

# សង្ខេបសង្ខេប—Abstract

## អត្ថបទទី៣៖ សៀវភៅសិក្សាគោលកាសាអង់គ្លេស និងការប្រើប្រាស់ សៀវភៅនៅបឋមសិក្សាភ្នំពេញ៖ ករណីសិក្សានៅទីក្រុងភ្នំពេញ

### សង្ខេបសង្ខេប

គោលបំណងនៃការសិក្សានេះដើម្បីស្វែងរកមើលភាពសមស្របនៃខ្លឹមសារ និងប្រសិទ្ធភាពនៃការប្រើប្រាស់សៀវភៅសិក្សាភាសាអង់គ្លេសដើម្បីអភិវឌ្ឍគុណភាពអប់រំផ្នែកភាសាអង់គ្លេស។ ការសិក្សានេះបានប្រើវិធីសាស្ត្រស្រាវជ្រាវបែបចម្រុះនៅតាមសាលារៀនបឋមសិក្សាចំនួន១២ គ្រូបឋមសិក្សាចំនួន១២នាក់ និងសិស្សបឋមសិក្សាចំនួន ១២០ នាក់ នៅទីក្រុងភ្នំពេញ។ ការសិក្សានេះ ពិនិត្យមើលលើទស្សនរបស់គ្រូបង្រៀនលើសៀវភៅសិក្សាគោល និងការប្រើប្រាស់។ ការសិក្សានេះក៏សំដៅលើមតិយោបល់របស់គ្រូឧទ្ទេសលើការវាយតម្លៃ សៀវភៅសិក្សា និងទស្សនរបស់សិស្សតាមរយៈកម្រងសំណួរសម្ភាស។ លទ្ធផលនៃការសិក្សាបានបង្ហាញថា គ្រូឧទ្ទេស គ្រូបង្រៀន និងសិស្សបឋមសិក្សាបានឯកភាពគ្នាលើរូបរាងខាងក្រៅ និងការរៀបចំការរចនានៃសៀវភៅសិក្សាដោយយកចិត្តទុកដាក់ដែលធ្វើអោយមានការចាប់អារម្មណ៍ពីសំណាក់គ្រូបង្រៀន និងអ្នកសិក្សា។ ពួកគាត់បានយល់ស្របថាជំនាញអាន និងវាក្យស័ព្ទគឺសំខាន់នៅក្នុងខ្លឹមសារបង្រៀន និងរៀន។ ទោះបីយ៉ាងណាក៏ដោយ ការសិក្សានេះបានសង្កត់ធ្ងន់លើតម្រូវការនៃការកែលម្អសៀវភៅសិក្សាគោលដោយសារពួកគាត់ខ្វះសម្ភារៈឧបទ្ទេស មិនបានពង្រឹងជំនាញមីក្រូ និងម៉ាក្រូសម្រាប់អ្នកសិក្សាក្មេងៗ វេយ្យាករណ៍និងអត្ថបទអានមានភាពស្មុគស្មាញខ្លាំងពេកខ្ពស់ជាងកម្រិតសិក្សារបស់សិស្ស ហើយសារប្រយោជន៍នៃសៀវភៅសិក្សាគោលត្រូវបានគេវាយតម្លៃត្រឹមត្រូវតិចតួច។ ការសិក្សាបានបង្ហាញផងដែរថា គ្រូបង្រៀនដែលមានមូលដ្ឋានចំណេះដឹងភាសាអង់គ្លេសបានអនុវត្តការប្រើប្រាស់សៀវភៅបានល្អប្រសើរជាង នៅពេលដែលគ្រូបង្រៀនមិនមានមូលដ្ឋានចំណេះដឹងភាសាអង់គ្លេស ជាពិសេសគ្រូបង្រៀនដែលមានអាយុច្រើនមានការស្ទាក់ស្ទើរក្នុងការបង្រៀន។

**ពាក្យគន្លឹះ៖** សៀវភៅសិក្សាគោល សាលាបឋមសិក្សា ភាពសមស្របនៃខ្លឹមសារ ប្រសិទ្ធភាពនៃសៀវភៅសិក្សាគោល

## National English Textbooks and the Implementation for Cambodian Elementary Schools: A case study in Phnom Penh City

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Received: December 22, 2020/ Accepted: May 08, 2021

### Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the appropriateness of content and the effectiveness of using English textbooks to improve the quality of English education. The study employed a mixed method involving 12 schools, 12 primary teachers, and 120 students in Phnom Penh city. It examines teachers' opinions about textbooks and textbook use. It also focuses on teacher trainers' view on textbook evaluation and students' ideas about textbook by using interview-guided questionnaires. The results revealed that teacher trainers, elementary teachers, and primary students agreed with the appearance and careful design of the textbooks which catch learners' and teachers' attention; they also approved that reading and vocabulary are important in the learning-teaching content. However, the study emphasized the need to improve the textbooks as they lacked adequate teaching materials, did not improve macro and micro skills for young learners grammar and reading contents were found to be too complicated for higher levels, and the usefulness of the textbooks were perceived to be moderate. The study also showed that teachers with English background implemented textbooks better while those without English background, especially teachers with advanced age, tended to hesitate to teach.

*Keywords:* National English textbook; Elementary school; Appropriateness of content; Effectiveness of textbooks

### 1. Introduction

It was in 1991 that English language started to attract more attention from students and teachers, particularly after the intervention of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia in 1993. This facilitated the cooperation between some 60,000 Cambodians and 20,000 peacekeepers and personnel from 34 countries around the world (Michael, 1995). Since then, the importance of the English language has truly taken hold in the country as Cambodia integrates itself into a global society where English is widely used as the language for business, communication, education and development.

In contemporary Cambodia, English is becoming increasingly popular among parents who do not mind paying for extra classes for their children in private schools which offer instruction in both English and Khmer, or in private international schools that provide instruction only in English. The English language has become more popular in Cambodian education for many

reasons, such as (1) tourism, (2) lifelong education, (3) job requirements, (4) connectivity, and (5) English-based education in primary schools.

The upper primary school in the Cambodian educational system became a significant impetus for change as seen in the introduction of new English textbooks (for Grades 4-6) by Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport since the 2013-2014 academic year, following the design of the English curriculum in 2012. However, MoEYS had conducted many workshops to train primary school teachers to use the Grade 4 English textbook as various issues have been found regarding content, lack of supporting materials, and non-suitability with young learners' needs. Moreover, the textbook was the only main tool for teachers and learners to activate their knowledge through a process of teaching and learning (Song, 2015; Hutchinson & Torres, 1994).

Against this background, this study seeks to examine the appropriateness of content and effective ways of using English textbooks to improve the quality of English education in Cambodia. The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. *Do the primary English textbooks meet the characteristics of a good English textbook?*
2. *How are textbooks implemented? And what factors affect the way of using primary school English textbook?*
3. *To what extent do the primary English textbooks fit into the Cambodian context from the users' perspective?*

## **2. Literature review**

Since there are few previous studies regarding textbook evaluation in the Cambodian context (see Sem, 2012), this literature review will primarily be based on related studies of English textbook evaluation for primary schools in other countries. Textbooks should be evaluated to see how they are appropriate to fit with students and teachers, and the selection of a textbook evaluation checklist was extremely significant in order to provide sufficient information in analyzing the characteristics of the textbooks. Sem (2012) conducted a study to assess English textbooks in lower secondary schools in Cambodia. The result of his study found that the textbooks have high quality in both external and internal features. His result suggested some parts to improve the textbooks such as cover page, pictures, book size, font, number of pages, durability, and glossary as the internal features, while the design and organization, language contents, grammar, vocabulary, language skills development and practicality consideration as the external features. Mukundan (2013) conducted a similar study on English language textbooks in Malaysia. The result showed that textbooks were highly useful for primary-level students while textbooks were only moderately useful for secondary-level students.

Textbooks are a really important resource in classroom teaching. Song (2015) stated that textbooks are the most useful item for teachers and learners in the Cambodian context. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) also emphasized that textbooks look worth to a universal element in language teaching classrooms. They further asserted that a process of teaching and

learning will not be complete without relevant textbooks. On the other hand, many researchers found the limitations of textbooks. Ur (1998) indicates that textbooks are appropriate to support every learner's needs in terms of topics but many textbooks are not interesting to the real classes, which makes learners experience boredom and demotivation. Besides, Richards (2001) also argued that many textbooks may not fit learners' needs because they are written for global markets.

In Turkey, Kirkgoz (2009) investigated students' and teachers' opinions about English textbooks for young learners at primary education. The findings showed that the textbooks were appropriate for young learners and they had clear explanation and usefulness in real-life situations. Abdulrahman (2008) conducted a study to evaluate the quality of Grade 6 English language textbook in Saudi Arabia. The result indicated that the new English textbook had an appropriate glossary to assist teachers and learners' integration of attractive illustration to promote critical thinking through interesting topics, more authentic themes to encourage student activeness, and the real-life interaction to encourage more flexibility of language practices. Aminuddin (2009) investigated teachers' perspectives on textbooks in language teaching classrooms and how learners respond to the usage of language textbooks in Indonesia. The result revealed that teachers used other materials instead of applying the textbook in the classroom because the textbook was not useful and did not have appropriate content to arrange the activities, structure, students' interest, and time constraints. Likewise, Srakang (2013) in Thailand examined teachers' perception of Grade 10 English textbooks. The study revealed that there were two conflictual opinions from the teachers' perspectives. Some teachers (with a pro-textbook view) posited that textbooks were extremely vital teaching material to be followed. However, some teachers (with a anti-textbook view) believed that following the textbook was useless for being exam-orientated serving more as a catalyst for students to pass university entrance exams. Osada & Tanaka (2013) conducted a research in Taiwan on teachers' concerns and students' perspectives in Taiwanese primary English education, It was found that textbooks were not interesting because most of the students attended an English cram school.

### **3. Methodology**

This study employed a mixed method design involving the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data collected at the same time. Qualitative data was used to answer research question 1 and 2, while both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered to seek answers for research question 3. The study took place in primary schools in Phnom Penh where English is widely used in schools.

#### **3.1 Participants**

This study was conducted with 12 upper primary teachers and 120 students (Grades 4-6) through purposive sampling by using a lucky draw technique to select 10 students from each class after classroom observation was conducted. There were 164 schools with 3849 teachers and 13519 students in Phnom Penh city (MoEYS, 2017). The participants were from

government schools (public schools) supervised by the Department of Educational Youth and Sport in Phnom Penh. The sampling size was kept limited to only 12 schools, due to research time constraints, and only schools that could implement the use of English textbooks. Moreover, three raters were involved in the process of English language textbook evaluation. One rater was the researcher while the other two raters were English teacher educators who prepare trainees to be public primary school teachers.

## **3.2 Instruments**

### **3.2.1 English textbook evaluation checklist**

A checklist proposed by Nimchisalem and Mukundan (2015) was adopted in this study. This checklist has been validated and tested for its reliability. It contains two main categories: the general attributes and the learning-teaching content. There are five major components under the general attributes, which include (a) syllabus and curriculum, (b) methodology, (c) suitability to learners, (d) physical and utilitarian attributes, and (e) efficient outlay of supplementary materials. On the other hand, there are nine major components under the learning-teaching content, including (a) general content, (b) listening, (c) speaking, (d) reading, (e) writing, (f) vocabulary, (g) grammar, (h) pronunciation, and (i) exercise. The rating system for the survey is based on a 5-point Likert scale.

### **3.2.2 Interview-guided questionnaires**

The survey was conducted to identify a source of students' perceptions and was thus aiming at eliciting students' opinions of regarding the use of English textbooks. This survey was developed based on Osada and Tanaka's (2013) questionnaire and Rashidi and Kehtarfard's (2014) questions.

### **3.2.3 Classroom observation checklist**

The classroom observation checklist was used to see how teachers used English textbooks in the actual classrooms. It included aspects address the purpose of this study as well as the teachers' responses to the questionnaire.

### **3.2.4 Semi-structured interview questionnaires**

A semi-structured interview questionnaire was also prepared for use during the face-to-face interviews. The data obtained from the interviews provided deeper answers and were used to cross check the accuracy of the observational data. All open-ended questions were adapted from Srakang's (2013) semi-structure questionnaire to gain in-depth understanding of the data on teachers' perceptions of English textbooks and its implementation. The interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants and were later transcribed for analysis. The questionnaire consisted of two important parts: (a) background information and (b) teachers' perception on English textbooks.

### 3.3 Data analysis

The textbooks were analyzed using the Score Interpretation Guide adopted from Nimchisalem and Mukundan (2015) for research question 1. The data gained from classroom observations and teachers' interviews were qualitatively analyzed following Merriam and Tisdall's (2016) ... for research question 2. The responses from students' interview guided questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS for research question 3.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Textbook evaluation from Grades 4-6

The analysis of English textbooks for Grades 4 to 6 was conducted by the researcher, along with two other evaluators, and a summary of the total result and Kappa values is shown in Table 1. It can be said that the three English textbooks have their own strengths and weaknesses and each textbook received its corresponding score.

Table 1

*Evaluation of the three English textbooks and reliability of results by Kappa value*

	<b>Grade 4</b>	<b>Grade 5</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>
Total Result	2.73	2.65	2.65
Kappa value	0.879	0.819	0.846

The results show that the three textbooks were moderately useful, and the Kappa value was strong for all Grades indicating a high degree of data reliability.

In Table 2, the detailed evaluation of the textbooks for Grades 4 to 6 is presented. It covers a wide array of factors that fall into two categories which are general attributes and learning-teaching content. Each factor has been ranked from a range of 0.00 to 4.00, and the interpretation of the scores is given in Table 3. These values are explained in further detail as follows.

Table 3

*Interpretation of scores*

<b>Level</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
0	0.00 - 0.80	Negligible usefulness
1	0.81 - 1.60	Low usefulness
2	1.61 - 2.80	Moderate usefulness
3	2.81 - 3.60	High usefulness
4	3.61 - 4.00	Very high usefulness

The similarity among the three textbooks, brought about by the content analysis, was the high to very high usefulness of their general attributes, specifically in their good relationship between syllabus and curriculum, good methodology, suitability with learners, and physical and utilitarian attributes. However, the glaring weakness common in their general attribute was

their inefficient layout of supplementary materials because the set of these textbooks did not contain suitable supplementary materials such as workbook, audio, or multimedia in order to make teaching and learning more effective and practical.

As for the learning-teaching content, reading appeared gradually in macro skills while vocabulary had remarkable activities in micro skills, and both were regarded highly useful in all textbooks. On the contrary, grammar and pronunciation in micro skills; speaking, listening, and writing in macro skills; and general content were all not scored as highly useful. For example, the pronunciation activities on pages 49, 59, & 63 of the textbook for Grade 5 (see Appendix 1) were not interesting or useful in helping students to learn their pronunciation. Further examples were the inappropriate writing activity on pages 45, 59, & 71 (see Appendix 2) which did not reflect the reading text, and the not very useful instruction of writing sounds to improve sentence structures rather than topic sentences. For the last example, speaking activities on pages 41, 63, & 81 from the textbook of Grade 6 (see Appendix 3) were not relevant to improve language skills as students could practice this better in their real communication outside of the classroom.

#### **4.2 Strategies to implement the textbooks**

Since everything could not possibly work perfectly from the beginning, strategies of MoEYS were necessitated to find a good solution to cross the threshold of success. A good strategy would drive the mechanism to achieve the goal. Hence, The Teacher's Guide was introduced and oriented for primary school directors to employ this program successfully. The orientation of teacher's guide focused on five main parts in Khmer language, including (1) teaching English (2) teaching methodology (3) using material, (4) evaluation, and (5) teaching step.

The teaching methodology part explained precisely for teachers to follow; for example, it had guidance on how to write lower- or upper-case letters of English correctly, followed by the sound of each letter, words, phrases, sentences, conversations, and short texts to develop students' skills in listening and speaking. The Teacher's Guide in Grade 4 also emphasized that "teachers should pay attention on supporting and helping students' skills in reading and writing properly as well as using material in teaching vocabulary, sentence structure, and game in order to achieve the objective of the lesson" (p.vi). Thus, teachers could follow the textbooks and The Teacher's Guide to build their confidence in teaching English; as the result, 12 teacher participants (100% representation) confirmed that they followed the textbook. The two teachers in Grade 4 said that "I follow everything from the textbook" (No.C01 & No.C04) and others also said that "I follow the textbook, but some parts and skipped some activities" (No. C02, No. C03, No. C05, No. C06, No.C07, No. C08, No.C09, No. C10, No. C11, & No. C12). The classroom observation also clearly revealed the evidence that all teachers followed the textbooks even though they did not strictly follow them page by page due to time constraints.

Using material described on producing flashcards of the 26 letters of English, words, pictures or photos relevant to the lesson to attract learners' attention and related to their real-life situation, so students were able to remember and understand well by demonstrating or pointing

to those flashcards or pictures. According to the interviews, most of the teacher participants stated that “before teaching, I always prepare teaching material such as vocabulary, pictures, and flashcards relevant to the lesson” (No. C01, No. C02, No. C03, No. C05, No. C06, No. C08, No. C10, No. C11, & No. C12). The result of the classroom observation, however, showed that there were only a few teachers who used teaching material in their teaching classes.

### **4.3 Factors that affect the use of textbooks**

#### **4.3.1 Teacher factor**

The teachers are the main characters who play an important role in using the textbooks smoothly and effectively. There were three teachers-related factors that affected textbook use.

##### **4.3.1.1 Teachers with no background in English have low confidence in teaching**

The truth is that, although the city was surrounded by private English schools and teeming with foreigners, most primary teachers in the capital city could not teach English. Nhem Sitha, deputy primary officer in Phnom Penh Municipal Department of Education Youth and Sports said in his 2018 speech that “Among 164 primary schools in Phnom Penh City, only 30% - 40% had teachers to support and teach the English subject.”

One teacher who was teaching in Grade 5 grumbled that “the problem is I don’t know English. (laughs). Sometimes, I don’t understand some words in English, so I ask my colleagues to help...” (No. C09).

Similarly, another teacher said,

The textbook is no difficult to use. The most difficult for me is that I do not know English. I am not confident enough to teach English, and I think most primary public-school teachers do not know English either. (No. C02)

Two of the teachers mentioned above are in their early 40s and were born before 1979, a dreadful period for education when Cambodia suffered under a regime of genocide which made it difficult for them to receive education, let alone learning a foreign language such as English. Probably, they did not get any chance to study English, or maybe they learnt a little bit during their training to be teachers when English textbooks were published for the first time in 1996 for Grade 7 (English for Cambodia, Book 1) for lower secondary schools (MoEYS, 1996). During the two classroom observations, the teachers hesitated while teaching students and in eliciting each word slowly from students, they seemed ambivalent to accept or reject the words from students’ responses. For instance, one teacher who was teaching in Grade 5 tried to elicit the word “jam” from students by using a picture and, when some students responded [dʒæm] while others replied [dʒam] in the alternative, the teacher felt confused as to pronounce the word. Moreover, the flow from one activity to another seemed awkward, which prevented a smooth transition in their teaching. If they had more opportunity to study English from elementary school, high school, or PTTC, they would have had a better background of English, and then they could have more confidence in teaching the English subject.



#### **4.3.1.2 Teachers with background in English use textbook as supplementary material for gaining confidence**

One teacher who was teaching in Grade 4 said that “the most important thing is the teacher. Teachers who have some background in English will find it easy” (No. C04).

Meanwhile, another teacher who was also teaching in Grade 4 supported the idea and said that, “I had to follow everything in the textbook because I did not have any experience in teaching English” (No. C01).

From these comments, they tried to convey that without them having some background in English, they could not use the textbook appropriately. Certainly, as was seen during the classroom observation, they tried to appear competent in the delivery of their English lesson in the real class by following what the textbook instructed to be done for the lesson. For one teaching session, the teacher was eliciting some vocabulary, writing those words on the board, asking students to spell the words, letting them work in pairs through conversations, and allowing them to play classroom games.

#### **4.3.1.3 Teachers with background in English use textbook as stimulus ideas for classroom activities**

Most participant teachers believed that English textbooks were extremely important materials to help them in teaching effectively. Another finding that emerged from the classroom observations showed how all participant teachers used the English textbook as a main source in their class and followed the phases of the teacher’s guide. The teachers considered the English textbook as their guide to demonstrate the sequence and differential activities in each unit.

Meanwhile, two teachers who were teaching in Grade 4 said, “The textbook is good. If I don’t know what to teach, the book tells me what to do” (No. C04) and “the textbook is good because of its various activities which are easy for me to follow...” (No. C06).

#### **4.3.1.4 Teachers with background in English use textbook as a source of vocabulary**

Another teacher who was teaching in Grade 6 maintained that “the textbook is good especially because it has an explanation of difficult words at the back of the book” (No. C07)

In her opinion, the glossary is really helpful to teachers because it facilitates translation into Khmer language clearly, especially at time when preparing their lesson plan or designing any flashcards or posters for their activities. It was also noted during the classroom observation that the words were really trivial, and teachers concentrated on translation rather than on the function of the language use; for instance, one teacher who was teaching in Grade 5 confirmed that “sometimes, I teach more words outside of this textbook to my students” (No.C09).

### **4.3.2 Students factors**

#### **4.3.2.1 Students have different levels of English proficiency**

Even though English is a mandatory subject that begins from Grade 4, some schools could not deal with the subject properly because they “have no English teachers.” The core issue comes to light when students start English classes in Grade 5 or 6 and begin learning the unit related to sentence structures, phrases, grammar, or reading texts, but they find it difficult as they have not learnt even basic letters or consonants yet. One teacher teaching Grade 6 complained, “the levels of proficiency of students are not the same so that I cannot go forward” (No. C12)

Grammar, the basic rule in using English correctly, is an area where most students were most challenged. One teacher who was teaching in Grade 6 said that “grammar in the textbook of Grade 6...and students don't like to study grammar...” (No. C11). As noted from the classroom observation, it was only in one class that grammar was explained to the students because grammar was believed to be implicit in these textbooks.

#### **4.3.2.2 Students were satisfied with the textbook design**

The English textbooks were written by a local writer committee who localized the context to meet the learners' needs and to motivate them in their new language learning. The textbooks were printed with colorful pictures and distributed to all libraries of public primary schools around Cambodia, so students could borrow them from the library, study in class and return them at the end of the academic year. From the classroom observation, it was clear that both teachers and students looked delighted by having the gorgeous textbook in their hands.

One teacher who was teaching in Grade 4 said that, “the textbook is fine and uses local names, so it is easy for me and my students, and the textbook is suitable to our context with a design that is appropriate for the students' level” (No. C01). Another teacher who was teaching in Grade 5 agreed with this and said, “I think the textbook has a very good design to attract the learners' attention” (No. C08). Similarly, two more teachers shared the same idea that “the textbook is good to have such colorful pictures that attract the learners' attention” (No. C02 and No. C07).

### **4.3.3 Textbook factors**

The textbook was really a helpful resource for teachers who followed its prescribed teaching steps and, even though they did not follow it page by page, they used most of the activities in sequence in each lesson. The textbook also provided unambiguous ideas for the teachers to develop and deliver the lesson to their students.

#### **4.3.3.1 The level in the textbooks was unequal for all students**

Although the textbook provided great support for teaching, it was difficult for the teachers to effectively carry out the lesson and meet its objectives.

Sometimes, the textbook set some limitations in view of divide in the students' ability which led to teachers not being able to manage well in teaching class. The classroom observation also helped to show that most teachers (especially those teaching Grades 5 and 6) were resigned to follow every single activity in the textbook rather than support and assist students who were poor at the lesson by repeating reading texts to them.

Two teachers who were teaching in Grade 5 complained that "the textbook is too deep for students to understand and learn..." (No. C09) and another teacher said "the textbook is good, but in this grade, it seems at a higher level compared to the level of my students, especially in reading texts which I can't teach any faster" (No. C10).

Another teacher who used to teach in Grade 5 but was currently teaching in Grade 6 also said, "for Grades 5 and 6, if students have experience in learning English before, they will have an easier time; but if students have not learnt English before, they will need help from the teacher." (No. C11).

Two teachers who were teaching in Grade 5 complained how "the text in the textbook is too long and the time for teaching is short, and I have to spend about 6 hours to finish one lesson" (No. C10) and "there are a lot of texts which are difficult to teach" (No. C12).

#### **4.3.3.2 The gradation and selection of the textbook**

In the textbooks, a sequence of topics in every lesson was the bridge linking one lesson to another. In this sense, prior knowledge was useful to activate new comprehensible input without which it was not easy to design appropriate linkages from one lesson to the next. Most teachers could do well in connecting one lesson to another by eliciting the link from the previous to the new lesson as was discovered during classroom observations.

One teacher who was teaching in Grade 6 opined that, "There is a connection from one lesson to another" (No. C02). Another teacher who was teaching in Grade 4 also confirmed this, saying that "the topics in the textbook move in gradation from one to another unit" (No. C04)

### **4.4 Assessment of English textbooks in a Cambodian context**

#### **4.4.1 Textbooks assessed by students**

Figure 1 shows that, among all student participants, there were 44 male students (36.7%) and 76 female students (63.3%) while female students are 76 (63.3%). Figure 2 indicates 20 students participated in Grade 4 (16.7%), 50 students in Grade 5 (41.7%); and 50 students in Grade 6 (41.7%). Figure 3 shows only 13 students (10.8%) did not study English in part-time class while 107 students (89.2%) studied. As shown in Figure 4, that 78 students (65%) really like English, 35 (29.2%) like English, 5 (4.2%) feel so so, and 2 (1.7%) do not like. On the other hand, Figure 5 gives an insight on the importance of English placed by students that 83 students (69.2%) strongly agree that English is important, 32 (26.7%) agree, 4 (3.3%) feel so so, and 1(0.8%) do not agree that English is important. With regard to the English language

skills set, Figure 6 shows that 54 students (45%) like reading skill, 25 (20.8%) like speaking, 25 (20.8%) like writing, and 16 (13.3%) like listening.

As responding to questions about the importance of teaching vocabulary and grammar and gave their further opinion on the textbooks. Figure 7 points out that 91 students (75.8%) thought that teaching vocabulary is very important, 32 (19.2%) thought it is somewhat important, and 5 (4.2 %) thought it is slightly important. Relatedly, the figure 7 showed that 92 students (76.7%) thought that teaching grammar is very important, 26 (21.7%) thought it is somewhat important, and 2 (1.7%) thought it is slightly important.

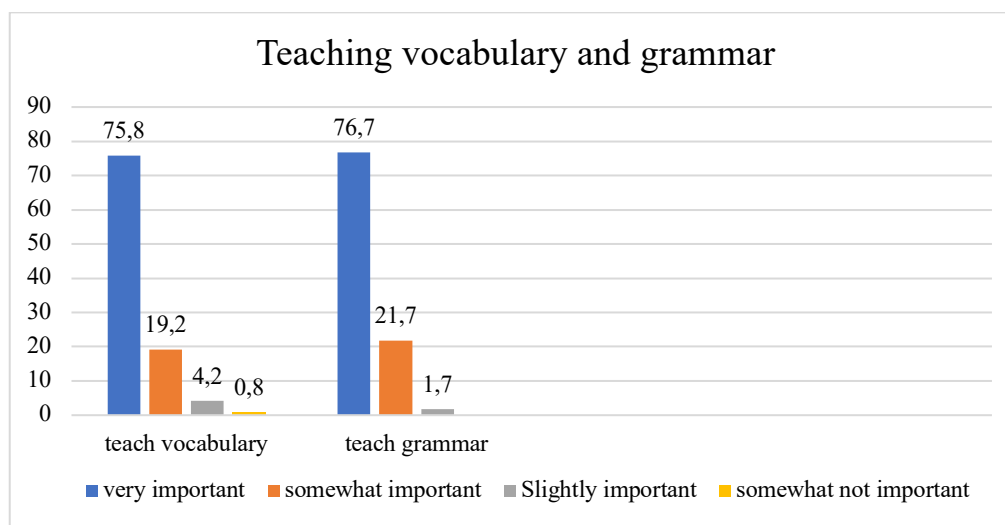


Figure 7. Importance of Teaching Vocabulary and Grammar

Figure 8 shows that 91 students (75.8%) strongly agree to liking the textbook, 18 (15%) agree to like the textbook, and 11 (9.2%) felt so so. This general preference is explained more in details given in Figure 9. On whether or not the textbook is interesting, 96 students (80%) strongly agreed, 19 (15.8%) agreed, 3 (2.5%) felt so so, and 2 (1.7%) disagreed. The figure also revealed that 98 students (81.7%) strongly agreed that the textbook is funny to study, 14 (11.7%) agreed, 6 (5%) felt so so, and 2 (1.7%) disagreed. As to whether or not the textbook related to real life, 64 students (53.3%) strongly agreed, 24 (20%) agreed, 24 (20%) agreed, and 8 (6.7%) disagreed. Finally, the survey showed that 2 students (1.7) strongly agreed that the textbook is easy to study, 99 (82.5%) agreed, 3 (2.5%) felt so so, 14 (11.7%) disagreed, and 2 (1.7%) strongly disagreed.

As can be seen from the results of the students' survey and textbook analysis above, the textbooks can fulfill the students' needs in terms of reading in macro skills and vocabulary in micro skills. In Figure 6, the value attached to reading skills was the highest (45%) among other skills, and when related to content analysis shown in Table 2, reading was rated 3.00, which indicated the high usefulness of the three textbooks. Meanwhile, Figure 7 revealed that a total of 95% students thought that teaching vocabulary is either somewhat important (19.2%) to very important (75.8%), while Table 2 in content analysis, vocabulary in the textbook was rated 3.00 for being highly useful. Moreover, the students' survey also made it clearer that 65%

of the students liked to study English and 75.8% liked the English textbooks. Through the classroom observation, it was ascertained how students felt passionate and excited to study the English subject, and probably, their background of private tutoring on this subject bears some relation. The data showed that 107 students (nearly 90%) have studied the English subject at private school. Finally, 95.83% of the students said that the textbooks were interesting, which is in sync with the rating for general attributes which found the books were well-designed to attract students' attention. The characters' names, activities, and situational themes were in a Cambodian context, which was convenient for the students who found the activities in the lesson more familiar.

In Figure 7, a remarkable 99.2% of students thought that teaching grammar is important. Unfortunately, the grammar received a score of 2.33 for moderate usefulness which echoed one teacher's negative comment who said "the grammar in the textbook of grade 6...and students don't like to study grammar..." (No. C11). From these results, it has become clear that the grammar item needs critical reconsideration for better contextualization and frequent repetition throughout the textbooks. For example, the grammar item on page 102 in Grade 6 textbook (see Appendix 4) could be simplified into the Cambodian context for ease of explanation to students who are 11 years old. In addition, 93.4 % of the students thought that the textbook was funny to study and 73.3% of the students believed that the textbooks were related to real life. However, the general content under learning-teaching content was scored 2.80 for only moderate usefulness.

#### 4.4.2 Textbooks and teachers

The textbooks were designed in a Cambodian context which motivated local teachers who appreciated the convenience and familiarity in using them. As to its physical appearance, it models a Khmer family, schools and students in order to attract teachers' and students' attention. In the textbook evaluation, the physical and utilitarian attributes was scored 3.33 for high usefulness. Some teachers have similar ideas related to the three textbooks and narrated that, "the textbooks have colorful pictures in the Cambodian context to hook teachers' and learners' attention" (No. C02, No. C07, and No. C08). Moreover, the activities under methodology in content analysis was scored 3.00 for high usefulness, which was parallel with one teacher's view, "The textbook is good with various activities which are easy for teacher to follow" (No. C06). From A-G activities for the English textbook Grade 4, from A-E activities for the textbook Grade 5, and from A-G activities for the textbook in Grade 6, the teachers could follow easily from one activity to another, making the lesson flow more smoothly.

Though the raters and teachers agreed that activities could be exploited more fully and work well in most classroom situations, most teachers could not afford to deal with all activities in one session as became obvious during the classroom observation. Most of them could teach only two or three activities per hour in one lesson instead of spending time on games or revising the lesson. One teacher who taught in Grade 5 mentioned that "I spend four to six hours for one lesson" (No. C10).

On the matter of listening skills, one teacher complained that, “For conversation, there is no audio for media which would have been useful instead of using the teacher’s voice for the listening part” (No.C1). Another teacher who taught in Grade 5 similarly said, “it is better if we have the audio sound” (No. C05) while yet another teacher who was teaching in Grade 6 added how “it will be great if most conversations can be provided with audio from media” (No.C11). This was reflected in the textbook analysis where the rating of 2.67 for moderate usefulness was given to note the ineffective layout of the supplementary material.

As confirmed from the classroom observation, the conversation, pronunciation, and listening parts were really necessary to confirm the English sounds. All teachers could have played some audio and pronounced the words correctly considering that the language competency between teachers was so different that they would pronounce one word differently. It is also worth noting how most teachers commented on the physical appearance and superficial characteristics of the textbooks when they should have said more about the methodology, techniques of teaching and learning, macro skills, or micro skills which were the major aspects to make the use of the textbook successful. Probably, they were not very aware of these matters or they did not care about the textbooks. In fact, one teacher who was teaching in Grade 6 gave a negative critique about “the grammar in the textbook of Grade 6... and students don’t like to study grammar...” (No. C11). Based on the classroom observations, only one teacher explained grammar to her students because of the notion that grammar was implicitly taught in these textbooks.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Problems about English textbooks

Textbooks are one of the most common resources in the classroom and are viewed differently depending on the aims of the curriculum. The learning outcome of the English textbooks for upper primary school is to meet the requirement of A1 CEFR in the Cambodian context. The result from textbook evaluation showed that the three English textbooks were moderate usefulness which conform with the result of a previous study by Mukundan (2013) who found that “primary level textbooks are of high usefulness while secondary level textbooks are of moderate usefulness” (p. 42). The results of the textbook evaluation in the current study are in the line with the secondary level. This feedback is valuable for analyzing the scope of improvement in these textbooks. According to Sultana, Khan, Ali, and Rehman (2007), textbook evaluation is extremely significant as well for decisions about choosing future textbooks.

Furthermore, the three textbooks were made in Cambodia to satisfy the users’ needs, and previous studies found that the textbooks written by local authors, normally attracted the most attention in terms of physical appearance. Chao (2009), for example, found that textbooks filled with colorful photos helped learners develop language and interaction skills. Some teachers also praised the textbooks for including colorful and local pictures related to the Cambodian family context. Ruan and Miekley (2005) and Abdulrahman (2008) also found that pictures and illustrations could help to promote learners’ understanding of the meaning of the text and

the topic. It is absolutely crucial to compile real and colorful pictures of humans and the environment that they could evoke new feeling among teachers and learners ( Fredrisson & Olsson, 2006; Nemati, 2009). Therefore, the result of this study seemed to be contrasted with Richards (2001) who states that textbooks may not suit learners' needs because they are often written for global market.

In addition, through the result of the textbook evaluation, the four macro skills except reading and micro skills except vocabulary were thought to have moderate usefulness because the local authors had a tendency to promote reading and vocabulary skills. To reach the A1 goal, students should have strong vocabulary of 5000 words. This can be achieved by providing several reading texts to students so that they can learn plenty of words. Vocabulary also helps students communicate in real life, which is the main objective of upper primary education. The result looked similar to a study conducted in Turkey which found that the textbooks had well-presented vocabulary for young learners (Kirkgoz, 2009). Certainly, one of the most exciting aspects of language development is vocabulary growth. Children enter school with the ability to understand and produce several thousand words, and more will be learned at school depending mainly on how much children read (Nagy, Herman, & Anderson 1985). Gardner (2004) also stated that reading a variety of texts is an important part of building vocabulary. Nation (1997), McCath (1998), and Meara (1995) had similar positive ideas, arguing that learning a large number of words at the beginning of the language learning process is extremely important for students. However, studies by Nation and Na showed that a vocabulary of about 3,000 words is needed to understand a simplified text for efficient learning from context (Nation, 1997, p. 11). However, Meara (1995) denied the importance of learning too much vocabulary, stressing that grammar rules should be mastered in language learning. Indeed, grammar in micro skills is an important part of language acquisition, but focusing too much on grammar at the basic English language stage can create obstacles in the language acquisition of young learners. As Copland, Galton, and Burns (2014) reported, teaching grammar is considered complicated among 145 counties in Asia.

Furthermore, the findings of this study highlight an issue among secondary schools in Cambodia. Sem's (2012) study assessment of English textbooks similarly found that textbooks were not equipped with a pack of CDs or cassettes for students to practice listening. However, reading is not the only macro skill, there are also listening, writing, and speaking skills. Listening is useful for articulation, pronunciation, and is a model for the controlled and free practice of speaking in basic English. Supporting materials are the key resources to help novice teachers and learners. The teachers interviewed in the current study also complained about the lack of audio aids in practicing listening skills and pronunciation.

Weddle cited Parrish (2004), stated that it was helpful for new teachers and learners to get relevant sources which could help them with different teaching and learning approaches. Masuhara and Tomlinson (2008) also stated that textbooks are normally accompanied by other materials such as workbooks, teachers' book or multimodal texts to make up a textbook package. However, there are several issues that local publishers could consider, such as the fact that many schools, especially those in rural areas, cannot afford audio aids, which results in the

unequal implementations of the textbooks in Cambodian schools. Another important issue is related to time constraints. A teaching session is only about 40 minutes, which puts too much pressure on teachers, who are forced to follow the textbook instead of selecting methods of their own choice in practice.

## 5.2 Problems with the implementation of English textbooks

Song (2015) mentioned that textbooks are really important for teachers and students to follow in the Cambodian context. It is really hard for English teacher to teach this subject without the textbook because some of them are in advanced age and English illiterate. Two teachers shared similar ideas, expressing their opinions that “the textbook is no problem and the problem is I don’t know English”. The result from this study is different from some previous studies. Perhaps the English proficiency of the teachers who participated in the previous studies were better, allowing them to seek for the sources or materials to teach in their classroom. For example, Srakang (2013) showed that some teachers believed that the textbooks were useless for classroom teaching because they thought that the supplementary material was useful in helping and guiding the students to achieve success in national exams. Those teachers used teaching materials instead of the textbooks, as the latter did not contain useful and appropriate content with respect to learning activities and structures, students’ interest, and time constraints (Aminuddin, 2009).

On the other hand, some teachers [in this study?] pointed out that level of students are different match with the level of language input in the textbooks. Moreover, having large classes was another possible problem in using textbooks. These findings are supported by Richards (2001), Ur (1998) and Sheldon (1998)’s views. They assert that textbooks cannot meet the varied needs of learners and language classes around the world. One of the reasons for this could be that primary teachers have multi subjects to focus on. Thus, elementary English teachers have low English competence and language teaching knowledge and skills. Therefore, textbooks are extremely useful for teachers since they cannot spend more on time looking for other materials to support for their teaching.

Indeed, the findings of the current study indicates that teachers with an English background have better teaching methods. Through the classroom observation, it can be said that “the younger teachers are better at teaching.” They had better preparation in terms of lesson plans, flashcards, posters, and teaching materials.

## 5.3 Conclusion

The study intended to evaluate the national English textbooks from Grades 4 to 6 and understand the implementation of these textbooks through students’ and teachers’ perceptions. The findings from textbook evaluation indicated that the three primary English textbooks were perceived to have only moderate usefulness since MoEYS chose the textbooks written by local authors not those from global market to fill the needs of learners and teachers in Cambodia. Even though the results of some parts of the textbooks seemed low, the textbooks were in general believed to fit the Cambodian situational context. To achieve the ultimate goal of



teaching English at primary school, which is A1 (CEFR), the local writers designed the textbooks by focusing on vocabulary and intensive reading skills. The study's results showed that students and teachers really appreciated the textbooks. The results from the teachers' perceptions and classroom observation about the English textbook was used indicated that most of the teachers could follow the textbook although they were not able to follow every single step of the teachers' book guidelines. Young and less experienced teachers tended to implement the textbooks in their classroom teaching better than those who had no English background.

#### 5.4 Limitations

This study was designed as a case study, with data collection spanning only over a period of eight weeks. Considering that English classes were conducted only on Thursdays, this presented an obstacle for the researcher to interview and conduct classroom observations with as many teacher participants as possible. With this limited data, this study is not generalizable to the implementation of the English textbooks in other schools across Cambodia.

#### 5.5 Implications

The results of this study are really important to inform MoEYS to properly plan and design the future English textbooks. These results also inform the PTTC and PTEC to evaluate the curriculum of the English training program for primary teacher education. Moreover, the English subject should be made compulsory for the national high school exam so that students can become industrial learners of English from the beginning until passing the entrance exam to be student teachers.

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## Appendixes

Table 2

### *Textbook evaluation in detail*

		Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
NA	<b>I. General attributes</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	A. <u>The book in relation to syllabus and curriculum</u>			
	1. It matches the specifications of the syllabus.			
	2. Overall, the book has a nice feel.	3.00	3.00	4.00
		3.00	3.00	3.00
NA	B. <u>Methodology</u>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. The activities can be exploited fully.	3.00	3.00	3.00
	4. The activities can work well in most classroom situations.	3.00	3.00	3.00
NA	C. <u>Suitability to learners</u>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. It is compatible with the background knowledge and level of students.	3.33	2.67	2.00
	6. It addresses learning targets.	3.33	3.00	3.00
NA	D. <u>Physical and utilitarian attributes</u>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. It is appropriately priced.	4.00	4.00	4.00
	8. Its layout is attractive.	3.00	3.00	3.00
	9. It indicates efficient use of text and visuals.	3.00	3.00	3.00
NA	E. <u>Efficient layout of supplementary materials</u>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	10. The book is supported by suitable materials like a workbook, audio, or multimedia.	1.00	1.00	1.00
		2.00	2.00	2.00
	11. The book is supported by other materials like review and test units.	3.00	3.00	3.00
	12. There is a useful teacher's guide to aid the teacher.			
NA	<b>II. Learning-teaching content</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	F. <u>General content</u>			
	13. Tasks move from simple to complex.	3.00	3.00	3.00
	14. Tasks are varied.	2.00	2.00	2.00
	15. Tasks support teaching objectives.	3.00	3.00	3.00
	16. The language in the textbook is natural and real.	3.00	3.00	3.00
	17. The material is fairly recent.	3.00	3.00	3.00
NA	G. <u>Listening</u>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	18. The book has appropriate listening tasks with well-defined goals.	2.00	2.00	2.00

	19. Tasks are authentic or close to real language situations.	2.00	2.00	2.00
	20. Various listening contexts such as formal vs. informal contexts are considered.	2.67	2.33	2.00
NA	H. <u>Speaking</u>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	21. Activities are developed to initiate meaningful communication.	3.00	3.00	3.00
	22. Individual, pair and group work are given equal emphasis.	2.00	2.00	2.00
NA	I. <u>Reading</u>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	23. Length is appropriate.	3.00	3.00	3.00
	24. Difficulty level is appropriate.	3.00	3.00	3.00
	25. Texts are interesting.	3.00	3.00	3.00
NA	J. <u>Writing</u>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	26. Tasks have achievable goals and take into consideration learner capabilities.	3.00	2.00	2.00
	27. Tasks are interesting.	2.00	2.00	2.00
NA	K. <u>Vocabulary</u>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	28. The load (number of new words in each lesson) is appropriate to the level of students.	3.00	3.00	3.00
	29. There is a good distribution (simple to complex) of vocabulary load across chapters and the whole book.	3.00	3.00	3.00
	30. New words are sufficiently repeated and recycled across the book.	3.00	3.00	3.00
	31. Words are contextualized.			
NA	L. <u>Grammar</u>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	32. Grammar is contextualized.	2.00	2.00	2.00
	33. Grammar items are repeated throughout the book.	2.67	2.67	2.67
NA	M. <u>Pronunciation</u>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	34. Tasks are useful.	2.00	2.00	2.00
	35. Tasks are interesting.	2.00	2.00	2.00

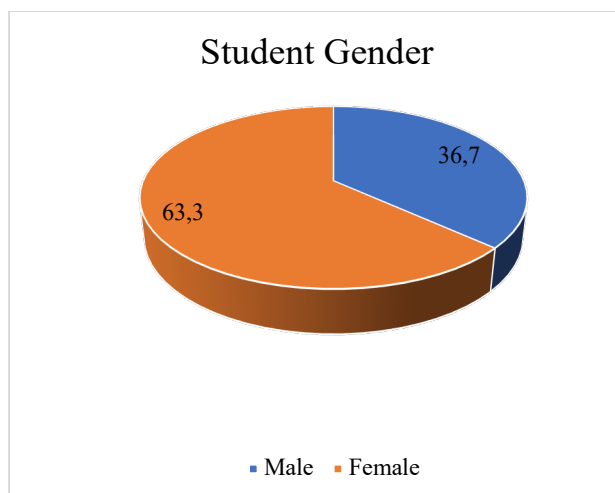


Figure 1. Participation by Gender

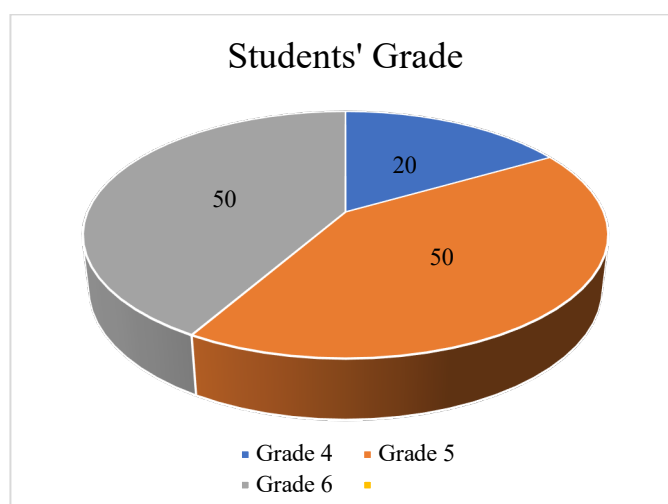


Figure 2. Participation by Grade Level

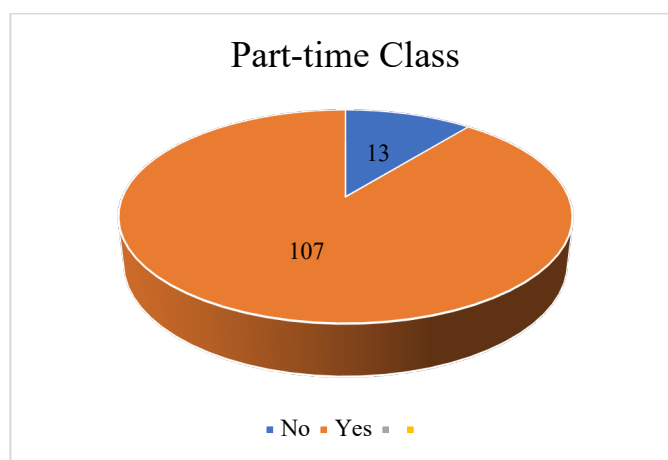


Figure 3. Attendance in Private School English Classes

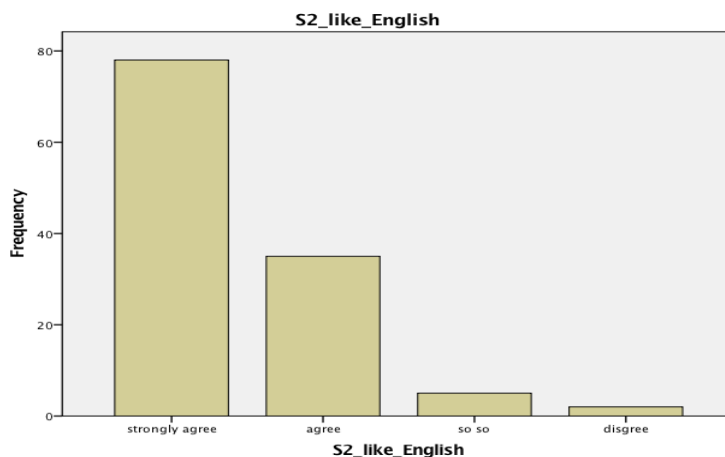


Figure 4. Students who Like English

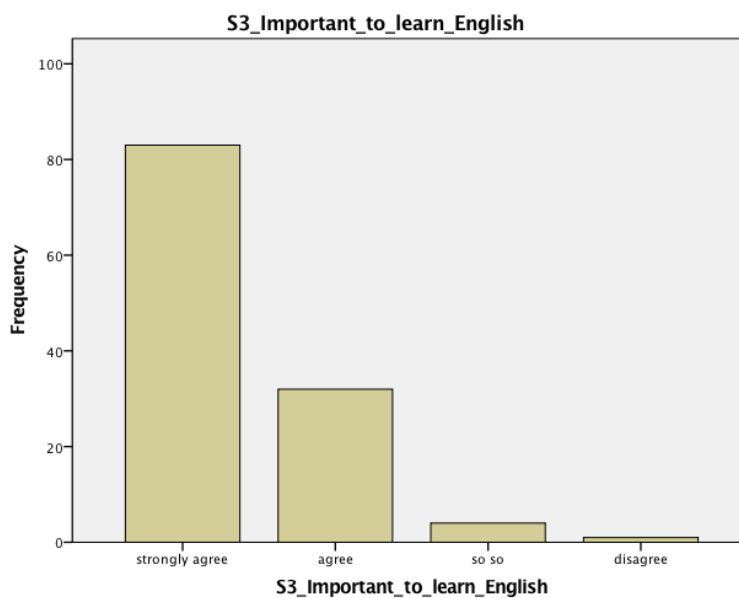


Figure 5. Number of Student who Value Learning English

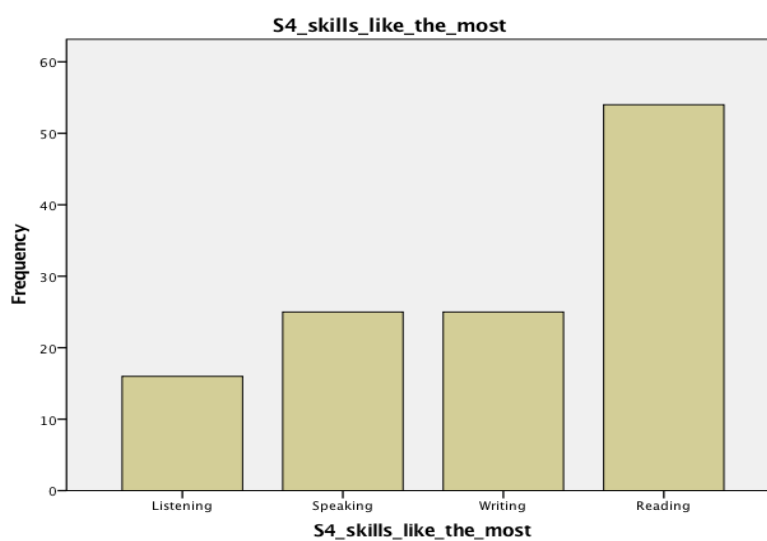


Figure 6. Skills that Students Like the Most

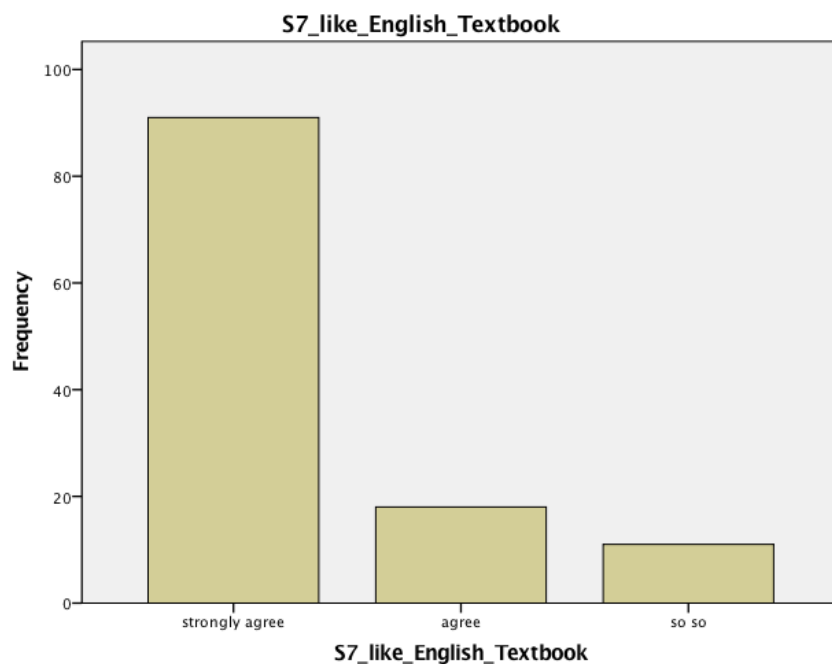


Figure 8. Students who Like English Textbook

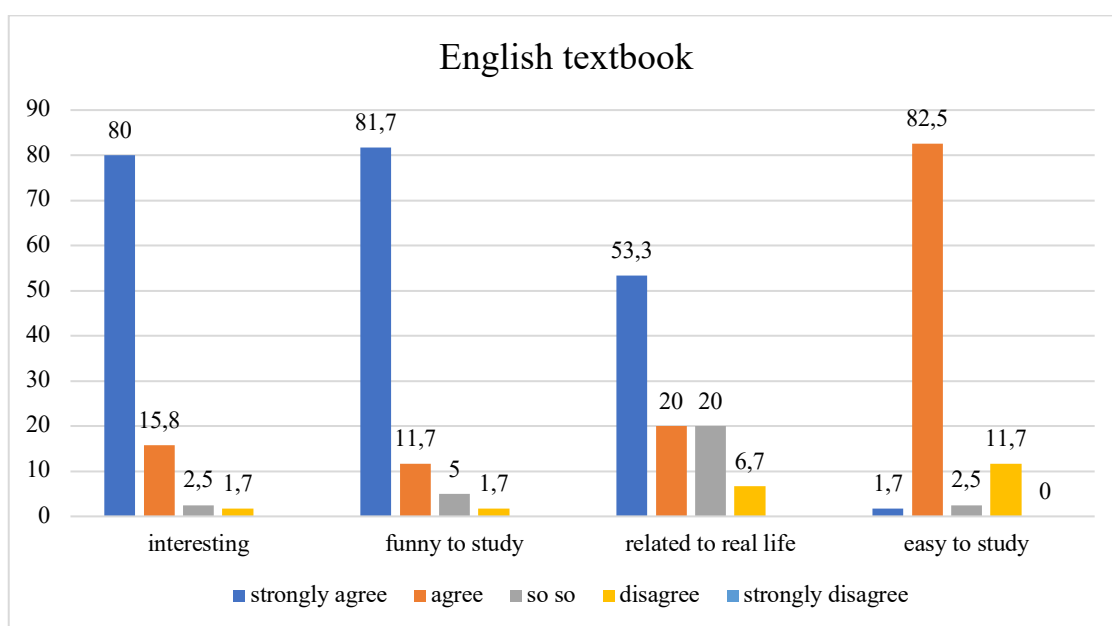


Figure 9. Impression on the Textbook