

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

EVALUATION OF AN INTEGRATED ENGLISH READING AND WRITING TEXTBOOK: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES**NGUYEN THI BICH HANH***

ABSTRACT: “Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing” has been used as the textbook for the integrated Reading and Writing 2 course for English majors at Ha Tinh University (HTU). However, no prior studies have evaluated the suitability and effectiveness of this textbook. This study, therefore, investigated students’ evaluation of *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing*. Forty-six HTU English-major students completed a questionnaire consisting of 45 items evaluating the design and organization, activities and tasks, language use, topics and content, skills, and impact of the textbook. The results showed that overall, the students had a positive evaluation of the textbook and thought the textbook helped them achieve the goal and objectives of the given course. These suggest that *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing* appears to be a suitable and effective textbook for an integrated reading and writing course for English majors.

KEY WORDS: Textbook evaluation; integrated reading and writing; Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing, student perspectives, English majors.

RECEIVED: September, 8th, 2025.

EDITED: November, 17th, 2025

1. Introduction

Textbooks are one key component in many English language teaching (ELT) programs (Richards, 2001; Tomlinson, 2020), and nowadays, many language courses use commercial textbooks as the main teaching and learning materials. Among the most popular English textbooks, the six-level *Q: Skills for Success Reading and Writing* (third edition) series published by Oxford University Press is designed to develop students’ English reading and writing ability and study skills to prepare them for academic success. Each third-edition student book has eight units which cover different aspects of language learning, including vocabulary and grammar, reading and writing skills, and language use in real-life and culturally specific situations. Each student book is accompanied by a workbook, online learning resources (videos and online practice), and a teacher book.

The *Q: Skills for Success Reading and Writing* textbooks have been used as the main teaching and learning material for the integrated reading and writing courses for English-major students at Ha Tinh University (HTU) for a number of years. However, there have been lacking evaluations of whether the textbooks are suitable and effective for the given courses. Therefore, this study aimed to examine students’ evaluation of *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing* (Collin & Garner, 2019), the textbook of the Reading and Writing 2 course at HTU. The Reading and Writing 2 course aimed at improving students’ reading and writing ability to the pre-intermediate level, incorporates both teaching and reading skills in each lesson, with students having three hour class per week for over a 15-week semester. The current study answered the following research question: Are HTU English-major students satisfied with the quality of the textbook *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing*?

2. Literature review**2.1. Textbook evaluation**

Textbook evaluation is a systematic process to assess the textbook’s quality, the strengths, weaknesses, and relevance to a particular teaching and learning context (Tomlinson, 2012, 2020). Pre-use evaluation take place during course designing and assesses the potential value of available textbooks so that course designers can make the decision of selecting an appropriate textbook for a particular course (Cunningsworth, 1995). Post-use evaluation is carried out after the textbook is used

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throughout a course and measures the effect of the textbook on its two main users (the teacher and students) (Ellis, 1997). Post-use evaluation uncovers what aspects of the textbook works well and what needs improvement, which, in turn, helps teachers and educators make reliable decisions about the adaptation or replacement of a given textbook.

Evaluation of a textbook follows a checklist of criteria which cover various aspects of the textbook (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 layout and organizational characteristics of the textbook. Other criteria concern the authenticity of the linguistic aspects, the effectiveness of activities and tasks for language practice, the language skills included, the appropriateness and diversity of topics and content as well as cultural representation in the textbook.

2.2. Previous studies on evaluation of ELT textbooks

In recent years, there have been a great number of commercial textbooks available in the field of ELT. Many popular commercial ELT textbooks, such as *English Firsthand* (Litz, 2005), *Pacesetter* (Alemi & Sadehvandi, 2012), *Life* (Tran et al., 2020), and *Solutions* (Nguyen, 2022; Nguyen & Pham, 2024), have been evaluated in prior research.

Litz (2005) examined teachers' and students' evaluation of *English Firsthand 2* (Helgesen et al., 2010), the textbook of an intermediate EFL course at a South Korean university. The study used a teacher and a student evaluation questionnaire which contained items evaluating the layout and design, range and balance of activities, skills appropriateness and integration, subject and content, and language types represented in the textbook. The results showed that overall, both teachers and students thought that the textbook was organized coherently, and the textbook effectively integrated the four skills along with the development of vocabulary and grammar. However, their evaluation also revealed a few weaknesses of the textbook, including inadequate pronunciation practice and lacking authenticity.

Alemi and Sadehvandi (2012) carried out a study to evaluate the *Pacesetter* series (Strange & Hall, 2005) used in EFL programs at some Iranian higher education institutions. Responses of 64 teachers to Litz's (2005) teacher evaluation questionnaire, showed that *Pacesetter* could be suitable ELT textbooks in the Iranian context. However, their evaluation also revealed that the series did not provide adequate speaking practice and many aspects of the European culture incorporated in the textbook were unfamiliar to the students.

Tran et al. (2020) examined teacher evaluation of *Life Elementary* used for teaching non-English majors at Thai Nguyen University in Vietnam. The textbook belonged to the *Life* series (Hughes, Stephenson, & Dummett, 2017) published by Cengage Learning. The results revealed that, although *Life Elementary* was considered to be relevant to the course objectives and the university's teaching-learning context, the textbook contained uninteresting writing activities, inadequate pronunciation practice, and unfamiliar cultural contents. Concerning another textbook for non-English majors in the Vietnamese higher education context, Nguyen (2022) and Nguyen and Pham (2024) carried out a study to examine teachers' and students' evaluation of *Solutions Pre-Intermediate*, respectively. Overall, teachers in Nguyen (2022) and students in Nguyen and Pham (2024) were satisfied with the quality of the textbook and thought that the textbook was suitable for the English courses at their institution. However, the textbook seemed to lack a focus on pronunciation teaching and glossary.

In summary, the ELT textbooks evaluated in the aforementioned studies seem to meet the need and requirements of the language programs in which they serve as the main materials, although each textbook may have certain weaknesses such as unfamiliar content or inadequate pronunciation/speaking practice. It is noted that all these textbooks were used for general English programs or for non-English majors, and there is limited research on English textbooks specifically selected for English majors, including integrated reading and writing textbooks. Therefore, this study was carried out to shed some light on the evaluation of a reading and writing textbook for English

majors after the textbook is already employed in an actual teaching context.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

Participants of the study were 46 HTU students, including 43 females and 3 males aged 19-25. The study was able to recruit a rather small number of participants due to low admission at HTU in recent years. The participants were enrolled in either the English language teaching or English Linguistics program. The majority of them started learning English at Grade 3, while some started at either Grades 1, 2 or 4. At the time of the study, all of them had already completed the Reading and Writing 2 course.

3.2. Materials

In order to examine students' evaluation of *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing*, the study used an online bilingual English-Vietnamese questionnaire consisting of four demographic background items (participants' age, gender, grades to start learning English, and undergraduate majors) and 45 Likert-scale evaluation items (see Tables 1, 2 and 3). Items evaluating the design and layout (6 items), activities, tasks and language use (10 items), topics and content (6 items), and supplemental materials (2 items) of the textbook were mainly adapted from the "Student Textbook Evaluation Scale" originally developed by Litz (2005), while items focusing on the reading and writing skills (15 items) and the overall impact (6 items) were mainly based on the "Localized ELT Textbook Evaluation Checklist" composed by Wuttisrisiriporn and Usaha (2010). The Likert scale included five points: "Strongly Agree (4)", "Agree (3)", "Partly Agree (2)", "Disagree (1)", "Strongly Disagree (0)". The questionnaire was administered via Google Form and took approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Students' evaluation of the design and layout, activities and tasks, language use, and topics and content of *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing*

As shown in Table 1, six items were used to evaluate the design, layout, and organization of *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing*. On a scale from 0 to 4, all six items had a mean rating above 3, indicating that students agreed that the textbook had an effective design, layout and organization. The results were consistent with prior findings of teachers' and students' positive evaluation of the design and layout of other textbooks in previous research (e.g., Litz, 2005; Nguyen, 2022; Nguyen & Pham, 2024; Tran et al., 2019). These suggest that overall, *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing* is designed appropriately and organized effectively, with detailed overview for the content of each unit, adequate review sections and exercises, and apparent material objectives to both teachers and students.

Table 1. Students' evaluation of the design and layout, activities and tasks, language use, topics and content of *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing*

Textbook evaluation items	N	M	SD
Design, layout, and organization			
1. The textbook includes a detailed overview of the functions, skills, structures and vocabulary that will be taught in each unit.	46	3.63	.62
2. The layout and design is appropriate and clear.	46	3.56	.55
3. The textbook is organized effectively.	46	3.60	.54
4. An adequate vocabulary list or glossary is included.	46	3.51	.63
5. Adequate review sections and exercises are included.	46	3.35	.72
6. The materials objectives are apparent to both the teacher and students.	46	3.65	.69
Activities, tasks, and language use			

7. The activities and tasks are student-centered.	46	3.44	.70
8. The activities encourage sufficient communicative and meaningful practice.	46	3.49	.70
9. The activities incorporate individual, pair, and group work.	46	3.58	.63
10. The activities promote creative, original and independent responses.	46	3.65	.61
11. The tasks are conducive to the internalization of newly introduced language.	46	3.51	.63
12. The language used in the textbook is authentic, that is, like real-life English.	46	2.51	1.01
13. The language used is at the right level for my current English ability.	46	3.23	.84
14. The main grammatical and vocabulary items are appropriately and sufficiently chosen for the students' level.	46	3.21	.86
15. The grammar points and vocabulary items are introduced in motivating and realistic contexts.	46	3.26	.69
16. The grammatical and vocabulary items gradually increase in complexity to suit the growing ability of the students.	46	3.33	.81
Topics and content			
17. The topics and content are relevant to my needs as an English language learner.	46	3.51	.74
18. The topics and content are generally realistic.	46	3.65	.61
19. The topics and content are interesting, challenging, and motivating.	46	3.44	.63
20. There is a sufficient variety in the topics and content.	46	3.63	.62
21. The content develops higher skills (e.g., critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem solving).	46	3.53	.74
22. The materials are not culturally biased and they do not portray any negative stereotypes.	46	3.33	1.17
Supplemental materials			
23. Class audio/VDO files and/or online resources needed are available for the students to promote autonomous learning.	46	3.37	.81
24. Supporting learning materials encourage the use of technology in learning English.	46	3.35	.61

Note: N: number of participants, M: mean; SD: standard deviation

As presented in Table 1, there were five evaluation items concerning activities and tasks and five items targeting the language use in the textbook. The mean rating scores of all items, except item 12, were above 3 (3.21-3.65). These showed that, similar to their evaluation of the textbook's design and layout, participants had a positive evaluation of its activities and tasks and language use. Once again, the results above are in line with teachers' and students' favorable perceptions of the activities and language use in other textbooks in previous research (e.g., Litz, 2005; Nguyen, 2022; Nguyen & Pham, 2024). Apparently, activities and tasks in *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing* are student-centered, and they encourage communicative and meaningful practice, incorporate individual and pair/group work, and can creative, original and independent responses. The language used in the textbook is at the right level of the students, with the suitable progression of vocabulary and grammar points.

Item 12 had a rating mean above 2 but below 3, indicating that students had a rather neutral opinion over whether the language representation in this textbook was authentic. A common problem of many ELT textbooks is lacking authenticity, thus potentially limiting students from acquiring natural language use (Nguyen & Pham, 2024). However, given students' limited exposure to real-life English, it might not be easy for them to decide whether the language used in the textbook is authentic or not.

Six items (see Table 1) evaluating the topics and content of the textbook had a rating mean in the range of 3.33-3.65, showing that students also had a positive opinion of the topics and content of *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing*. They thought the topics and content of the textbook were relevant to their English learning needs, generally realistic, topically diverse, challenging, and motivating. Once again, the results of this study replicated findings in prior studies evaluating *English Firsthand 2* (Litz, 2005), *Life* (Tran et al., 2018) and *Solutions* (e.g., Nguyen, 2022; Nguyen & Pham, 2024). These seem to 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” (Nguyen & Pham, 2024, p. 184). Two items evaluating supplemental materials also had a rating mean above 3, indicating that supplemental materials accompanying the textbook helped promote autonomous learning and technological skills in students.

4.4. Students' evaluation of the integration and teaching of reading and writing skills in *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing*

As summarized in Table 2, all 15 evaluation items concerning the materials, activities and tasks for reading and writing skills as well the integration and balance of reading and writing activities had an average rating mean above 3 (3.30-3.60), indicating that the majority of the students either agreed or strongly agreed with them. This suggests that, similar to their evaluation of other aspects, the participants also had a favorable opinion of how reading and writing skills were integrated and taught in the textbook.

Table 2. Students' evaluation of the integration and teaching of reading and writing skills in *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing*

Textbook evaluation items	N	M	SD
25. The materials include and focus on the reading and writing skills that students need to practice, as required by the aims and objectives of the Reading-Writing 2 course.	46	3.44	.73
26. The materials provide an appropriate balance of both reading and writing skills.	46	3.33	.89
27. The practice of writing skills is integrated into the practice of reading skills and vice versa.	46	3.56	.63
28. The materials and activities in the reading sections in each unit are beneficial to the learning and practice of writing skills.	46	3.49	.74
29. There is a smooth transition from the reading tasks to writing tasks in each unit.	46	3.30	.89
30. The textbook's reading tasks are appropriate for the students' level with well-defined objectives to enhance the students' sub-skills in reading (e.g., making predictions, skimming, scanning, understanding the organization of the text, drawing inference, etc.).	46	3.30	.80

31. There is a wide range of authentic reading texts with different subject contents that help students to relate English language learning to real life.	46	3.49	.74
32. Pre-, while-, and post-reading activities are provided to help students to become effective readers.	46	3.44	.73
33. Pre-reading activities include language preparation in terms of vocabulary and grammatical structures needed to understand the reading texts.	46	3.60	.62
34. Various exercises, from controlled to free, are provided in pre-, while-, and post-reading activities.	46	3.44	.73
35. The textbook's writing tasks are appropriate for the students' level with well-defined objectives.	46	3.40	0.79
36. The textbook encourages the use of a process approach to writing (i.e., idea generation, planning, drafting, and revising).	46	3.40	.82
37. The activities help the students to identify the writing purpose and audience of different text-types.	46	3.37	.72
38. The activities help the students to understand different organization patterns of written texts, that is, how the ideas are put together to serve the writing purpose.	46	3.30	.86
39. The activities prepare the students in terms of vocabulary, grammatical structures, cohesive devices, and punctuation needed for effective writing.	46	3.60	.62

Note: N: number of participants, M: mean; SD: standard deviation

Apparently, the textbook included reading and writing skills as required by the aims and objectives of the Reading and Writing 2 course, with an appropriate balance and smooth transition from the reading to writing sections. In addition, the practice of reading skills was beneficial to and integrated in the practice of writing skills and vice versa. The textbook focused on different sub-reading skills (e.g., predicting, skimming, scanning, and making inferences) and sub-writing skills, using authentic texts and a variety of activities in different stages of the reading/writing lesson.

4.6. Students' overall evaluation of the impact of Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing

Table 3. Students' evaluation of the impact of Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing

Textbook evaluation items	N	M	SD
40. The textbook is appropriate for the language-learning aims and objectives of the Reading and Writing 2 course at my institution.	46	3.19	.82
41. The textbook has raised my interest in further English language study.	46	3.26	.76
42. The textbook has improved my core language skills (reading and writing) for academic purposes.	46	3.44	.84
43. The textbook has helped to improve my critical thinking skills (e.g., synthesizing skills, evaluating ideas, justifying their opinions) for academic purposes.	46	3.07	.96
44. The textbook has helped to improve my softer skills (e.g., discussing	46	3.26	.83

ideas, taking responsibility for learning, self-reflection) needed to develop effective study techniques.			
45. I would choose to study with this textbook again for the Reading-Writing 2 course.	46	3.40	.82

Note: N: number of participants, M: mean; SD: standard deviation

All six items evaluating the impact of *Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing* (see Table 3) had a rating mean above 3. The students in this study thought that the textbook was appropriate for the language-learning aims and objectives of the Reading and Writing 2 course. They also agreed that the textbook raised their interest in further English language study and improved their reading and writing skills, and critical thinking skills as well as soft skills. More importantly, the majority of students indicated that they would choose to use the textbook again. These suggest that the students were generally satisfied with the quality of the textbook and the textbook was suitable and effective to their learning needs as required by the integrated reading and writing course at their institution. These findings are consistent with previous findings of students' positive evaluation of textbooks chosen for English courses at tertiary level, for example, *Solutions Pre-intermediate* (Nguyen & Pham, 2024) and *Pacesetter* (Litz, 2005). These seem to suggest that the selection of a textbook for language courses at higher institutions must have undergone a rigorous evaluation process, resulting in the textbook being able to meet the aims and objectives of the given courses and learner needs.

5. Conclusion

This study examined HTU English-major students' evaluation of the English textbook "Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing" used as the main material in an integrated reading and writing course. The results showed that the students have a positive evaluation of the textbook. Overall, the evaluated aspects of the textbook, including its design and layout, activities and tasks, skills, language type, topics and content, and impact, appear to meet the aims and objectives of the given course and the needs of the English-major students in the current study. These results suggest that the textbook appears to be a suitable textbook for an integrated reading and writing course for English majors.

The findings of this study have provided some insights into English-major students' evaluation of the textbook of an integrated reading and writing course. However, the findings of the study must be considered with caution, as this study was conducted on a quite small sample of participants (46 students). In addition, the study has evaluated the textbook from the student perspective only, however, both teachers and students are the two main users of the textbook. Teachers and students may have differing opinions over some aspects of the same textbook and may employ different strategies in using the textbook. Thus, further research is required to examine the evaluation and use of the textbook from not only students but also the teachers in the same context of use.

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Đánh giá của sinh viên đối với giáo trình dạy tích hợp kỹ năng đọc-viết tiếng Anh

Tóm tắt: “Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing” đã được sử dụng làm giáo trình của học phần tích hợp kỹ năng Đọc-Viết 2 tại Trường Đại học Hà Tĩnh. Tuy nhiên, chưa có nghiên cứu đánh giá sự phù hợp, hiệu quả của giáo trình này. Nghiên cứu này xem xét đánh giá của sinh viên đối với giáo trình trên. 46 sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh tại Trường Đại học Hà Tĩnh phản hồi một bảng khảo sát bao gồm 45 tiêu chí đánh giá các khía cạnh khác nhau của giáo trình như thiết kế và trình bày, hoạt động, ngôn ngữ, nội dung, kỹ năng, và tác động của giáo trình. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy sinh viên có đánh giá tích cực đối với tất cả các mặt của giáo trình và cho rằng giáo trình giúp sinh viên đạt được mục tiêu của học phần Đọc-Viết 2. Điều này cho thấy giáo trình này phù hợp với các khóa học dạy tích hợp kỹ năng đọc viết cho sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh.

Từ khoá: Đánh giá giáo trình; tích hợp kỹ năng đọc-viết; “Q: Skills for Success Level 3 Reading and Writing”; đánh giá của sinh viên; sinh viên chuyên ngành Tiếng Anh.