



An Evaluation of the Advanced Oxford Practice Grammar Textbook Used for University's English Majors

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Abstract

Textbook evaluations help select the best textbook by highlighting its potential strengths and weaknesses. This study aimed to determine whether George Yule's Advanced Oxford Practical Grammar remained relevant as a compulsory textbook for the first-year English-majored students at Van Lang University, Vietnam. Questionnaire and interview were served as the main research instruments with the participation of the thirty experienced English instructors. The findings demonstrated how well-suited the textbook was for tertiary students in terms of teaching grammar in a practical setting. The thoughtful application of additional grammar exercises and the connection of more pertinent contexts to communicate grammatical points and structures were two other suggested enhancements. Even though the textbook covered the most crucial grammatical topics for advanced learners with a plethora of examples and hands-on exercises, the participants pointed out some complex and unusual grammatical usage that might need to be revised. Particularly, suggestions called for more additional and interactive activities and tasks.

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Introduction

The need for fluent English speakers and the international orientation of education have led to a significant change in English instruction in Vietnam, and at Van Lang University specifically, in recent years. Having a solid grasp of grammar is essential for both academic success and preparing for future employment in an environment where English is remarkably regarded as a global lingua franca. Consequently, grammar courses are essential to the training program for English majors at Van Lang University since they lay the groundwork for students' language competency and effective communication. Both the rules and frameworks of upper intermediate and advanced English grammar as well as the practical application of grammar in speaking and writing are emphasized in the course. The critical thinking skills necessary to assess challenging texts and effectively communicate ideas are taught to students through targeted instruction and practical exercises. Grammar instruction also increases cultural awareness and background knowledge.

As the most widely used resource for imparting knowledge and skills and a major contributor to content learning, textbooks are unquestionably a foundational element for many reasons, as many educational scholars have pointed out. Teachers no longer have to worry about what to teach, how to teach it, or what resources to use because of textbooks, claims Woodward (2001). For the benefit of both teachers and students, they are portable and reasonably priced, making them useful for both in-class and independent study. With the ability to progress at their own pace, textbooks also help students become more independent. Additionally, textbooks provide a roadmap that outlines the lessons' structure (Tomlinson, 2003) and allow for consistent evaluation because various classes utilize comparable resources (Abdelwahab, 2013). Textbooks offer essential structure and a syllabus, which promotes success and makes lesson planning easier, according to Richards (2001). Surely, the textbook used in English language teaching has a major impact on the development of English language abilities and learning. Not surprisingly, choosing the best textbook and applying it are of great importance because textbooks can promote standardization in educational context. Thus, it is a must for great and careful review to select the most appropriate ELT textbook for a particular setting.

Oxford University Press published the Oxford Practice Grammar series to give students a thorough understanding of English grammar with a focus on nuanced comprehension and practical application. The series is well known for its methodical approach to grammar instruction, offering a variety of exercises that cater to various proficiency levels. This is advantageous because it not only reinforces grammatical structures but also encourages students to apply such concepts in real-world situations. The textbook is enhanced with additional resources for teachers and online practice tools to further emphasize their applicability in the classroom. In order to improve advanced grammar skills, the Advanced Oxford Practice Grammar has been selected as a required resource for VLU English majors.

Since there are so many published books available on the market, instructors at Van Lang University find it difficult to decide which book is best for a particular course and which is best for learners. The purpose of this study is to critically assess the relevance of this textbook, so as to assess its strengths and weaknesses in terms of promoting grammatical competence and

meeting the objectives of the English grammar course. That is, deciding whether to continue using it or replace it depending on the needs of the students and the objectives of the Grammar course will help to change and will increase the suggested resources to make the most of the textbook.

The study's two primary goals are (1) to determine how well the textbook fits the needs of the students and the course objectives, and (2) to suggest some possible ways that instructors could improve their use of the textbook. As a result, the following research questions are addressed in this study:

Research question 1: To what extent is the *Advanced Oxford Practice Grammar* textbook suitable for English majors at Van Lang University?

Research question 2: What kind of adaptations do instructors propose for the shortcomings of *Advanced Oxford Practice Grammar* textbook?

Literature Review

Textbook, Course book and Materials

Over the years, various educators—including Hutchinson and Torres (1994), Sheldon (1998), Littlejohn (2011) and Tomlinson (2011), —have tried to define textbooks in different ways, and it appears that they have some things in common. Sheldon (1998) views textbooks as the visual centre and content core of an English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum, while course books are viewed as additional reading materials for language classes that are accessible to both teachers and students. In particular, the terms "textbooks," "course books," and "materials" are used interchangeably.

Regarding the role of textbooks, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) note that they help teachers prepare lesson plans in a methodical way and give students useful reviews, which helps to facilitate stress-free teaching and learning. They appear to be widely used for a number of reasons, including providing learning and teaching resources that teach fundamental skills and systematic, standardized knowledge of language units. As a syllabus created to meet predetermined learning objectives, textbooks also serve as a helpful tool for independent learners and inexperienced teachers (Cunningsworth, 1984). Richard and Rodgers (2001), as cited by Kayapimar (2009), also suggest that textbooks are unavoidable since they dictate how particular curriculum elements will be covered. Standardization, organization of the language content, representative examples of language use, and useful exercises for teachers and students are all provided by textbooks. Rea-Dickins (1994) also mentions that textbook evaluation can pinpoint good practices, bad ones, and things hindering progress.

To sum up, textbooks offer pre-structured curricula, written content, and practice exercises that suit a large population of language learners, making them very beneficial for administrators, language teachers, and students.

Textbook Evaluation

Textbook evaluation is very important because it helps teachers determine whether to replace or modify existing materials by pointing out their strengths and weaknesses. While the evaluation of ELT textbooks started in the 1970s, systematic evaluations were lacking due to a

lack of comprehensive criteria (Harbi, 2017). Textbook evaluations from 2011 to 2013 were dominated by classifications, while checklists for evaluating textbooks were progressively created and finished throughout the 1980s. Cunningsworth (1995) proposed that when appropriate questions are asked and accurate answers are given, an evaluation process is completed successfully. To predict, examine, and assess a book's relevance, Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) classify a three-stage textbook evaluation process. To enable the most appropriate treatment, these phases—pre-, in-, and post-use evaluation—occur in succession, which take turns to facilitate the most suitable textbook selection regarding the course objectives, examine the book's benefits and shortcomings, and determine the future utilization of a textbook (Mukundan, 2011). Tomlinson (2011) added that textbook evaluation should be based on the three criteria: reliability, flexibility and validity to investigate the extent the book influences different stakeholders including teachers, learners, and administrators.

Approaches to ELT Textbook Evaluation

Since there is no formula, grid, or system that can unquestionably measure material evaluation based on experiential knowledge, it is inherently subjective (Sheldon, 1998). Many criteria and checklists have been established for assessing a book in the context of ELT. Administrators and teachers must decide on the best standards for evaluating specific materials because of the wide variety of learning environments.

Table 1. Approaches to ELT textbook evaluation

Author	Process/ Approach	Explanation
Ellis (1997)	Predictive versus retrospective	(1) help select appropriate course materials (2) determine whether the learners' needs are met
McGrath (2002)	First glance review versus in-depth review	(1) Based on criteria: accessibility, affordability, attractiveness, longevity, and appropriateness (2) Consider the alignment with teachers' methods, the course' objective, its compatibility with students' needs and learning styles
Tomlinson (2003)	Pre-use, during-use and post-use evaluation	Entail distinct effects of the materials on different users
McDough and Shaw (2003)	External, internal, and overall evaluation	
Littlejohn (2011)	The first, second and third level	(1) Cover physical appearance, engaging activities and its unit division. (2) Analyze individual tasks, (3) Infer the book's targeted objectives, content sequencing and selection as well as users' roles.

Each strategy undoubtedly has advantages and disadvantages of its own. Therefore, the most methodical, effective, and contextually appropriate one should be chosen or developed by the evaluators. The study emphasizes the need to combine different approaches in order to address the drawbacks of one strategy while utilizing the advantages of another. The frameworks of Ellis (1997) serves as the foundation for this study's hybrid methodological approach, which has been carefully crafted to incorporate checklists from multiple authors.

Roles of Checklists in Material Evaluation

According to Cunningsworth (1995), effective and methodical checklists are a potent instrument that ensures that all important elements of the evaluation process are carefully taken into account. A checklist increases the effectiveness and practicality of materials evaluation by widely implementing a set of criteria (Mukundan et al. (2011). Additionally, Mukundan, Hajimohammadi, and Nimehchisalem (2011) disclose that a number of checklists in the literature are inapplicable in real-world evaluation settings due to their potential for being either excessively short or lengthy. In particular, some assessment checklists have fewer than twenty items, whereas others may have more than one hundred (Abdelwahab, 2013). A checklist created for one scenario may also be less useful in another, highlighting the necessity of a versatile assessment instrument. In fact, one can modify it by removing or adding items to fit the specific needs of a particular learning environment, which is only feasible when the learning objectives can be precisely identified.

A number of factors make the use of assessment checklists crucial. Many English language classes worldwide rely significantly on textbooks that were not chosen using rigorous, impartial standards, as Ghorbani (2011) explains. Most of the time, the selection process is still arbitrary and irregular. Additionally, since they are the main users, instructors typically play a big part in choosing textbooks. Students are significant stakeholders who immediately experience either positive or negative washback from the chosen textbook, so it is worth it. Therefore, when selecting a textbook, it is important to take into consideration their needs and preferences, ideally with the use of flexible checklists that allow for the selection of pertinent criteria.

Needs Analysis

The idea of needs analysis is the subject of numerous studies. According to Richards (2001), needs analysis refers to the methods used to gain an understanding of the language proficiency required in an English-speaking nation. Crucially, needs analysis serves as a solid foundation for all course designs (Johns, 1991). One of the milestones in curriculum design and development is needs analysis, which Brown (2009) views as the initial stage of gathering instructional materials based on learning activities (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Johns, 1991; Tarone & Yule, 2000; Brown, 2009; etc.)

Student needs analysis, also known as learner analysis, is prioritized within the broader needs analysis framework (Nunan, 2001). Learner-centered needs analysis allows teachers to adapt learning experiences to meet the needs of their students by gathering both objective and subjective data about their backgrounds and perceptions. Furthermore, determining students' learning needs can help teachers better understand their interests, which will enhance the way in which students' learning needs are satisfied, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987).

Method

Design of The Study

This study assessed the textbook using both quantitative and qualitative data using a mixed-methods design. Regarding the quantitative portion of the analysis, a checklist derived from Demir (2014) was modified to evaluate the textbook using two criteria: content and practical considerations. These standards will also guide the study's discussion section's subsections. To

get participant opinions that might not have been fully addressed in the questionnaire or that required more explanation, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Two preset questions that matched the sections of the checklist were part of the interview protocol; however, follow-up questions were modified according to the interview's flow. To eliminate any ambiguity, these questions were created, and pilot tests were carried out with multiple instructors.

Participants

Being part of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Van Lang University, 30 English language instructors who had taught with the Advanced Oxford Grammar book at least one year participated in a survey to assess the textbook and were assured that their answers would be confidential. They had 25 female and 5 male instructors with teaching experience between 5 and 20 years.

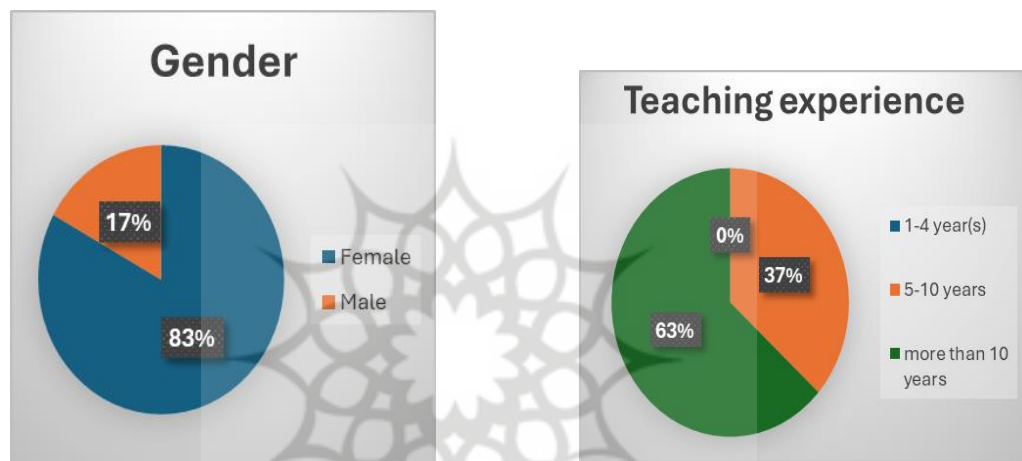


Figure 1. *The participants' demographic information*

Semi-structured interviews with 10 volunteers were conducted to obtain more detailed information on the topic. Interviews took between 10 and 15 minutes, depending on the depth of the discussion and the availability of the participants.

Materials and Instruments

Questionnaire

With the help of a Google Form, the researchers created a questionnaire with two sections and a five-point Likert scale: 1 for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for neither agree nor disagree, 4 for agree, and 5 for strongly agree. There were 14 items in the first section about checklists for practical considerations, and 10 items in the second section about contents.

Interview

For the instructors' convenience, the interviews took place on Microsoft Teams. Based on their experiences using the textbook, ten participants were chosen at random to participate in the interview. Every participant was made aware that the 10- to 15-minute interviews were being recorded. In order to fully share their thoughts, overall impressions, and initial assessment of

the textbook, they were willing to voice their opinions in English. Every response was taken into account and meticulously categorized to display excerpts from interviews along with justifications.

Procedure

An online survey created with Google Forms was used to gather quantitative data. After that, the data were tabulated after being entered into Microsoft Excel to calculate the frequencies and percentages for each item. With permission from the participants, the interviews were recorded, and the audio was transcribed for analysis through the coding development process and discussions to determine possible codes. Only the pertinent and accepted statements were converted into analysis codes.

Data Analysis

Microsoft Excel, a program primarily used for analyzing small statistical data, served as the primary analysis tool. Concurrently, the researchers modified the thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which enables them to group the responses into related themes and facilitate the instructors' assessment and experience with the grammar textbook. More precisely, the six-phased guideline that follows was adhered to:

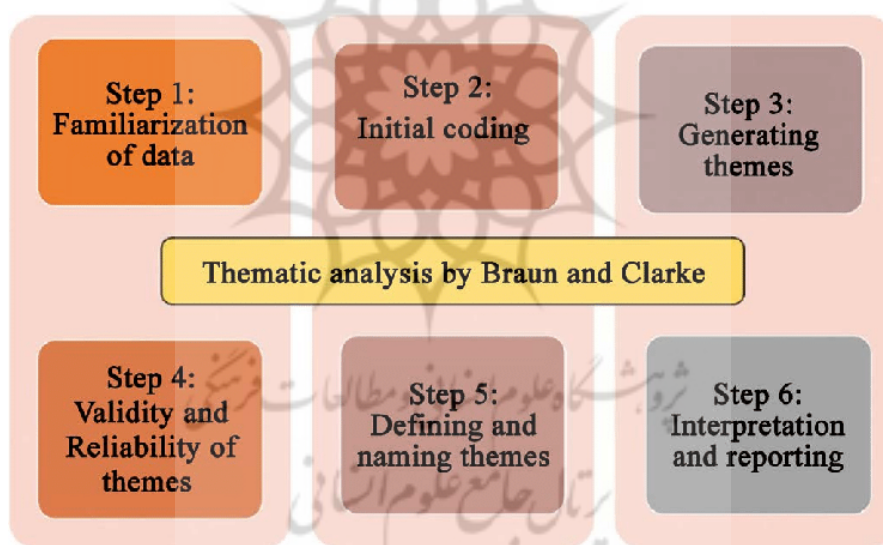


Figure 2. *Thematic analysis (Adapted from Braun and Clarke, 2006)*

Findings

In addition to a table that displays quantitative data and interpretations of the data, the questionnaire was organized with headings and subheadings. In order to better explain or elaborate on specific points, pertinent quotes from the interview were then used to present the qualitative data.

Practical considerations

Table 2 reveals some insights into the English instructors' perceptions of the textbook's relevance and appropriateness.

Table 2. Practical considerations

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. The book is up-to-date (e.g. published within the past 10 years).	28 93.3%	2 6.7%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
2. The book is easily accessible.	2 6.7%	8 26.7%	5 16.7%	4 13.3%	11 36.7%
3. The book is affordable.	0 0%	0 0%	3 10%	11 36.7%	16 53.3%
4. The book has audiovisual materials (tapes, visuals etc.).	0 0%	0 0%	6 20%	10 33.3%	14 46.7%
5. The book has supporting online materials/tests and e-format.	25 83.3%	5 16.7%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
6. The book addresses different learning styles and strategies.	12 40%	8 26.7%	2 6.7%	6 20%	2 6.7%
7. The activities and exercises introduce the main principles of CLT.	0 0%	2 6.7%	6 20%	12 40%	10 33.3%
8. The book includes self-assessment parts.	28 93.3%	2 6.7%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
9. The activities can be exploited fully and embrace various methodologies in ELT.	8 26.7%	9 30%	3 10%	6 20%	4 13.3%
10. The types of syllabus design are used in the book appropriate for learners.	27 90%	0 0%	3 10%	0 0%	0 0%
11. The book is easily integrated into technology, thereby allowing for individual study outside the school.	26 86.7%	4 10%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
12. The book fits curriculum/goals.	25 83.3%	5 16.7%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
13. The objectives are specified explicitly in the book.	0 0%	2 6.7%	6 20%	12 40%	10 33.3%
14. The book is designed by taking into account the learners' socially and historically English-free status.	22 73.3%	8 26.7%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%

As shown in Table 2, most instructors of English chose higher percentages of agreement (A) and strong agreement (SA) towards the relevance of the Advanced Oxford Grammar book in terms of practical considerations. Generally, the responses showed that most instructors rank the appropriateness of the textbook 4 and 5 on a 5-point Likert scale. Specifically, 100% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the textbook was up to date, had supporting online materials or tests and e-format, included self-assessment parts, easily was integrated into technology allowing for individual study outside the school, fit curriculum/goals and was designed by considering the learners' socially and historically English-free status as well. Those responses were also supported through the interview. Particularly, teachers #1, #4, #5, and #6 explained that the textbook was published in 2019, which met the criteria "be published

within the past 10 years” when choosing a main textbook for a training course. Also, teachers #7 and #10 appreciated highly the book in terms of its usefulness and a wide range of sources for

The book comprised of not only the student book but also the Practice-plus CD-rom and 44-page tests for self-practice and learners’ autonomy (Teacher #10).

Noticeably, teachers #2 and #8 expressed their satisfaction toward the book’s content which was designed with learners’ socially and historically English-free status.

The book provides learners with a meaningful and content-based reading text before a grammar lesson and a plethora of easy-to-understand examples, which facilitates better grammar acquisition (Teacher #8).

Some 90% and 56.7% were the second and third-highest proportion of participants reflecting their agreement or strong agreement on the appropriateness of the textbook in accordance with the course learning objectives and teaching methodology. For instance, teachers #5, #9 and #10 mentioned that the 17-unit textbook covered most of the key grammar topics including sentences, tenses, modals, negatives, questions, passive voice, parts of speech, determiners, quantifiers, pronouns, substitution, ellipsis, and types of clauses, which aligned with the course’s goals “to provide students with a comprehensive knowledge of advanced grammatical points”. Furthermore, teacher #1 added that the textbook employed both deductive and inductive approaches to introduce grammatical structures with a variety of exercises like completion, error identification, mini-test and writing sentences.

Although there was such a positive result in terms of appropriateness and relevance, the textbook also had its remarkable drawback since the majority of participants de-appreciated its availability and affordability. Specifically, 90% of the instructors claimed that the textbook was not affordable, whereas 80% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that the textbook had enough audiovisual materials. Meanwhile, 73,3% both supposed that the activities and exercises failed to introduce the main principles of communicative language teaching, and the objectives were not specified explicitly in the textbook. Half of the respondents reported that the textbook was not easily accessible. According to teachers #4 and #7, with the expensive cost of 330,000 VND and the state of being sold out, learners were not eager to buy a printed original book. Instead, they had a tendency to use a pirated online PDF version. Teacher #1 also expressed his concern on the layout of the book when it failed to include as many visuals as possible to illustrate examples or present the grammatical rules. As far as teacher #5 was concerned, she reported that the textbook failed to present the objectives of each unit, which led to learners’ ambiguity in what they were going to deal with. Teachers #3, #7, and #10 revealed that apart from using real-world materials like articles for the very first activity, other activities and exercises did not introduce the main principles of CLT for it lacked discussion and interaction.

Content

Table 3. *Contents*

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. The content serves as a window into learning about the target language culture (American, British, etc.).	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	16 53.3%	14 46.7%
2. The subject and content of the book are interesting.	12 40%	10 33.3%	8 26.7%	0 0%	0 0%
3. The content of the book is challenging enough to foster new learnings.	10 33.3%	7 23.3%	8 26.7%	2 6.7%	3 10%
4. The subject and content of the book are motivating.	23 76.7%	7 23.3%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
5. The thematic content is understandable for students.	26 86.7%	4 13.3%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
6. There is sufficient variety in the subject and content of the book.	28 93.3%	2 6.7%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
7. The thematic content is culturally appropriate.	2 6.7%	3 10%	10 33.3%	7 23.3%	8 26.7%
8. The topics and texts are free from any kind of discrimination (gender, race etc.).	24 80%	6 20%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
9. There is a relationship between the content of the book and real-life situations (society).	10 33.3%	2 6.7%	5 16.7%	7 23.3%	6 20%
10. The topics and texts in the book include elements from both local and target culture.	0 0%	1 3.3%	10 33.3%	9 30%	10 33.3%

Table 3 unveiled that most of the participants agreed and strongly agreed with the suitability of the textbook in terms of subject and contents, for 100% of the instructors stated that the textbook contained interesting subjects and contents, understandable thematic contents, sufficiently various points of grammar as well as discrimination-free topics for ELT contexts. In addition to relevant contents, the subjects and contents of the textbook were interesting and challenging enough to foster learning with 73.3% and 56.6% of the respondents supposed respectively. Regarding the cultural aspect, instructors who reflected either their disagreement or strong disagreement on the contents' function as a window into learning about American or British culture accounted for 100%, while 63.3%, 50% and 43.3% took turn to reveal that some elements from both local and target culture were not incorporated together with a lack of culturally thematic content and a gap between the content of the textbook and real-life situations. These findings were clarified clearly through the interview's analysis. Particularly, the wide range of grammatical points and structure along with step-by-step explanations such as sentences, types of clauses, parts of speech and grammar beyond sentences, according to teachers #1, 2, 5, 8, 10, was engaging enough for conveying grammar knowledge and stimulating grammar practice. In addition, teacher #5 expressed that learners were exposed to plenty of examples and exceptional rules of usage, which encouraged them to explore and have a comprehensive understanding of grammatical areas. Nevertheless, all interviewees shared that the contents were somehow sophisticated and rare in use such as *mixed real and unreal conditionals* as well as *it as an empty object after some certain verbs* (Teacher #6). More importantly, teachers #4, #5, and #8 showed their concerned about the appropriateness of several examples from the textbook since it violated the ethical standards such as "The woman killed her husband, and she intended to do it. Therefore, she is guilty of murder" (Yule, 2019, 214) and lacked the relationship between local and target culture such as an exercise from

history text about the Spanish-American war which was absolutely weird to Vietnamese learners.

Discussion

George Yule's Advanced Oxford Practice Grammar evaluation at Van Lang University confirms the results of earlier English Language Teaching (ELT) studies and offers important new information about how it works as a teaching tool. Notably, teachers responded favorably to the book because it covered all of the grammar topics that were considered essential and were in line with the course's learning objectives. These results align with those of Eliana (2024), who also emphasized the importance of relevance and student engagement in course materials. These findings are also supported by those of Alrefaei (2025), who concluded that some factors related to content, social interaction as well as leisure and entertainment contribute to learners' willingness to use the book. Despite highlighting the textbook's benefits, the majority of Van Lang University lecturers also identified some significant disadvantages, particularly with regard to cost and accessibility. This is in line with the findings of Ho and Nguyen (2022), who found that inaccessible resources and exorbitant prices can hinder efficient teaching and learning.

Furthermore, the participants in this research indicated a need for interactive and culturally appropriate materials. This result supports the assertions made by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who claim that textbooks not only give students the language's structure but also their cultural background. The call for more regional illustrations and interactive exercises is taken from McGrath (2002), who supports resources that engage students through real-world application.

Conversely, the specific recommendations made by Van Lang teachers highlight a weakness in the current *Advanced Oxford Practice Grammar*'s pedagogical approach, despite the fact that the majority of research highlights the need for textbooks to be flexible and accommodating of different learning needs. The teachers' remarks about the need for communicative language learning rules and clear objectives indicate a larger trend in ELT research toward a more student-centered and interactive pedagogy (Richards, 2001).

Overall, the results of this study add to the current discussion about textbook selection and evaluation in ELT, reaffirming the necessity of a well-rounded strategy that considers both the advantages of the available resources and the changing needs of the students. In order to fully realize the potential of textbooks in various learning contexts, future research is probably going to delve deeper into the ramifications of incorporating culturally relevant content and participatory techniques.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, instructors' comments on the Advanced Oxford Practice Grammar textbook highlight the book's strengths in providing a solid framework for teaching advanced grammar through a range of engaging and intelligible grammar topics. But it also suggested some significant changes to help Van Lang University English majors learn grammar more effectively. Teachers believe that in order to help students better understand the language in context, the textbook should include more material that is relevant to Vietnamese culture and

everyday situations. To be more precise, teachers found it beneficial to supplement the lessons with additional real-life examples and Vietnamese cases, as well as new, recent articles and contentious, viral videos. Students would see both local and target cultural perspectives, enriching their learning. Adding interactive games, role-playing exercises, group discussions, and hands-on activities is more crucial.

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