every activity may cause frustration in many Iranian adolescent learners since they were unfamiliar with certain aspects of the target language culture. Similar findings regarding unfamiliar cultural content of other ELT textbooks have been replicated in other studies (Bal, 2020; Böcü & Razi, 2016; Tok, 2010).

Mohammadi and Abdi (2014) examined both teachers' and students' evaluation of the textbook *Top Notch* (Saslow & Ascher, 2011) used at some English language institutions in Iran. Thirty-two teachers and 105 students responded to a 40-item questionnaire and a 25-item questionnaire, respectively. Both questionnaires were adapted from Litz (2005). The results showed that both teachers and students felt that the textbook was a useful teaching and learning tool that met students' needs, but the textbook did have shortcomings such as lack of vocabulary glossary and ineffective grammar presentation. In addition, the teachers and students showed differing degrees of agreement to some evaluation items. While the students agreed that the activities in the textbook encouraged communicative and meaningful practice, the teachers had a neutral opinion. Similarly, while the students thought that the materials were not culturally biased and they did not portray any negative stereotype, the teachers were in neutral position.

Tran Minh Thanh, Nguyen Thuy Linh, and Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc (2020) examined teacher evaluation of *Life Elementary*, a textbook belonging to the *Life* series (Hughes, Stephenson, & Dummett, 2017) published by Cengage Learning. *Life Elementary* was used for teaching non-English majors at Thai Nguyen University in Vietnam. Fourteen English teachers responded to a survey evaluating different aspects of the textbook, including general attributes, linguistic aspects, language skills, and exercises. The results reveal that, although the textbook *Life Elementary* is considered to be relevant to the course objectives and the university's teaching-learning context, there are some weaknesses such as uninteresting writing activities, inadequate pronunciation practice, and unfamiliar cultural contents.

Nguyen Pham Thanh Van and Huynh Thi Long Ha (2018) conducted a study to examine teacher and student evaluation of the textbook *Life Pre-intermediate* used for teaching non-English majors at Hue University in Vietnam. Similar to the aforementioned studies, this study also used a checklist of criteria to assess the effectiveness of different aspects of the textbook. In addition, the study used qualitative data from interviewing teachers. The results of the study also showed that the majority of teachers and students thought that the textbook is suitable for the teaching and learning requirements of the English programs and meets the expectation of the students. However, in this study, students appeared to have lower ratings for the textbook as compared to the teachers, especially on aspects such as cultural contents and grammar presentation. This suggested that there is still some mismatch between teachers' and students' perceptions of the suitability of a given textbook.

Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh (2022) carried out a study to examine teachers' evaluation of *Solutions Pre-Intermediate*, a textbook belonging to the *Solutions* series. Ten English teachers at a public university in Vietnam responded to a 30-Likert-scale item questionnaire evaluating the design and layout, language type, skills, subject and content, and whole aspect of the textbook. The results showed that overall, the teachers were satisfied with the quality of the textbook, except for some concern over lacking focus on pronunciation teaching and inadequate glossary.

To the researchers' knowledge, Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh's (2022) study appears to be the only one study evaluating the Solutions series in the Vietnamese context and probably, elsewhere in the world. There has been no prior research examining students' evaluation of this series. As shown in previous research (e.g., Mohammadi & Abdi, 2014; Litz, 2005; Nguyen Pham Thanh Van & Huynh Thi Long Ha, 2018), teachers and students may have different opinions over aspects of the textbook. In conclusion, limited evaluation of the Solutions series in general and the lack of students' evaluation in particular suggests a need for further research to provide better understanding of the suitability and appropriateness of the textbooks to tertiary level EFL courses, particularly from students' perspectives.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

Participants of the study were 256 students at a public university in Vietnam, including 212 females and 44 males aged 19-25. They were either freshmen or second-year students, and they studied various non-English majors, including kindergarten education, primary education, Chinese linguistics, math pedagogy, accounting, business administration, construction engineering, environmental engineering, and computer science. They started learning English at various grades (Grade 1-7) but mostly at Grade 3, and so, before attending tertiary education, all participants had completed from 6 to 12 years of English education at secondary level. At university, they had to complete two mandatory English courses which aimed to improve their English proficiency to an intermediate level and above (i.e., from Level 3 under Vietnam's 6-Level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework), and the textbook of both courses was Solutions Pre-intermediate. Each course covered five units in the textbook, with students having three class hours per week over a 15-week semester. At the time of the study, 20% of the participants completed both courses and 80% were approaching the end of the second course.

3.2 Materials

In order to examine students' evaluation of the textbook Solutions Pre-intermediate, a 29-item questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was adapted from the "Student Textbook Evaluation Scale" which was originally developed by Litz (2005) and has been widely adapted in research on ELT textbook evaluation (e.g. Mohammadi & Abdi, 2014; Tok, 2010). The questionnaire included 28 Likert-scale items and one open-ended item. The Likert-scale items asked students to evaluate the following dimensions of the textbook: design and layout (7 items, see Table 1), activities (5 items, see Table 2), language skills (4 items, see Table 3), language type (4 items, see Table 4), subject and content (5 items, see Table 5), and overall evaluation (3 items, see Table 6). The Likert scale included five points as follows: "Strongly Agree (5)", "Agree (4)", "Partly Agree (3)", "Disagree (2)", "Strongly Disagree (1)". The open-ended item asked students to provide further comments about the textbook.

This study used a bilingual English-Vietnamese version of the questionnaire. The first researcher translated the questionnaire into Vietnamese and the second researcher reviewed the translation and modified it if necessary. In the questionnaire, the Vietnamese translation appeared right after the original English statements. Before being administered to the participants of the study, the questionnaire was piloted to a group of five students to receive

their feedback in terms of wording clarity and to estimate the duration needed for the questionnaire completion.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The questionnaire was administered to students via an online survey platform. The completion of the questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes, and participants responded to the questionnaire at their own time and pace. Participants responded to items evaluating the effectiveness of the textbook after answering a few demographic background questions asking for their age, gender, grades to start learning English and undergraduate majors.

Data was analyzed using the Microsoft Excel program. Descriptive statistics, including mean ratings and standard deviation for individual evaluation items, and percentage of rating distribution were calculated. Data from the open-ended questions were analyzed thematically and used as supplementary data to explain the results of the rating data from Likert-scale items.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Students' evaluation of the design and layout of Solutions Pre-Intermediate

The first aspect of the textbook Solutions Pre-intermediate being evaluated was its design and layout. Seven items (see Table 1) were used to examine whether the organization and presentation of language items and activities in the textbook were appropriate and effective.

Table 1. Students' evaluation of the design and layout of Solutions Pre-intermediate

Textbook evaluation items	N	strongly disagree	disagree	partly agree	agree	strongly agree	M	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
1. The textbook includes a detailed overview of the functions, structures and vocabulary that will be taught in each unit.	256	9 3.6%	18 7.1%	62 24.5%	66 26.1%	98 38.7%	3.88	1.12
2. The layout and design are appropriate & clear.	256	6 2.3%	17 6.6%	57 22.3%	78 30.5%	98 38.3%	3.96	1.04
3. The textbook is organized effectively.	256	6 2.3%	18 7%	49 19.1%	85 32.3%	98 38.3%	3.98	1.03
4. An adequate vocabulary list or glossary is included.	256	6 2.3%	19 7.4%	50 19.5%	79 30.9%	102 39.8%	3.98	1.05
5. Adequate review sections and exercises are included.	256	6 2.3%	14 5.5%	47 18.4%	78 30.5%	111 43.4%	4.07	1.02
6. An adequate set of evaluation quizzes or testing suggestions is included.	256	5 2%	16 6.3%	57 22.3%	82 32%	96 37.5%	3.97	1.01
7. The material objectives are apparent to both the teacher and students.	256	5 2%	15 5.9%	58 22.7%	71 27.7%	107 41.8%	4.02	1.03

Note: N: number of participants, M: mean; SD: standard deviation; italicized *digits* indicate the raw counts for each response option.

As shown in Table 1, two items (Items 5 and 7) had an average score above 4 and five items had an average score approaching 4. The distribution of participants' rating showed that for most of the statements, nearly 70% of the participants agreed/strongly agreed with them and around 20% had a neutral opinion, while very low percentage (less than 10%) of the participants disagreed/strongly disagreed with them. The results were consistent with prior findings of teachers' positive evaluation of the design and layout of this textbook (Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh, 2022) and some other textbooks (e.g., Mohammadi & Abdi, 2014; Litz, 2005; Nguyen Pham Thanh Van & Huynh Thi Long Ha, 2018). These suggest that overall, Solutions Pre-intermediate is designed appropriately and organized effectively, with detailed overview for each unit, adequate review sections and exercises, beneficial guidance, and apparent objectives to both teachers and students.

It is noted that in their further responses to the open-ended questionnaire item, some of the students commented that the font size used in some sections of the textbook was quite small. It is not a big surprise given that this textbook was chosen from a commercial textbook series. To reduce the page numbers and consequently, the price, commercial textbooks tend to use quite small font size in some sections.

4.2 Students' evaluation of activities and tasks in Solutions Pre-Intermediate

Table 2. Students' evaluation of activities in Solutions Pre-Intermediate

Textbook evaluation items	N	strongly disagree	disagree	partly agree	agree	strongly agree	M	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
8. The textbook provides a balance of activities (e.g., There is an even distribution of free vs. controlled exercises and tasks that focus on both fluent and accurate production).	256	5 2%	15 5.9%	63 24.6%	73 28.5%	100 39.1%	3.97	1.02
9. The activities encourage sufficient communicative and meaningful practice.	256	9 3.5%	22 8.65%	51 19.9%	80 31.3%	94 36.7%	3.89	1.1
10. The activities incorporate individual pair and group work.	256	6 2.3%	15 5.9%	52 20.3%	91 35.5%	92 35.9%	3.97	1
11. The grammar points and vocabulary items are introduced in motivating and realistic contexts.	256	7 2.7%	15 5.9%	54 21.1%	85 33.2%	95 37.1%	3.96	1.03
12. The activities promote creative, original and independent responses.	256	9 3.5%	12 4.7%	66 25.8%	67 26.2%	102 39.8%	3.94	1.07

Note: N: number of participants, M: mean; SD: standard deviation; italicized *digits* indicate the raw counts for each response option.

The second aspect of Solutions Pre-intermediate being evaluated in this study was the activities and tasks designed for introducing language features and practicing using them. As presented in Table 2, there were five evaluation items concerning activities and tasks of the textbook. The mean scores of all items were approaching 4 (the point of agreeing), and the rating distribution also showed that around 70% of the participants agreed and 20-25% somewhat agreed, while less than 10% disagreed with these statements. These showed that, similar to their evaluation of the textbook's design and layout, participants had a relatively positive evaluation of its activities and tasks.

Once again, the results above are in line with teachers' favorable perceptions of the activities in Solutions Pre-intermediate in previous research (Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh, 2022). Apparently, the textbook provides a balance of free versus controlled exercises and tasks focusing on both fluent and accurate production, and its activities encourage communicative and meaningful practice as well as well incorporate individual and pair/group work. In addition, grammar points and vocabulary items seem to be introduced in motivating and realistic contexts, and the activities can promote creative, original and independent responses.

4.3 Students' evaluation of skills taught in Solutions Pre-intermediate

As summarized in Table 3, four items were used to examine students' evaluation of the skills taught in Solutions Pre-Intermediate. All four items had a mean score of 4 or higher, and around 70% of the participants agreed with these items while less than 10% disagreed with them. These indicated that overall, students thought that the textbook includes the skills that they need to practice and provide an appropriate balance of the four language skills. In addition, they agreed that the textbook includes the skills that students need to practice and emphasizes the teaching of subskills such as note-taking in listening and skimming and scanning in reading. Furthermore, students thought that the textbook highlights natural pronunciation.

Table 3. Students' evaluation of skills taught in Solutions Pre-intermediate

Textbook evaluation items	N	strongly disagree	disagree	partly agree	agree	strongly agree	M	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
13. The materials include and focus on the skills that I need to practice.	256	4 1.6%	14 5.5%	57 22.3%	84 32.8%	97 37.9%	4.00	.98
14. The materials provide an appropriate balance of the four language skills.	256	6 2.3%	11 4.3%	57 22.3%	84 32.8%	98 38.3%	4.03	.99
15. The textbook pays attention to sub-skills, that is, listening for gist, note-taking, skimming for information, etc.	256	3 1.2%	17 6.6%	59 23%	68 26.6%	109 42.6%	4.03	1.02
16. The textbook highlights and provide practice activities for natural pronunciation.	256	6 2.3%	13 5.1%	55 21.5%	82 32%	100 39.1%	4.01	1.01

Note: N: number of participants, M: mean; SD: standard deviation; italicized *digits* indicate the raw counts for each response option.

Similarly, the teachers in Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh’s (2022) study also thought that the textbook includes the skills that students need to practice and provides an appropriate balance of the four language skills as well as subskills. However, different from the results of this study, the teachers in Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh’s study did have concern over the teaching of pronunciation skills in the textbook. In their point of view, the textbook appears to lack a focus on teaching pronunciation, including stress and intonation. Interestingly, although the students’ rating to Item 16 indicated their positive evaluation of teaching pronunciation skills in the textbook, their open-ended responses did show their opinion that there was a lack of pronunciation and intonation practice in Solutions Pre-intermediate and furthermore, the pronunciation activities were not interesting enough for them to be engaged in and were quite difficult to follow. Pronunciation skills are often one of the biggest weaknesses among language learners; however, many ELT textbooks evaluated in previous studies (e.g., Tran Minh Thanh, Nguyen Thuy Linh, & Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc, 2020) and the textbook in this study appear not to include adequate and engaging pronunciation practice. Therefore, it is suggested that when using these textbooks, students should be provided with supplementary materials and activities to help improve their pronunciation skills.

4.4 Students’ evaluation of linguistic aspects in Solutions Pre-intermediate

The linguistic aspects of the textbook Solutions Pre-intermediate were evaluated via four items as presented in Table 4. The linguistic aspects considered the authenticity of the language used in the textbook, the appropriateness of the language for the level, the suitable progression of vocabulary and grammar, and exemplification of the grammar points.

Table 4. Students’ evaluation of linguistic aspects in Solutions Pre-intermediate

Textbook evaluation items	N	strongly disagree	disagree	partly agree	agree	strongly agree	M	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
17. The language used in the textbook is authentic, that is, like real-life English.	256	6 2.3%	14 5.5%	46 18%	87 34%	103 40.2%	4.04	1.01
18. The language used is at the right level for students' current English ability.	256	6 2.3%	13 5.1%	61 23.8%	72 28.1%	104 40.6%	4.00	1.03
19. The progression of grammar points and vocabulary items is appropriate.	256	5 2%	14 5.5%	53 20.7%	78 30.5%	106 41.4%	4.04	1.01
20. The grammar points are presented with brief and easy examples and explanations.	256	6 2.3%	13 5.1%	61 23.8%	76 29.7%	100 39.1%	3.98	1.02

Note: N: number of participants, M: mean; SD: standard deviation; italicized *digits* indicate the raw counts for each response option.

The rating means and distributions as summarized in Table 4 showed that overall, students agreed that the language used in the textbook is authentic and at the right level for their' current English ability. One major objective of most ELT programs is to prepare students with the ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations; however, a common problem of many ELT textbooks is lacking authenticity. In previous research evaluating other ELT textbooks such as English Firsthand 2 (Litz, 2005), students tended to rate the authenticity of the language used in the textbooks more highly than did the teachers. It might have resulted from students' inadequate knowledge and exposure to authentic target language to be able to make a right judgement to the related evaluation items. However, the students in this study and the teachers in Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh's (2022) study had the same opinions that Solutions Pre-intermediate included authentic language input. Therefore, it can be concluded that the language used in Solutions Pre-intermediate meets the requirements of authenticity, thus potentially promoting natural language use by undergraduate students and in turn, making them feel more confident when they have to use the target language in real life.

The students in this study and the teachers in Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh's 2022 study also had comparable and favorable opinions of other linguistic aspects in Solutions Pre-intermediate. They both thought that the progression of grammar points and vocabulary items was appropriate and the grammar points were presented with brief and easy examples and explanations.

4.5 Students' evaluation of the subject and content in Solutions Pre-Intermediate

There were five items (see Table 5) evaluating the subject and content of the textbook. Similar to their evaluation of other aspects of the textbook, given the mean scores and rating distribution as presented in Table 5, students also evaluated the subject (i.e., themes and topics) and content of Solutions Pre-intermediate highly. They thought the subject and content of the textbook is relevant to their English learning needs and is generally realistic, topically diverse, interesting, challenging, and motivating. Once again, the results of this study replicated Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh's (2022) findings of teachers' positive evaluation of this aspect of the textbook. Similar findings are found in prior studies evaluating Top Notch (Mohammadi & Abdi, 2014), English Firsthand 2 (e.g., Mohammadi & Abdi, 2014; Litz, 2005) and Life (e.g., Nguyen Pham Thanh Van & Huynh Thi Long Ha, 2018). These suggest that nowadays, ELT textbook writers have made efforts in selecting interesting and relevant topics and content to be included in their textbooks to meet diverse groups of learners' needs.

Table 5. Students' evaluation of subject and content in Solutions Pre-intermediate

Textbook evaluation items	N	strongly disagree	disagree	partly agree	agree	strongly agree	M	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
21. The subject and content of the textbook is relevant to EFL tertiary students' needs..	256	4 1.6%	12 4.7%	62 24.2%	74 28.9%	104 40.6%	4.02	.99
22. The subject and content of the textbook is generally realistic.	256	3 1.2%	21 8.2%	53 34%	87 34%	92 35.9%	3.95	1.00
23. The subject and content of the textbook is interesting, challenging, and	256	6 2.3%	14 5.5%	69 27%	80 31.3%	87 34%	3.89	1.01

motivating.								
24. There is a sufficient variety in the subject and content of the textbook.	256	<i>2</i> .8%	<i>14</i> 5.5%	<i>60</i> 23.4%	<i>83</i> 32.4%	<i>97</i> 37.9%	4.01	.95
25. The materials are not culturally biased, and they do not portray any negative stereotypes.	256	<i>5</i> 2%	<i>12</i> 4.7%	<i>51</i> 19.9%	<i>85</i> 33.2%	<i>103</i> 40.2%	4.05	.98

Note: N: number of participants, M: mean; SD: standard deviation; italicized *digits* indicate the raw counts for each response option.

Many commercial textbooks evaluated in prior studies have been shown to contain unfamiliar or biased cultural content (Bal, 2020; Böcü & Razi, 2016; Tok, 2010; Tran Tran Minh Thanh, Nguyen Thuy Linh, & Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc, 2020). In addition, in previous research (e.g., Mohammadi & Abdi, 2014), the students showed higher ratings to cultural components of the textbooks as compared to the teachers. However, similar to the teachers in Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh’s (2022) study, the majority of the students in this study agreed that the materials in Solutions Pre-intermediate are not culturally biased and do not portray any negative stereotypes.

4.6 Students’ overall evaluation of Solutions Pre-intermediate

Table 6. Students’ overall evaluation of Solutions Pre-intermediate

Textbook evaluation items	N	strongly disagree	disagree	partly agree	agree	strongly agree	M	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
26. The textbook is appropriate for the language-learning aims of my institution.	256	<i>1</i> .4%	<i>14</i> 5.5%	<i>58</i> 22.7%	<i>79</i> 30.9%	<i>104</i> 40.6%	4.06	.94
27. The textbook raises my interest in further English language study.	256	<i>1</i> .4%	<i>15</i> 5.9%	<i>71</i> 27.7%	<i>83</i> 32.4%	<i>86</i> 33.6%	3.93	.94
28. I would choose to study this textbook again.	256	<i>6</i> 2.3%	<i>12</i> 4.7%	<i>55</i> 21.5%	<i>85</i> 33.2%	<i>98</i> 38.3%	4.00	.99

Note: N: number of participants, M: mean; SD: standard deviation; italicized *digits* indicate the raw counts for each response option.

As presented in Table 6, two items for students’ overall evaluation of the textbook had a mean of 4 or above or one approaching 4. These suggest that the students were generally satisfied with the quality of the textbook. Similar to the teachers in Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh’s (2022) study, the students in this study also thought that the textbook was appropriate for the language-learning aims of their institution. They also agreed that the textbook raised their interest in further English language study. More importantly, both the teachers in the previous study (Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh, 2022) and the large majority of students in this study indicated that they would choose to use the textbook again.

5. Conclusion and suggestions for further research

This study examined evaluation of the English textbook Solutions Pre-intermediate from the perspectives of EFL tertiary students. The results showed that the students generally have a positive evaluation of the textbook. Overall, the aspects of the textbook, including design and layout, activities, skills, language type, and themes and topics selected in the textbook, and its content appear to meet the needs of the English language learners in the current research, although students did think that the textbook did not provide adequate pronunciation practice, as indicated in their further comments about the textbook. The findings of students' satisfaction of Solutions Pre-intermediate is generally in line with previous findings of teachers' high evaluation of it (Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh, 2022). These results suggest that the textbook can continue to be used in teaching English to students at tertiary level in the Vietnamese context, provided that students will be provided with supplementary pronunciation practice.

The findings of this study had provided missing evidence of students' evaluation of a textbook belonging to the Solutions series. However, this study has not considered factors that may influence students' evaluation of the textbook. Although it was conducted on a quite large sample of participants, it did not include measures of students' language proficiency, course performance and English learning motivation. Higher proficiency and lower proficiency users of English may use textbooks differently and thus, may also have different perception of the effectiveness of a particular textbook. Similarly, students with better performance and lower performance may also differ in their use and evaluation of the textbook. Furthermore, students with higher English learning motivation may be more active in using and exploiting the textbook than do their lower learning motivation counterparts. Thus, further research is required to examine the effects of these factors on students' evaluation of the textbook. In addition, this study used a questionnaire which was time effective in terms of data collection but might not be able to provide information about how students and teachers actually use the textbook as well what challenges that they may encounter during the course of textbook use. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of different aspects of the textbook in combination with qualitative measures such as interview with teachers and students may provide better evaluation of the strength and weaknesses of the textbook as well as more insights into the impact that the textbook may have on teaching and learning.

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ĐÁNH GIÁ CỦA SINH VIÊN ĐỐI VỚI GIÁO TRÌNH TIẾNG ANH “SOLUTIONS PRE-INTERMEDIATE”

Tóm tắt: Đánh giá giáo trình đóng vai trò quan trọng trong quá trình dạy và học. Bộ sách “Solutions” đã được sử dụng làm giáo trình trong nhiều khóa học tiếng Anh tại các trường đại học ở Việt Nam và trên thế giới. Tuy nhiên, chưa có nhiều nghiên cứu đánh giá tính hiệu quả của bộ giáo trình này, đặc biệt còn thiếu những nghiên cứu về đánh giá của sinh viên. Nghiên cứu này xem xét đánh giá của sinh viên đối với giáo trình Solutions (cấp độ tiền trung cấp). 256 sinh viên không thuộc chuyên ngành tiếng Anh tại một trường đại học ở Việt Nam trả lời một bảng điều tra bao gồm 29 câu hỏi để đánh giá các khía cạnh khác nhau của giáo trình như thiết kế và trình bày, hoạt động, nội dung và các kỹ năng được dạy trong giáo trình. Kết quả nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng nhìn chung, sinh viên có đánh giá tích cực đối với tất cả các mặt của giáo trình và lựa chọn sẽ tiếp tục sử dụng giáo trình này để học tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: Đánh giá giáo trình, Solutions Pre-intermediate, đánh giá của sinh viên, sinh viên không chuyên Tiếng Anh