

An Evaluation Of The Reading Section Of The Book “*Master English 1*” For The First-Year Students At Thai Nguyen University Of Economics And Business Administration

Nguyen Hong Hanh ¹, Pham Minh Hoang ²

¹(Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration, Viet Nam)

²(Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration, Viet Nam)

Abstract: This study aimed at evaluating the reading section of the book “*Master English 1*”, used for the freshman at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration (TUEBA). To fulfill the aim of study, the researcher followed the descriptive analytical approach: document analysis and questionnaires were applied to analyze the course requirement in accordance with the reading section of the course book analysis and investigate the level of appropriateness of the reading section given in the material compared with the course’s objectives in terms of the aims, content and methodology. After that, a comparison between these findings was made to evaluate how well the material matched the course requirements. The result shows that the reading section of the material has fully achieved the aims of the course and matched the requirements of the course in terms of content and methodology. Basing on the findings, two possible methods of material adaptation are suggested by using techniques of addition and modification for further improvement of the material.

Key Words: TUEBA, reading, *Master English 1*, appropriateness, requirement, content, methodology

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I. Introduction

Obviously, materials are involved in process of language teaching and learning as appropriate materials can stimulate effective teaching and learning; therefore, to have a successful language teaching, it is essential to have proper materials, especially in university language teaching. It is the same as at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration, where English is considered as a compulsory subject and condition for graduation. Thus, it is challenging for language teachers here to design appropriate material for their students to meet the demand of both course syllabus and university graduation requirement. In addition, the diversity of textbooks available on the market makes it hardtop choose the suitable materials for their language learners. Due to these reasons, the teachers of English at TUEBA decided to compose their own material for their students called English Master 1. Since it has been used, both positive and negative corresponds have been found, but there is no research on the course book evaluation in TUEBA conducted to examine how well these materials match the course requirements in terms of aims, content and methodology, particularly in reading section.

Tomlinson (1998:229) states that summative evaluation is often thought of as occurring at the end of the program. The purpose for gathering the information in this type of evaluation is to determine whether the program was successful and effective.

The types of decisions that will result from such analyses will be fairly large-scale and may result in weeping changes (for example, the continual funding of a program or its cancellation). Similarly, Graves (2000:215) says that it assesses the achievement of the course to provide information when the course is redesigned.

In short, it is crucial to conduct an evaluation of the book “*Master English 1*” and recommend some adaptations to make it more effective in use at the university. From those above reasons, the author would like to conduct a research under the title “*An evaluation of the reading section of the book "Master English 1" for first-year students at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration*”. In particular, this research is aim at answering the following question:

To what extent is the reading section given in the book “Master English 1” suitable for the first year students at TUEBA in terms of aims, content and methodology?

As McDonough and Shaw (1993) and Tomlinson (1998) recommended, many aspects of materials should be considered in the process of material evaluation such as the audience, aims, content, methodology,

needs, cultural bias and context, each demands their own evaluative criteria. However, due to the time constraint, the research will only be done with focusing on:

- Aims (the aims of the reading section in the book in relation to the aims of the course);
- Content (in terms of proportion of work on reading skills, types of topics/themes and text types in the reading section);
- Methodology (kinds of tasks/exercises and teaching and learning techniques included in the reading section) of the reading section in "Master English 1".

II. Literature Review

In order to achieve the purposes of language learning and teaching, teachers as well as language learner have to seriously consider series of materials used in their education process because there is a diversity of materials, which are available nowadays. For example, with respect to the technology aspect, there are two types of materials: hard and soft ones. Hard materials are those like hard copy documents and textbooks whereas soft materials are those constructed thanks to technological software such as slides, e-books, video recorders.

In terms of the teaching/learning purposes, there are four types of materials: writing, listening, reading and speaking materials. Other types of materials but mostly included in the scope of this study are published textbooks and in-house materials (Robinson, 1991). However, with the limitation of the study, in-house material is mainly discussed.

According to Robinson (1991), the term in-house materials refers to locally produced materials, or material produced by teachers. In his opinion, this type of materials offers many advantages in ESP teaching and learning. The importance of in-house materials is also appreciated by Hutchinson and Water (1987). They indicate that ESP materials written by the teachers will fit the specific subject area of particular learners, even when suitable textbooks are available, it may not be possible to buy them because of currency or import restriction. However, the weakness of in-house material is also mentioned for their time-consuming and expensive, and many locally produced materials "show a striking resemblance to the published materials that have been rejected" (Swales, 1985, as cited in Robinson, 1991, p. 58).

As mentioned above, there are both benefits and backwards in using in-house materials. However, in order to meet the demand of the university as well as course requirement, it seems that, in-house materials are the practical solution. That why Ellis (1997) points out two main reasons for carrying out materials evaluation. Firstly, in the market flooded by a wide range of materials, there may be a need to choose the most suitable ones to use for a particular situation. Secondly, a demand for materials evaluation to determine whether the chosen materials works for that situation after it has been used for a period of time is highly increasing. This may help in deciding whether to use the material again or replace it with a better one.

Besides, what ways are appropriate to evaluate the material should be carefully chosen. We can not personally select this or that material because of our interest, it must be based on critical criteria as mentioned in the models of Hutchinson and Water (1987). This model is a kind of macro-evaluation defined by Ellis (1997, p. 37) as "an overall assessment of whether an entire set of materials has worked" for a particular situation. In this model, materials evaluation is considered as "a matter of judging the fitness of something for a particular purpose".

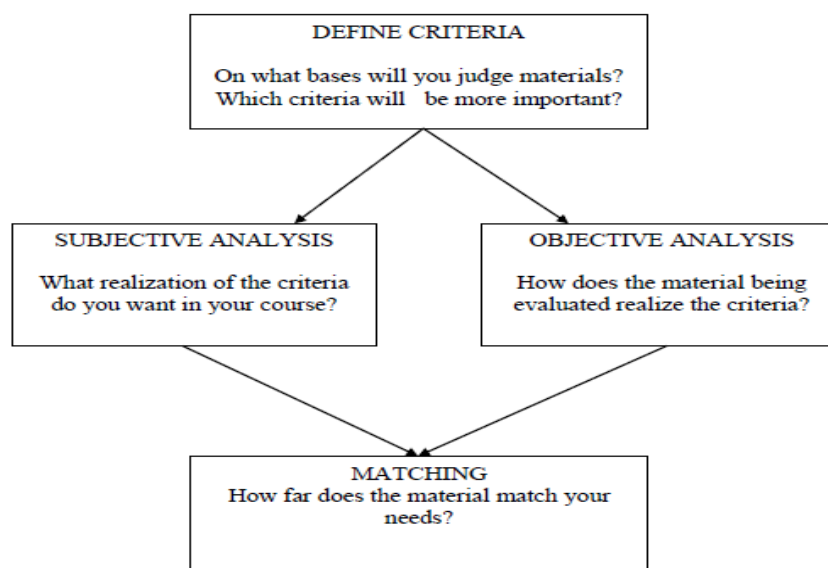


Figure 1. Materials evaluation model of Hutchinson and Waters (1987)

As it can be seen in the diagram, the model includes four stages. The first stage is to define the criteria on which the evaluation is based. In this step, the researcher has to make sure which perspectives of the material will need a look at, then, s/he will define a different set of criteria based on the purposes of the materials evaluation.

The second stage is a subjective analysis in which the analysis of the course requirements in aspects related to the criteria is conducted. Hutchinson and Water (1987) suggest that a course can be analyzed based on the criteria: aims, content and methodology. Then, from the result of the analysis, the requirements of the material are specified. Subjective analysis gives detailed description of ideal materials for the learners and the course.

The third stage is an objective analysis where the materials being evaluated are analyzed under defined criteria.

Matching is the final stage of the evaluation process. The findings obtained from the two analyses are compared to conclude whether they match up to each other or not. Based on the result, good points as well as problematic areas of the material can be defined, which may suggest necessary modifications to the materials to make them as close to the ideal as possible.

The most distinguishing point in this model is that the stages, criteria and checklists of the questions are presented in a very simple and comprehensible way but still systematic. Therefore, it is easier for the researcher to carry out an evaluation based on this model. It can help the evaluators to know exactly what have to be done to analyze the materials in comparison with the course requirements. In addition, it is very useful for the author to set out both subjective analysis and objective analysis because the findings of the two analyses are compared to find out whether they match to each other and if not, to what extents they do not match up. In short, the researcher decides to conduct the evaluation research based on Hutchinson and Water (1987) model.

III. Subject And Methodology

The study was conducted in 200 first year students and 10 teachers. In order to choose 200 first year students, the researcher chose 10 classes which are most easily and conveniently accessible, based on students' consent. After that, 20 first students were randomly picked out from the name list of each class. In addition, 10 teachers of English Division (including the researcher) were selected to participate in this study. By the time the research was carried out, they had experience in teaching the material *Master English 1* to first year students of different classes at TUEBA; thus, they were in a better position to evaluate the material.

There are a variety of techniques and instruments for evaluation such as questionnaires, interview, observation, and document analysis. All above-mentioned techniques expose their own potentiality for the material evaluation. As the study aims at finding out the suitability of the reading section of the book “*Master English 1*” to the requirements of the course for the first year students at TUEBA, the two kinds of documents analyzed in this study are the course syllabus and the reading section of the book are chosen. Then two sets of questionnaire (the Questionnaire for material designers and teachers and Questionnaire for students) are used to seek more evidence from the teachers' and students' opinions about the level of appropriateness of the reading section of the material compared with the course's objectives in terms of the aims, content and methodology. The questionnaire for the students also has the same structure with the questionnaire for the teachers. However, a section about student's personal detail information is included in this questionnaire to seek out information about student's background in English and student's ranking of the assumed purposes in learning reading. This section will not be analyzed in this research.

IV. Findings, Results And Discussion

4.1 The results of document analysis and questionnaire

Based on the findings pointed out from the document analysis and teachers' and students' questionnaires, certain strengths and weaknesses of the reading section were categorized into appropriate features and inappropriate features below.

Categories	Appropriate features	Inappropriate features
1. Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The material was successful in fostering students' reading skills by giving them useful techniques and sufficient tasks/exercises for practice. - The reading supplementary practice for the TOEIC test provides students with numerous tasks suitable to students' levels and helps students to be familiar with the format of TOEIC test. - Students understand common reading texts in business 	

	areas via texts extracted from the Financial Times.	
2. Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The book successfully supplied students with a balance of macro- skills. - Teachers and students were satisfied with 3-4 reading lessons in the total of 12 lessons of each unit. - The book was effective in helping students to improve their reading sub- skills such as reading for main ideas and reading for specific information - Three reading sub-skills were at normal level in parallel with the students’ reading ability. - The reading lessons were organized in the same model through the four units with three separate phases: pre-reading, while- reading and post-reading. - Most of the topics introduced were updated, familiar and suitable with the language proficiency level of students as well as their future application in business environments. - The topics of main texts were integrated in each unit of the reading section. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amount of work for reading for main ideas and reading for detail was inadequate. - Excessive stress was given to the type of reading for specific information. - The material had a few pre-reading activities and contained uninteresting post-reading activities. - The material used only authentic articles directly taken from Financial Times as a main source.
3. Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The material offered with a variety of interesting and familiar tasks and exercises. - The activities of the supplementary practice for the TOEIC test were carefully selected. - The teaching and learning activities included teacher’s presentation, individual work, pair work and group work. - The integration of reading-speaking skill occurred very frequently in a lesson. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Few group work activities could be found in the reading section. - The material failed to offer sufficient instructions and explanations for the techniques (individual, pair, and group work) that were used in specific reading lessons.

4.2. Suggestions from respondents

In part B of the questionnaires for teachers and students, there was space for both students and teachers to freely make a suggestion for the material improvement. They were asked to recommend changes to improve the effectiveness of the material for future use in terms of reading tasks in each unit, reading topics, level of difficulty and methodology. In addition, the participants were allowed to give opinions for other aspects of the material that needed to be improved. Below is the summary of their recommendations.

4.2.1. Teachers’ suggestions

- More pre-reading activities to arouse students’ interest and activate their schemata should be added.
- Post-reading activities should be diversified and integrated with other skills such as writing skill instead of discussion only.
- More reading tasks used to develop students’ skills of reading for main ideas and reading for detail should be given in class as well as assigned to do at home.
- The content of the reading section should be presented in various forms such as letters, dialogues, and newspapers instead of using mainly articles as a main source.

4.2.2. Students’ suggestions

- The reading section of the book should employ more pictures and visual material related to the topic in the pre-reading phase to give students visual images of what they are about to read.
- Post-reading phase should be varied with both speaking and writing activities.
- The book should include more exercises to help students improve the skills of reading for main ideas and reading for detail because they find difficult in master these skills.
- There should be more appropriate guidance/instruction for each of the tasks/exercises so that they can understand what they are required to complete.

V. Conclusions And Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

Materials evaluation is obviously a very important process in language teaching and learning. It cannot be denial that the results of evaluation will help teachers find out relevant and appropriate materials for a particular group of students or lead some changes to the whole or some parts of the materials for its more effective use in the future. Its importance urged the researcher to carry out this study.

The material "Master English 1", which has been used for the first year students at TUEBA for one year, has been evaluated based on the model and criteria suggested by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). Two data collection instruments namely document analysis and questionnaires were employed.

In this study, two sets of questionnaire (the Questionnaire for material designers and teachers and Questionnaire for students) were used to seek more evidence from ten teachers' and 200 students' opinions about the level of appropriateness of the reading section given in the material compared with the course's objectives in terms of the aims, content and methodology. After that, a comparison between these findings was made to evaluate how well the material matched the course requirements.

The results showed that the reading section of the material has fully achieved the aims of the course. In addition, it has mostly matched the requirements of the course in terms of content and methodology. Basing on the findings, the researcher suggested two possible methods of material adaptation by using techniques of addition and modification for further improvement of the material.

5.2. Recommendations

5.2.1. Aims

Based on the results of document analysis and participants' questionnaire, the reading section given in the book "Master English 1" has successfully met the requirements of the course in terms of aims. To be specific, the material was successful in fostering students' reading skills by giving them useful techniques and sufficient tasks/exercises for practice. Furthermore, to graduate from the university students have to get the TOEIC certificate with the minimum of 450 in the TOEIC (listening and reading) test. Thus, the reading supplementary practice for the TOEIC test given in the course book was appropriate for students because it helped them be familiar with the TOEIC test format with numerous tasks suitable to their levels. Besides improving students' reading skills, through various topics in the reading section, students' understanding of common reading texts in business areas could be enriched a lot. Therefore, there is no need to modify any aspects of the material in terms of aims.

5.2.2. Content

With regard to content, the reading section of the book has mostly achieved the requirements of the course. Nonetheless, some inadequate points in the reading section should be adjusted as follows.

As pointed out in the document analysis, the material had a few pre-reading activities to attract students' interest and activate their prior knowledge about the topic of the lesson. Also, uninteresting post-reading activities made students feel bored and demotivated. The content designed gave main focus on developing the skill of reading for specific information and text types were not varied enough. The researcher proposes to choose adding and replacement techniques to adapt the material. For example, a lack of pre-activity in the unit 2 can be supplemented with two minor activities.

* Activity 1

The teacher shows some words on the screen. (Name, Age, Job, Nationality, Family) then asks students to make a short talk about themselves in 2 minutes and present in front of the class. After that, the teacher calls some students to present and leads in the lesson.

* Activity 2

The teacher asks students to look through the text and find out new words then pre-teaches some words which may be new to students. For instance,

- luxury (n) /'lʌkʃ(ə)rɪ/: Anything which pleases the senses, is not necessary for life, and is also costly, or difficult to obtain.
- back-to-back meetings (n) /'bæk, təbæk/: They are meetings which happen one after the other with no time to breathe in between.
- to stay in contact (= go to keep in touch) with sb: maintain contact with another person

In addition, there was no post-reading activity in unit 4, therefore, the researcher suggests a writing activity as a production of the reading. For example, after completing while-reading activities, students are asked to work in groups of three, imagine that they have a hotel then make an introduction about their hotel in the form of a leaflet. After 5 minutes, one or two groups present their work in front of class.

Besides, in unit 1, excessive stress was given to the type of reading for specific information and there were no space for reading for main idea. Therefore, the modification technique should be employed to achieve the balance among the sub-reading skills. For instance, the exercise A at page 9 requires "Read this article. Then complete the chart below" should be modified as "Work individually. Read this article then answer these questions about Angela below".

- What does this article mainly discuss?
- What is her job?
- How about her family?

- *What are her interests outside work?*

Last but not least, in terms of text types, various types of reading text should be added with the comprehension questions. The reading materials like news, business report, financial performance, advertisement, business planning related to the topics of the unit can be delegated to the students to work as a homework exercises. This aims at helping students get familiar with a variety of business reading types and motivating them to reading skills.

5.2.3. Methodology

Concerning teaching and learning techniques, the activities were mainly individual and pair work, few group work activities could be found in the reading section. With this shortcoming, the researcher recommends the modification technique to increase the amount of group work activity. For example, in unit 3, instead of asking students to "*work in pairs, ask and answer questions about problems in your place of study or workplace*", the teacher can instruct students to work in groups of four, make a discussion about problems in your place of study or workplace then present in front of class. The purpose of this activity is to promote students' interaction and avoid boredom of a reading lesson.

Among the weaknesses listed in the findings, inappropriate explanations/ instructions for each of the tasks/exercises in the reading section could not be ignored. With this flaw, the researcher suggests using the adding technique for adaptation. With each task/exercise provided to students, the material should clarify the specific type of teach-learning technique applied in this task.

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