

Developing A New English Coursebook for Non-English Major Students In Master's Programs

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Abstract - The study aimed at investigating the need to develop an English coursebook for non-English major students in master's programs with the orientation of preparing for their VSTEP3-5 proficiency tests and the level of acceptability towards the use of the proposed textbook. The population samples consist of 69 graduate students majoring in different fields of natural and social sciences who have to achieve level 4 in the Vietnam Six Level Framework of Foreign Languages. The study's findings reveal that most students believe that it is essential to create an English textbook specifically for master's students which would provide the necessary knowledge, strategies, and practice tests to effectively prepare them for the VSTEP 3-5 proficiency exams. Additionally, graduate students widely approve of the proposed English coursebook for master's programs, as it offers ample strategies and practice opportunities to help them meet the B2 proficiency test requirements necessary for graduation from their programs.

Index Terms- English coursebook, students of master's programs, VSTEP 3-5 proficiency test, B2 level.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized academic environment, proficiency in English is indispensable for scholarly communication, research, and career advancement. This necessity is particularly pronounced for master's students who must engage with complex texts, produce high-level academic writing, and participate in international collaborations. Recognizing this, educational institutions worldwide emphasize English proficiency as a key component of graduate education.

In Vietnam, Circular 23/2021/TT-BGDĐT issued by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) mandates that all graduate students must achieve a B2 level in English before graduation. This regulation underscores the importance of English proficiency as a prerequisite for academic and professional success. The English level 4, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), reflects an upper-intermediate level of proficiency, enabling students to understand and produce detailed and coherent texts on a variety of topics.

Despite this requirement, Thai Nguyen University currently lacks an official English textbook tailored specifically for its master's students who are not majoring in English. This gap presents a significant challenge for students striving to meet the B2 proficiency standard. Without a structured and comprehensive resource, students may struggle to develop the necessary language skills, potentially delaying their graduation and affecting their academic performance.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop a dedicated English coursebook for non-English major master's students at Thai Nguyen University in general and Thai Nguyen University of Sciences in particular. Such a coursebook would provide targeted instruction in academic English, focusing on the skills and knowledge required to achieve B2 level proficiency. It would include advanced grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and academic writing exercises tailored to the specific needs of graduate students. By equipping students with the requisite language skills, this coursebook would ensure that they meet MOET's English proficiency requirements, thereby enhancing their overall academic success and future career prospects.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research focused on the need analysis for developing a coursebook in English to master's students at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences. This study utilized the research and development (R&D) model established by Borg and Gall (1983). According to them, this research design is a method aimed at developing and validating educational products. The process, known as the R&D cycle, involves several key steps: conducting a needs analysis, developing the product based on the analysis, field testing the product in real-world settings, and evaluating the textbook for revision.

The respondents were 69 graduate students who were studying master degrees of different training programs such as Mathematics, Literature, Resources and Environment Management, Management Sciences, History of Vietnam Communist Party.... The subjects consists of 42 females and 27 males who participated in a survey questionnaire regarding the need to develop an English textbook for master students and also assessed the level of acceptability towards the proposed coursebook.

Data Source and Data Collection Technique

This research involved data which was taken from the following research instruments:

Needs Analysis

For the needs analysis, a questionnaire was distributed to 69 graduate students who were studying different majors of master training programs at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences. This instrument was designed to gather information necessary for developing an English textbook with the orientation of VSTEP3-5 proficiency test preparation.

Expert Validation

To ensure the textbook aligned with the existing objectives, several experts were involved in the development process. These experts validated the textbooks content by adhering to principles of language requirements for graduation of those students.

Try-out

During the try-out stage, the developed teaching coursebook was implemented through the creation of sample materials. This approach was intended to demonstrate the textbook’s feasibility for eventual full-scale use in teaching period.

Evaluation

69 graduate students of social and natural sciences were asked to express their level of acceptance on the proposed English coursebook so that necessary changes could be given to the textbook for full-scale implementation and application in real life teaching.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Background information on respondents and learning materials

Table 1. Background information on respondents and learning materials

No	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	Number of respondents		
	Male	27	39%
	Female	42	61%
2	You are given a detailed syllabus of the English course in your masteral training program.		
	Yes	21	30%
	No	48	70%
3	Are you familiar with a syllabus with B2 level oriented strategies and practices?		
	Yes	39	57%
	No	30	43%
4	Do you think there is a need to develop a syllabus for the English course incorporating all four language skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing?		
	Yes	69	100%
	No	0	0%
5	There is an English textbook in the English course at your training curriculum.		
	Yes	15	22%
	No	54	78%
6	Do you think there is a need to develop a textbook for English course in your training program?		
	Yes	69	100%
	No	0	0%
7	Do you think there is a need to develop an English coursebook comprising strategies and practices to help you achieve required language proficiency of level B2 in all four skills?		
	Yes	69	100%
	No	0	0%

The respondents consists of 42 females and 27 males accounting for 61% and 39% respectively who participated in a survey questionnaire regarding the need to develop an English textbook for master students.

The results revealed that all respondents (100%) agreed on the importance of a syllabus as a teaching guide. It means that, to the students, a syllabus and a coursebook is a compulsory material that guide them in learning English during the whole course.

When asked if a syllabus existed for English courses in masteral training programs, 30% indicated there was a syllabus, while 70% stated there was none. Those without a syllabus emphasized the need for its development. Regarding a syllabus with B2 level oriented strategies and practices, 57% of the respondents were familiar with the concept, while 43% were not. Nonetheless, all respondents supported the development of a syllabus incorporating four language skills and strategies to help students achieve level 4 (or B2) in the Six-Level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework For Vietnam.

Regarding the existence of English course books, 22% of respondents confirmed their availability, while 78% said there were none. The head of the English language teaching division, when interviewed, explained that teachers use various materials with differing sources for graduate students. This inconsistency makes it challenging to assess students' English proficiency upon graduating from their training programs. In light of this issue, all students advocated for the development of a unified textbook.

Additionally, they supported the inclusion of appropriate strategies and practices to help them achieve level 4 in all four different language skills in the course book.

2. The need to develop an English textbook for master students

Table 2 demonstrates students' opinions towards the demand for an English textbook in English course in materal training program.

Table 2. Students' opinions towards the need of an English textbook

Opinions	Mean Score	Level of Agreement
1. An English textbook is essential for master's students to improve their academic writing skills.	3.96	Agree
2. Having a dedicated English textbook will help master's students better prepare for the B2 proficiency exam.	4.22	Strongly Agree
3. The current resources available to master's students are sufficient for achieving B2 level proficiency.	2.49	Disagree
4. A textbook tailored specifically for non-English major master's students is necessary to address their unique learning needs.	3.09	Neutral
5. Including academic vocabulary and terminologies in the textbook would significantly benefit master's students.	2.86	Neutral
6. Exercises focusing on reading comprehension in an English textbook would improve master's students' abilities to understand academic texts.	3.13	Neutral
7. A textbook that integrates listening and speaking activities is crucial for achieving B2 level proficiency.	4.33	Strongly Agree
8. Incorporating research writing and presentation skills into the textbook is essential for master's students.	2.90	Neutral
9. Master's students would benefit from a textbook that includes practice exams and test-taking strategies for the B2 proficiency test.	4.46	Strongly Agree
10. Developing a comprehensive English textbook that covers all four skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) is necessary to prepare master's students for B2 level proficiency.	4.56	Strongly Agree
Overall	3.6	Agree

Legend:

- 1-1.80: Strongly Disagree
- 1.81-2.60: Disagree
- 2.61-3.40: Neutral
- 3.41-4.20: Agree
- 4.21-5.00: Strongly Agree

At a glance, a majority of students agreed that in general, there is a demand for an English textbook for master's students in their training program with an overmean of 3.41, and a verbal interpretation of Agree.

Looking at the figures in more detail, it is apparent that students agreed most significantly on the factor involving preferences to develop a comprehensive English textbook that covers all four skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) to prepare master's students for B2 level proficiency with the highest mean of 4.56 and an interpretation of Strongly Agree. Subsequently, they were also in strong agreement that master's students would benefit from a textbook that includes practice exams and test-taking strategies for the B2 proficiency test and the textbook that integrates listening and speaking activities is crucial for achieving B2 level proficiency with means of 4.46 and 4.33 respectively. In addition, students also strongly agreed that having a dedicated English textbook will help master's students better prepare for the B2 proficiency exam. with a mean of 4.22 while they were in an agreement that an English textbook is essential for master's students to improve their academic writing skills with a mean of 3.96. It can be understood that an English textbook would be ideal if they can integrate the development of all four major language skills. Furthermore, it should offer students with not only the strategies for taking the test but also provide them with practice tests so as to prepare for their B2 proficiency test in English as a compulsory requirement for graduation.

However, students in masteral training programs of English expressed neutral opinions that exercises focusing on reading comprehension in an English textbook would improve master's students' abilities to understand academic texts with a mean of 3.13. In addition, they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements that a textbook tailored specifically for non-English major master's students is necessary to address their unique learning needs or incorporating research writing and presentation skills into the textbook is essential for master's students and including academic vocabulary and terminologies in the textbook would significantly benefit master's students with the means of 3.09, 2.90, and 2.86 respectively. This may shed light on the fact that students did not express their interest to include factors such as learning needs, presentation skills and academic reading or research writing in the proposed new English textbook.

Significantly, students disagreed with the fact that the current resources available to master's students are sufficient for achieving B2 level proficiency with a mean of 2.49. It further raised the need to develop an English textbook with adequate strategies and materials for students to practice for their proficiency tests.

3. Level of acceptability of students on the proposed textbook of A Practical Guide to English VSTEP 3-5

The table below indicates students' level of acceptability towards the proposed English textbook.

Table 3. Students' level of acceptability towards the proposed English textbook

No.	Section	Mean	Interpretation
1	Listening lessons on strategies to deal with specific questions in VSTEP proficiency tests are adequate and appropriate.	3.26	Neutral
2	Listening mini practice exercises are sufficient to help me practice for VSTEP 3-5 listening proficiency test.	2.54	Disagree
3	Speaking lessons on strategies to deal with specific questions in VSTEP proficiency tests are adequate and appropriate.	4.18	Agree
4	Speaking practice exercises are sufficient to help me practice for VSTEP 3-5 speaking proficiency test.	4.00	Agree
5	Reading lessons on strategies to deal with specific questions in VSTEP proficiency tests are adequate and appropriate.	3.72	Agree
6	Reading practice exercises are sufficient to help me practice for VSTEP 3-5 reading proficiency test.	3.85	Agree
7	Writing lessons on strategies to deal with specific questions in VSTEP proficiency tests are adequate and appropriate.	4.10	Agree
8	Writing practice exercises are sufficient to help me practice for VSTEP 3-5 writing proficiency test.	4.07	Agree
9	Full Practice tests are adequate and sufficient to help me practice for VSTEP proficiency tests.	4.15	Agree
10	I agreed to use the proposed textbook of A practical guide to VSTEP 3-5 as the main material for my training program.	4.25	Strongly agree
	Overall	3.81	Agree

Legend:

- 1-1.80: Strongly Disagree
- 1.81-2.60: Disagree
- 2.61-3.40: Neutral
- 3.41-4.20: Agree
- 4.21-5.00: Strongly Agree

When being asked to assess the proposed textbook of A Practical Guide to English VSTEP 3-5, students generally expressed a level of acceptability towards the use of the new coursebook in their master programs with an overall mean of 3.81 and a verbal interpretation of Agree. Significantly, it is worth mentioning that students strongly agreed to use the proposed textbook of A practical guide to VSTEP 3-5 as the main material for their training programs with a mean of 4.25.

With regards to specific skills, it is obvious that students expressed a level of agreement on almost all skills namely Speaking, Reading and Writing. More specifically, speaking lessons on strategies to deal with specific questions in VSTEP proficiency tests are most highly considered as adequate and appropriate with the highest mean of 4.18, which is followed by the sufficient practice tests for all the four skills of 4.15. Standing below in the line of agreement are Writing lessons on strategies, writing practice exercises and speaking practice exercises which account for the means of 4.10, 4.07 and 4.00 respectively. Lastly, reading strategies and mini practices also received a level of acceptance to be used with a mean of 3.85 and 3.72 respectively.

However, listening section experienced an opposite idea when students neither agreed nor disagreed that listening lessons on strategies to deal with specific questions in VSTEP proficiency tests are adequate and appropriate with a mean of 3.26. Meanwhile, they expressed their disagreement in that listening mini practice exercises are sufficient to help me practice for VSTEP 3-5 listening proficiency test with a mean of 2.54.

In conclusion, it is apparent that students agreed on almost all sections of the textbook with a significant level of acceptability in using the proposed textbook.

CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, finding of the study shows that a majority of students agreed that it is necessary to develop an English textbook for

master's students in their training program to help equip them with sufficient knowledge, strategies and practice tests to best prepare them for the VSTEP 3-5 proficiency exams.

Secondly, the proposed English coursebook for students of master's programs are generally accepted by graduate students since they provide adequate strategies and sufficient practices for students to prepare for the B2 proficiency tests to pass the requirement condition of foreign language in order to graduate from their training programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is positive that students expressed a level of acceptability towards the use of proposed English textbook in their training programs. Therefore, it is recommended that English educators and instructors should make use of the materials to help students become better proficient in the language and best prepare for the final test of proficiency. However, as Listening section of strategies and mini practice tests have been not up to the students' expectations yet, it is therefore suggested that instructors continue to revise and develop the listening section so that it can be a practical material for graduate students to better practice for the VSTEP 3-5 proficiency test.

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