

Investigating High School Students' Attitudes Towards Friends Global Textbook


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ABSTRACT

Keywords: General Education English Curriculum 2018, textbook evaluation, attitudes, learners' needs, Friends Global textbook

Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training's nationwide English educational reforms have introduced a new English textbook series aimed at enhancing students' communicative competencies. Although extensive research has evaluated these English textbook series based on the General Education English Curriculum 2018, it has focused solely on educators' perspectives. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the high school students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes towards one of those series, the Friends Global textbook, regarding learners' needs. Utilizing a mixed-method design, the study combined questionnaire data from 226 grade-ten and grade-eleven students with insights from semi-structured interviews with eight participants. Findings reveal that students generally hold positive attitudes towards the textbook's reading skills, vocabulary, and grammar but display ambivalence towards speaking, listening, and writing skills and are opposed to phonology. These results offer valuable insights for the Ministry of Education and Training, textbook authors, and ELT educators, supporting future curriculum development, textbook evaluation, and instructional planning.

Introduction

English subject not only helps students develop their communicative competency in English, but also contributes to the formation and development of other abilities necessary for their work, lives, and lifelong learning. Therefore, the Vietnamese General Education English Curriculum (GEEC) must be designed properly in order to assist students in achieving the aforementioned goals. In 2018, a new version of the GEEC, updated from the old one in 2006, was imposed, yet not until 2020 was it officially launched nationwide. With the advent of the new curriculum, there have been many nationwide renovations in teaching English to achieve the aims set out by the curriculum, especially in Ho Chi Minh City. In addition to teacher retraining, teachers are equipped with teaching materials and resources to prepare their lessons and facilitate their students' learning process. More specifically, English language textbooks in Ho Chi Minh City

have undergone significant changes when the new textbook series mainly based on CLT consisting of different versions from various publishers, including the Friends Global textbook. This textbook has been chosen as the core teaching and learning materials in various educational institutions due to its structure and approach, which are designed in accordance with the GEEC 2018. Therefore, the researchers aim to investigate students' attitudes toward this material, specifically examining its alignment with students' perceived needs.

In the realm of textbook evaluation, many studies have been conducted on EFL textbooks in Vietnam. These studies have delved into various facets such as language and culture (Dang & Seals, 2016), intercultural communication (T. T. M. Nguyen et al., 2020), communicative competencies and intercultural communication (T. H. Bui, 2022), pragmatic content (Ton Nu & Murray, 2020), gender bias (M. T. Vu & Pham, 2021), design, structure and quality (Hoang, 2016), or a specific skill (Phan et al., 2020). However, these evaluations predominantly reflect educators' perspectives while largely neglecting students' viewpoints on these English textbook series. To address this gap, further research is needed to explore high school students' attitudes toward Friends Global textbooks in terms of learners' needs at high schools, especially in the context of Vietnam. This gap justifies the significance of the current research.

The result of this study could be helpful for Vietnamese educators by granting them more profound insights into their students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes toward the Friends Global textbook. Understanding could guide high school teachers in adapting their instructional planning to foster students' interest and classroom engagement and in providing supplemental materials to promote learner autonomy and self-study. Those insights could also enable school administrators to choose suitable textbook sets for their high schools, especially given the variety of textbook sets available in Vietnam. Additionally, the data from this study can be a useful source of reference for the textbook authors and the Ministry of Education and Training if there are any plans for modifications of the GEEC in the future. Furthermore, it might suggest a broader hypothesis for further research into the attitudes of students towards the Friends Global textbook in terms of learners' needs in different contexts.

Literature review

Attitudes

Attitude is defined as a response or psychological tendency to evaluate an antecedent stimulus or attitude object with favor or disfavor (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Anvik et al., 2007; Breckler, 1984). According to Melissa and John (2007), attitude objects have typically included physical, concrete objects (like apples or garbage), individuals or groups (such as Michael Jordan or Blacks), abstract ideals and values (such as equality or freedom), and various matters and policies (like abortion or voting rights). Within the context of this study, the stimulus or attitude object is the Friends Global textbook.

Attitude has three major components: affective component (the way we feel), cognitive component (the way we think), and behavioral component (the way we act) towards stimuli or a particular entity (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Breckler, 1984).

Cognition has to do with the role of cognition in a person's attitude towards stimuli, including beliefs, knowledge structures, perceptual responses, and thoughts (Breckler, 1984; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In this case, attitudes towards Friends Global textbook are based on high school students' beliefs about "textbook," and those beliefs - cognitive component - may vary from favorable to unfavorable (e.g., supporting versus derogating arguments) (Allport, 1935).

Affect refers to an emotional response, a gut reaction, or sympathetic nervous activity that are caused by stimuli (Breckler, 1984). Based on Breckler's perspective, one can measure it by monitoring physiological responses (e.g., heart rate, galvanic skin response) or by collecting verbal reports of feelings or mood. Within the context of this study, affect can vary from pleasurable feelings (feeling good, happy) to unpleasurable feelings (feeling bad, unhappy).

Behavior includes overt actions, behavioral intentions, and verbal statements regarding behavior with respect to stimuli (Breckler, 1984). Furthermore, behavior is a manifestation of underlying cognitive and affective components (Anvik et al., 2007). In this study, attitudes towards Friends Global textbooks are based on high school students' emotions and beliefs about "textbooks," and those emotions and beliefs can have an impact on their behavior. More specifically, students' behavior with respect to the Friends Global textbook would be reflected by their classroom engagement and self-study.

Textbook evaluation

According to Littlejohn (2022), textbook evaluation is the process of examining and making a judgment on the suitability of a set of textbooks for a particular context and a specific teaching and learning purpose, which necessarily implies a view of how the textbooks should be. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) also stated that textbook evaluation is a straightforward, analytical matching process involving matching learners' needs to available solutions.

From the perspective of McGrath (2002), materials evaluation, which needs to be learner-related and context-related, is of paramount significance, which aligns with the perspective of Cunningsworth (1979). According to the framework of McGrath (2002), materials evaluation encompasses the micro-evaluation (internal) and the macro-evaluation (external). Learner factors, learners' needs, teacher factors, institutions, and the specific program are five essential existing factors in the micro-evaluation (internal). Meanwhile, macro-evaluation (external) includes the larger educational system or the overall socio-political system.

Learners' needs

As discussed by McDonough et al. (2013) and Nation and Macalister (2010), learners' needs encompass various elements that should be analyzed to design a syllabus, decide on course content, and develop effective language instruction programs. Building on this foundation, drawing on McGrath's (2002) synthesis and analysis of research by Bruder (1978), Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979), and Harmer (1991), the evaluation of learners' needs should encompass a comprehensive set of ten criteria. The first prevalent criterion forming any foreign language textbook's basis is "language-skill emphasis". According to Dakowska (2014), this encompasses the four essential skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, the foundation of language competency, and speakers' effective engagement in unpredictable and changing language environments. Within those primary skills are "sub-skills," which provide a more

detailed focus on skill acquisition. In addition, "language-system emphasis" or language materials emphasis also plays a part in choosing an English textbook. This aspect refers to the focus on the underlying systems of the language being taught, namely grammar (the rules of language structure), vocabulary (the words and phrases of the language), and phonology (the sounds of the language).

Closely related to language materials is "language forms," a criterion listed in the literature as a tangible organization and presentation of language elements. These include structural patterns (grammar), specific words and phrases (vocabulary), and phonetic features such as stress and intonation, which constitute language's surface features. However, language itself is not always consistent across various geographical areas. For this reason, "dialect" should be considered when designing textbooks. "Dialect" covers aspects of pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax that are slightly different from the standard variety, encompassing variations found in regional contexts such as British, American, or Australian English (D. H. Bui & Truong, 2021). Such differences are often emphasized differently in textbooks to develop learners' English language proficiency. Moreover, there is also a diversity of "contexts and registers", stemming from various situations and environments where language is used, including text types such as dialogues, essays, and letters, and texts with different levels of formality. Other criteria center around the practical use of language and the ideas it expresses. They include "language usage," "functions," and "notions." The last criterion is referred to as "mechanics", focusing on technical aspects of written language to ensure that texts are coherent and readable. Collectively, these criteria provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing learners' needs, facilitating targeted and effective textbook evaluation.

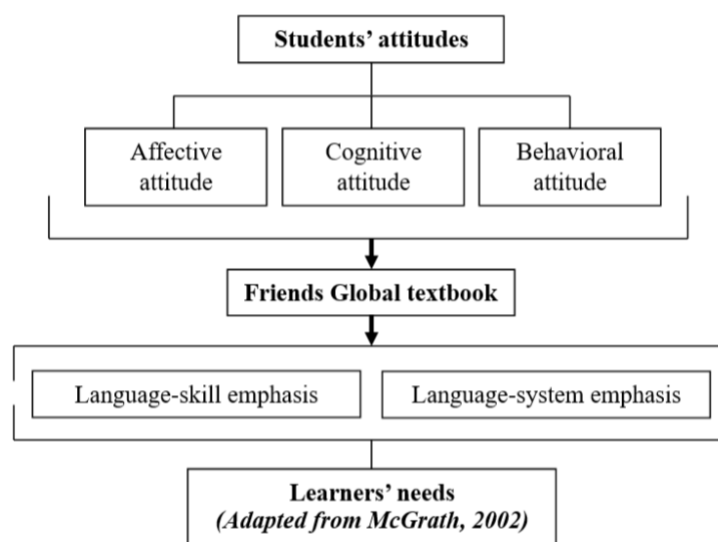
On the other hand, according to the GEEC 2018, high school students need to reach certain targets related to qualities and competencies, which are further divided into general competencies and specialized competencies. In terms of qualities and general competencies, learners graduating from high school will have developed patriotism, compassion, industry, honesty, and responsibility, as well as autonomy, self-learning, communication and cooperation, problem-solving, and creativity. With regard to specialized competencies, students need to achieve Level 3 of the six-level Foreign Language Competency Framework for Vietnam before graduation. Specifically, they must understand the gist of a paragraph or speech on a familiar topic, write a simple paragraph on a personal topic, or solve problems in situations where English is spoken. Furthermore, phonology, vocabulary, and grammar knowledge is also required so that students can communicate in English effectively through four skills.

To explore students' attitudes (affective, cognitive, and behavioral) towards the Friends Global textbook at a high school in Ho Chi Minh City, the conceptual framework of this study was developed and adapted from the theoretical framework of McGrath (2002) and the content of the GEEC 2018. The framework focuses on two main criteria: language-skill emphasis and language-system emphasis. These elements were chosen because the GEEC 2018 prioritizes Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which incorporates both language skills and systems. Other elements in McGrath's framework were omitted as they are not central to the Friends Global textbook or the GEEC 2018's emphasis and objectives. Thus, the selection of language-skill emphasis and language-system emphasis aligns well with the GEEC 2018's

orientation and objectives. To demonstrate this, a conceptual framework was created as follows:

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of Students' Attitudes towards Friends Global Textbook in Terms of Learners' Needs



Previous studies

There have been numerous studies on textbook evaluation in Vietnam that have examined various aspects of EFL textbooks. In the research implemented by T. T. M. Nguyen et al. (2020), by adopting Hu and McKay's (2014) analytic scheme in the textbook analysis, it was found that although communication in the twenty-first century involves a broad spectrum of speakers from vastly diverse backgrounds, the new textbook series in the GEEC 2018 tended to focus mainly on preparing students to use English for communication with non-Asian English users, particularly those from the West.

T. H. Bui (2022) evaluated the effectiveness of two grade-12 Pearson textbooks in achieving the goals of the Vietnam National Foreign Language Project (Project 2020). Using Cunningsworth's (1995) evaluation checklist, the study primarily focused on two objectives of the Project that the textbooks were designed to address: communicative competencies and intercultural communication. The findings indicated that the textbooks failed to achieve their intended goals regarding communicative competences fully.

In another study, Ton Nu and Murray (2020) employed content analysis to examine the provision of pragmatic content in the current national EFL textbook series. The findings revealed that this series included a very limited amount of explicit information about pragmatics. Furthermore, the explicit presentation of various elements that could facilitate the learning of pragmatics was found to be quite infrequent.

Moreover, Hoang (2016) conducted a study on renovation in curriculum design and textbooks development, focusing on the ten-year textbook series with three piloted books. The results showed that teachers evaluated these textbooks as having good quality, a clear structure, an

appealing layout, being user-friendly for both teachers and students, and meeting regional and international standards.

Also, Phan et al. (2020) conducted a study evaluating the piloted English 10 textbook (Pearson), specifically its listening tasks. The research utilized questionnaires, classroom observations, and interviews involving 50 teachers and eight high school EFL teachers. The findings showed that teachers rated the listening exercises as above average, with the goals receiving the highest rating for their clear focus on communication. However, insufficient input, such as vocabulary and structures, highlighted the need for improvements to better support learners.

From the above-mentioned previous studies, it is patently obvious that the evaluation of the textbook series just concentrated on the educators' opinions and did not exploit the high school students' perspectives. Although much work has been done to date, few studies have been conducted to investigate students' attitudes toward an English textbook at a high school, especially in terms of learners' needs in the context of Vietnam. This, therefore, serves as an adequate rationale for the existence of this paper, offering more comprehensive insights into high school students' attitudes towards an English textbook regarding learners' needs.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the cognitive attitudes of students at Gia Dinh High School towards the Friends Global textbook in terms of learners' needs?
2. What are the affective attitudes of students at Gia Dinh High School towards the Friends Global textbook in terms of learners' needs?
3. What are the behavioral attitudes of students at Gia Dinh High School towards the Friends Global textbook in terms of learners' needs?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The study was conducted at Gia Dinh High School, one of the most prestigious high schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. With high entrance examination scores, the students at this high school are academically capable, well-educated, and exhibit a wide range of English proficiency levels, ranging from A1 to C1. The participants in the study were selected using a convenience sampling method, a cost-effective and accessible approach where students from the researcher's educational institution served as the primary participants (Dörnyei, 2007; Saunders et al., 2019). Specifically, the study involved 226 students from three grade ten classes and three grade eleven classes, representing the total sample size of this research. According to Brannen (2017), quantitative research can serve as a basis for sampling cases and comparison groups for detailed analysis. Therefore, from the 226-student cohort, eight individuals were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. These participants were chosen based on their academic performances and categorized as good or average. Furthermore, considerable attention was paid to key sample characteristics such as gender, grade, years of English study, and daily hours of

English learning to ensure diversity. This approach aligns with Milroy and Gordon's (2003) assertion that the strength of data collected from a small cohort depends on how well the group represents the broader population. It is clear that the participants in this study, with their diverse English proficiency levels, academic capabilities, learning attitudes, and experiences with Friends Global textbook - the main coursebook of their school - are instrumental in exploring the cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes of grade 10 and 11 students at Gia Dinh High School towards Friends Global textbook in terms of learners' needs. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the participants completing the questionnaire, encompassing variables such as gender, grade, duration of English language study, and daily English learning hours. Meanwhile, table 1 demonstrates the demographic profile of the participants taking part in the semi-structured interview section, encompassing variables such as gender, age, grade, academic performance, duration of English language study, and daily English learning hours.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Survey Participants

Background Information		N = 226		
		F	%	
Gender	Male	67	29.6	population; F:
	Female	159	70.4	
Class	10L	35	15.5	
	10TN4	43	19.0	
	10TN5	36	15.9	
	11CV	36	15.9	
	11XH1	41	18.1	
	11TN2	35	15.5	
Years of learning English	Less than 1 year	6	2.7	
	1-3 years	6	2.7	
	5-7 years	50	22.1	
	More than 7 years	164	72.6	
Daily hours for learning English	Less than 1 hour	97	42.9	
	1-3 hours	116	51.3	
	3-5 hours	7	3.1	
	More than 5 hours	6	2.7	
Frequency; %: Percent				

Regarding semi-structured interviews, eight students were selected from the 226-student group who had completed the questionnaire and were labeled from S1 to S8. The sample included an equal number of students from grades 10 and 11, and a balanced gender distribution with four males and four females. Academic performance was evenly split, with four students (two from each grade) classified as having good performance and four as having average performance, based on first-semester results. All participants had studied English for more than seven years. Most students (six) reported studying English for 1–3 hours daily, while only two studied for less than one hour per day.

Design of the Study

To answer the above-mentioned research questions, which delve into the cognitive, affective, and behavioural attitudes of students from grades 10 and 11 in Gia Dinh High School towards

the Friends Global textbook in terms of learners' needs, this study was carried out using a mixed methods design. In fact, the qualitative researcher is often said to observe through a wide lens, aiming to identify connections and patterns among a previously unspecified set of concepts, whereas the quantitative researcher witnesses via a narrow lens on a predetermined set of variables (Brannen, 2017). Due to this, it is not enough to merely analyze qualitative or quantitative data, and data tend to exhibit "greater validity" when they result from the utilization of multiple instruments. Hence, integrating the two databases helps gain deeper insight into the research problems and questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Likewise, Pardede (2018) also contended that mixed methods allow researchers to explore both the "what" questions, encompassing quantitative and qualitative facets, and the "how" or "why" predominantly qualitative questions. Consequently, this approach offered researchers insights into varying perspectives concerning a specific phenomenon. For those reasons, the researchers conducted a mixed-methods research, combining a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

Data collection & analysis

Google Form links were sent to 226 students at Gia Dinh High School through the Zalo platform to answer three research questions. Each student spent five to ten minutes reading the instructions and completing the questionnaire for quantitative data. After that, eight students in the 226-student group above, including three grade-ten students and three grade-eleven students, were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews individually for qualitative data. This seems to be because circumstances where qualitative fieldwork is conducted after quantitative work involve seeking further clarification of a confusing result that quantitative data alone cannot elucidate, and the need to delve deeper into small but notable subgroups that emerge from the initial data (Brannen, 2017).

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted with the assistance of 84 students at Gia Dinh High School, after which the results were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha measurement. The total reliability score was 0.944 ($\alpha = 0.944$), which was also evident across cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes, with scores of 0.836, 0.841, and 0.877, respectively. These scores indicated a very high level of internal consistency among the test items, as Deniz and Alsaffar (2013) stated that a questionnaire is deemed sufficiently reliable if the alpha value (α) in the reliability statistics is 0.7 or above.

Table 2

Reliability Statistics

No.	Attitudes	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Cognitive attitudes	7	0.836
2	Affective attitudes	7	0.841
3	Behavioral attitudes	7	0.877
Total		21	0.944

Concerning quantitative data analysis, the data collected via questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS 20, a software that Saunders et al. (2019) describe as suitable for "advanced data management and statistical analysis" (p. 556). This software was employed to produce statistics on frequency, mean, and standard deviation. To further enhance the validity of the study, the

researchers adopted a new interpretation scheme for the 4-point Likert Scale to interpret the mean scores of Gia Dinh high school students' attitudes towards the Friends Global textbook. This scheme, which utilized the integers' natural boundaries as scale anchors, has demonstrated over 90% efficiency in accurately assessing respondents' underlying abilities and effectively avoids the bias inherent in conventional interpretation methods. The interpretation scheme is as follows:

1.00 - 1.49: Very negative

1.50 - 2.49: Negative

2.50 - 3.49: Positive

3.50 - 4.00: Very positive

In terms of qualitative data analysis, once all 8 recordings were collected, the authors personally transcribed them, adhering to Dörnyei's (2007) assertion that the transcription process markedly aids in data comprehension. The transcripts were thereafter manually coded from Vietnamese to English to facilitate detailed analysis. Dörnyei also describes coding as marking parts of the transcribed data with labels for easy identification, retrieval, and grouping.

Results/Findings

Research Question 1: High school students' cognitive attitudes towards Friends Global textbook in terms of learners' needs.

Table 3

High School Students' Cognitive Attitudes toward the Friends Global Textbook in Terms of Language-Skill Emphasis

No.	Statements	N = 226	
		Mean	Std. Deviation
1.1	I think the textbook helps me understand texts' detailed content on current and familiar topics.	2.74	0.775
1.2	I think the textbook helps me listen and understand main ideas of current events, broadcasts, interviews on familiar topics.	2.66	0.785
1.3	I think the textbook provides writing activities with full instructions like model essays, outlines, and guiding questions.	2.64	0.789
1.4	I think the textbook provides lots of vocabulary, structures, model speeches, and a "speaking strategies" section.	2.64	0.843
Total		2.67	0.798

In general, high school students' cognitive attitudes towards Friends Global textbook's language-skill emphasis were favorable (Table 3), evidenced by the total mean score indicating a generally positive outlook ($M = 2.67$), and a standard deviation reflecting moderate response variability ($SD = 0.798$). In terms of speaking skills, there was total agreement on the Friends Global textbook's provision of lots of vocabulary, structures, model speeches, and a "speaking

strategies" section (item 1.4: $M = 2.64$; $SD = 0.843$). The same picture was evident in the textbook's reading skills; students adopted positive cognitive attitudes towards its strength to improve students' reading for details on familiar topics (item 1.1: $M = 2.74$; $SD = 0.775$). Similarly, most learners also concurred that "the textbook [helped them] listen and understand main ideas of current events, broadcasts, interviews on familiar topics" (item 1.2: $M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.785$), and "the textbook [provided] writing activities with full instructions like model essays, outlines, and guiding questions" (item 1.3: $M = 2.64$; $SD = 0.789$).

Qualitative data supported these findings, with students praising the textbook's appropriately challenging reading and realistic topics and the moderate speed and natural conversations in the listening exercises. The productive skills were also well-received, with students appreciating the clear guidelines, strategies, and additional vocabulary for speaking and writing. The findings are detailed as follows:

"The reading section isn't too difficult and helps develop reading for details. The topics are realistic, making it easy to engage. The speaking section offers varied topics, vocabulary, structures, and detailed guidance on speaking strategies." (S2)

"The listening exercises feature natural conversations at a moderate speed, making them easy to understand." (S3)

"The writing section provides clear guidelines, outlines, and structures, making it understandable." (S5)

However, the qualitative evidence also suggested that the Friends Global textbook provided a few instructions on writing essays, suggesting a need for more instructional support and practice.

Table 4

High School Students' Cognitive Attitudes toward the Friends Global Textbook in Terms of Language-System Emphasis

No.	Statements	N = 226	
		Mean	Std. Deviation
2.1	I think the textbook's repeating new vocabulary in subsequent lessons help me remember them longer.	2.85	0.826
2.2	I think the textbook provides enough material for pronunciation practice (vowels, consonants, word stress, sentence stress, and intonation).	2.47	0.828
2.3	I think the examples in the textbook help me understand grammar's practical usage.	2.88	0.773
Total		2.73	0.829

Generally, as can be seen in the Table 4, high school students had positive cognitive attitudes toward the Friends Global textbook's language-system emphasis, with moderate diversity among responses ($M = 2.73$; $SD = 0.829$). The highest mean score belonged to item 2.3 ($M = 2.88$; $SD = 0.773$), "[they thought] the examples in the textbook [helped them] understand grammar's practical usage". This was followed by item 2.1 ($M = 2.85$; $SD = 0.826$), "[they thought] the textbook's repeating new vocabulary in subsequent lessons [helped them]

remember them longer”. In contrast to the textbook’s vocabulary and grammar, most of them objected to phonology, with item 2.2 ($M = 2.47$; $SD = 0.828$), “[they thought] the textbook provided enough material for pronunciation practice”.

The interview responses were consistent with the numerical findings, with interviewees showing positive cognitive attitudes toward the textbook's vocabulary and grammar. More precisely, they celebrated the repetition of new vocabulary for retention and the clarification of grammar’s practical use through examples. The opposite was true for phonology; they had not been exposed to phonology-related guidelines, activities, and exercises.

“I find it helpful that new vocabulary is repeated in subsequent lessons because frequent review is necessary to remember and use it.” (S2)

“As for phonology, I find that the textbook almost lacks any instruction on pronunciation or distinguishing different sounds, as well as phonology-related activities.” (S6)

“The textbook visually provides grammar examples and explains them directly, which helps us understand how to use them correctly.” (S8)

Research Question 2: High school students’ affective attitudes towards Friends Global textbook in terms of learners’ needs.

Table 5

High School Students’ Affective Attitudes toward the Friends Global Textbook in Terms of Language-Skill Emphasis

No.	Statements	N = 226	
		Mean	Std. Deviation
3.1	I find the vocabulary and structures extracted from the textbook's reading passages very applicable to English communication.	2.72	0.782
3.2	I feel the textbook has current and familiar listening topics suitable for my interests.	2.48	0.834
3.3	I find practicing writing common administrative forms like CVs, job applications very useful.	2.62	0.868
3.4	I feel the textbook has current and familiar speaking topics suitable for my interests.	2.61	0.848
Total		2.61	0.837

By and large, Table 5 indicates that the total mean score of 2.61 characterized a generally affirmative outlook on the Friends Global textbook's language-skill emphasis, with a standard deviation of 0.837 showing moderate differences in responses. Item 3.1 ranked highest ($M = 2.72$; $SD = 0.782$), where students found the vocabulary and structures from the reading passages very applicable to English communication. Many students also agreed on the speaking topics’ currency, familiarity, and suitability (item 3.4: $M = 2.61$; $SD = 0.848$), and the usefulness of practice in writing administrative forms (item 3.3: $M = 2.62$; $SD = 0.868$). Conversely, item 3.2 ($M = 2.48$; $SD = 0.834$) revealed that students found the listening topics less familiar, current, or engaging for their interests.

Consistent with the numerical data, qualitative data illustrated that many students praised the textbook's reading, writing, and speaking skills for their practical and engaging content. However, they found the listening topics monotonous, suggesting the inclusion of more stimulating subjects such as social media, video games, and aspects of young people's school life to enhance learners' motivation and interest. The interviewees' responses include:

"I can apply words from reading and listening sections to my speaking or writing." (S1)

"The listening topics aren't very interesting, so the textbook should include topics like social media, video games, school life or young people's lives" (S2)

"Writing common administrative forms is useful for work and life. Apart from this, I find the speaking topics quite varied and engaging." (S6)

Despite the above-mentioned similarity to quantitative data, several students mentioned that listening to topics like sports and music could increase classroom engagement, suggesting that promoting these familiar topics could be advantageous.

Table 6

High School Students' Affective Attitudes towards Friends Global Textbook in Terms of Language-System Emphasis

No.	Statements	N = 226	
		Mean	Std. Deviation
4.1	I find the textbook's vocabulary exercises very useful in my memorization and language usage.	2.85	0.789
4.2	I find the textbook's pronunciation practice activities very useful and interesting.	2.42	0.841
4.3	I find the textbook's grammar explanations understandable.	2.85	0.759
Total		2.71	0.821

Overall, Table 6 reveals that high school students' affective attitudes on the Friends Global textbook's language-system emphasis were mostly positive, with a total mean score of 2.71 and a standard deviation of 0.821, underscoring moderate variance in responses. Securing the first rank was the usefulness of this textbook's vocabulary exercises in memorization and language usage (item 4.1: $M = 2.85$; $SD = 0.789$) and the comprehensibility of its grammar explanations (item 4.3: $M = 2.85$; $SD = 0.759$). The opposite picture was evident in item 4.2 ($M = 2.42$; $SD = 0.841$); students found the pronunciation practice activities less useful and interesting.

Qualitative evidence aligned with these findings, as students praised the vocabulary exercises for aiding memorization and language usage, along with grammar explanations for the use of simple English and the direct analysis within examples. However, they noted that the textbook did not provide many exercises and explanations on phonology, which they found in the Friends Global Workbook instead. The particulars are listed as follows:

"The textbook's vocabulary exercises also help me remember words longer and apply them across the four skills." (S3)

"The grammar explanations and examples are easy to understand because the

vocabulary is simpler, helping me visualize how grammar is used.” (S8)

“I’ve noticed that there are not many exercises or explanations on phonology in the Student’s Book; I practice phonology in the Workbook.” (S7)

Conversely, a handful of learners, especially those with good academic performance, found the vocabulary exercises too easy, simple, and limited in number, suggesting a supplementary workbook for more advanced practice. In addition, some students also found the academic terms used in grammar explanations confusing.

Research Question 3: High school students’ behavioral attitudes towards Friends Global textbook in terms of learners’ needs.

Table 7

High School Students’ Behavioral Attitudes toward the Friends Global Textbook in Terms of Language-Skill Emphasis

No.	Statements	N = 226	
		Mean	Std. Deviation
5.1	The textbook’s reading passages and associated activities increase my classroom engagement.	2.62	0.841
5.2	I will continue to use the textbook as a resource for practicing my listening skills.	2.36	0.933
5.3	Thanks to the textbook, I can write common administrative forms like CVs, leave applications on my own.	2.39	0.884
5.4	Thanks to the textbook, I can confidently communicate in English with others on familiar topics.	2.43	0.893
Total		2.45	0.893

Overall, Table 7 shows that the total mean score of 2.45 reflected negative behavioral attitudes towards Friends Global textbook’s language-skill emphasis, and the standard deviation of 0.893 demonstrated moderate diversity among learners’ responses. More specifically, students held negative behavioral attitudes towards listening (item 5.2: $M = 2.36$; $SD = 0.933$), speaking (item 5.4: $M = 2.43$; $SD = 0.893$), and writing skills (item 5.3: $M = 2.39$; $SD = 0.884$). The opposite was evident in students’ behavioral attitudes on the Friends Global textbook’s reading skills; most of them agreed upon item 5.1 ($M = 2.62$; $SD = 0.841$), especially regarding classroom engagement through reading passages and associated activities.

Qualitative evidence confirmed the quantitative statistics above. Students found the listening tasks too easy, which discouraged them from using the textbook for self-study. Regarding speaking skills, students felt uncertain whether the activities improved their confidence, attributing this to a lack of challenging questions, washback effects, and limited class time. They suggested adding more debate topics to address these issues for better speaking practice. Regarding writing skills, students expressed difficulty writing administrative forms independently, citing inadequate writing instructions, washback effects, and teachers’ underutilization of writing tasks in class. However, most students showed positive attitudes towards reading skills, particularly appreciating the engagement provided by reading passages and identifying information exercises. Selected student comments include:

“The textbook’s reading exercises with True/False tasks make the lessons more engaging, allowing me to express my opinions and choose answers.” (S4)

“The textbook’s listening exercises are too easy, not significantly improving my listening skills. Therefore, I don’t use the textbook to practice listening. Moreover, the textbook doesn’t focus much on writing administrative forms. Also, teachers don’t fully exploit these parts because they aren’t included in the midterm and final tests.” (S5)

“The textbook’s speaking section isn’t useless, but teachers focus more on grammar; vocabulary, writing, and reading due to limited class time. The speaking section only includes a few questions and lacks depth. More challenging questions and debate topics would engage me more, but the textbook lacks these.” (S7)

Despite these critiques, a few students still used the textbook’s listening exercises for self-study, finding them suitable for their levels with informative and motivating topics. Additionally, several interviewees reported that the textbook’s speaking activities increased their confidence by allowing them to apply newly learned grammar and vocabulary in their conversations.

Table 8

High School Students’ Behavioral Attitudes towards Friends Global Textbook in Terms of Language-System Emphasis

No.	Statements	N = 226	
		Mean	Std. Deviation
6.1	I often apply the textbook’s vocabulary in communication with my surroundings.	2.58	0.862
6.2	With the textbook’s guidance, I spend more time self-studying pronunciation (vowels, consonants, word stress, sentence stress, and intonation).	2.42	0.887
6.3	I often apply the textbook’s grammar in communication with my surroundings.	2.61	0.827
Total		2.54	0.862

Generally, high school students adopted fairly positive behavioral attitudes toward the Friends Global textbook’s language-system emphasis (Table 8), with moderate response variation ($M = 2.54$; $SD = 0.862$). In detail, the high mean scores of item 6.3 ($M = 2.61$; $SD = 0.827$), and item 6.1 ($M = 2.58$; $SD = 0.862$) indicated that students often applied the textbook’s grammar and vocabulary in communication with their surroundings. However, similar to their cognitive and affective attitudes towards the textbook’s phonology, students continued expressing their objections to item 6.2 ($M = 2.42$; $SD = 0.887$), “[they spent] more time self-studying pronunciation (vowels, consonants, word stress, sentence stress, and intonation) with the textbook’s guidance.” This proved that there is insufficient guidance on pronunciation, leading students to spare little or no time for self-studying pronunciation.

In accordance with the quantitative results, the qualitative evidence further indicated that students expressed their agreement over the applicability of vocabulary and grammar but criticized the shortage of detailed instructions on phonology, which discouraged self-study.

“I find the vocabulary and grammar in this textbook very useful, especially when I can

apply the vocabulary and grammar in communicating with people around me.” (S2)

“The phonology section in the textbook lacks detailed tips and guidance, so I rarely self-study it at home, which negatively affects my performance in that part of the test.” (S8)

Nevertheless, the qualitative data disclosed that some students hardly ever applied grammar points to communicate with surroundings by virtue of a substantial mismatch between the textbook’s grammar and real-life conversational language.

Discussion

Cognitive attitudes

The results indicated that high school students showed generally positive cognitive attitudes towards the Friends Global textbook regarding reading, listening, speaking, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. Obviously, grammar was one of the strong points of the Friends Global textbook, as opposed to Pearson's textbook. T. H. Bui (2022) stated that Pearson's textbook lacked contextualized grammar presentation, which may lead to students being deprived of the opportunities to make connections between grammatical patterns, meanings of texts, and uses in real-life communication. Concerning speaking skills, the Friends Global textbook included age-appropriate topics. With respect to writing skills, the Friends Global textbook provided students with numerous writing activities with full instructions. This is similar to Pearson's textbook, which offered controlled practice exercises (e.g., gap fills, matching), allowing students to brainstorm and develop ideas for their writing, and concluded with a free practice task requiring students to produce a complete written output. As for listening skills, most students found the Friends Global textbook helpful for understanding the main ideas in current events, praising the exercises' moderate speed and natural conversations. This contrasts with T. K. L. Bui's (2024) research, where students found their materials' listening texts too difficult, citing unfamiliar pronunciation and many new words as the main reasons.

On the other hand, students expressed dissatisfaction with the Friends Global textbook's phonology. Pronunciation practice materials were rare and not detailed. Friends Global textbook did not present pronunciation lessons explicitly, which is quite different from Pearson's textbook, in which the Pronunciation section of each unit revolves around one pronunciation feature, which can either be individual sounds, word stress, sentence stress, or intonation (T. H. Bui, 2022). Moreover, Pearson’s textbook also provides more frequent and detailed practice, starting with a listening input, followed by an exercise to help students identify and recognize the target pronunciation feature.

Affective attitudes

It is noticeable that regarding learners' needs, the Friends Global textbook received positive affective attitudes from high school students. The factors garnering praise from them were reading, speaking, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. Concerning reading skills, the Friends Global textbook offered communicative tasks after reading exercises, which was a strength compared to old textbooks in Vietnam. Dat (2008) asserted that many controversial readings in English 7, 11, and 12 textbooks were, sadly, followed by tasks eliciting universal knowledge

rather than inviting critical judgment, and usually, learners were not provided with sufficient opportunities to make discoveries about how English is used. As for vocabulary, the Friends Global textbook may be superior to Pearson's one in which, according to T. H. Bui (2022), new words were usually introduced alongside their English definitions through straightforward matching or gap-fill activities, followed by further gap-fill exercises designed to reinforce the students' comprehension of the words' meanings within context as well as their grammatical accuracy. On the other hand, the Friends Global textbook often presented new items through reading passages and listening exercises with clear contexts, allowing students to deduce meanings themselves.

In contrast, high school students still showed their strong disapproval of the Friends Global textbook's listening skills and phonology. First, they perceived the listening topics in the Friends Global textbook as uninteresting and dull, noting a lack of engaging topics like social media, video games, and facets of young people's school life. Hence, this textbook's listening topics failed to boost learner motivation and interest. This is contrary to Hoang's (2016) research, which stated that the ten-year English textbook series was organized around topics familiar to Vietnamese students and suited to their age group. Also, research by Phan et al. (2020) indicated that, among ten listening topics presented in Pearson's textbook, most topics were familiar, authentic, and interesting, while some were new. Another disagreement was the usefulness and excitement of its pronunciation practice activities. The result is rather similar to the study of T. H. Bui (2022) on Pearson's textbook in which pronunciation practice mainly involved listening to and repeating dialogues without connecting pronunciation features to speaking, limiting its effectiveness in improving pronunciation through meaningful communicative contexts.

Behavioral attitudes

It is clear that the behavioral attitudes of high school students towards the Friends Global textbook were generally unfavorable, particularly regarding listening skills, writing skills, speaking skills, and phonology. More specifically, this textbook's role in enhancing their self-study regarding listening skills and phonology was devalued by most learners. This finding is consistent with T. H. N. Tran's (2022) study, where most students seldom practiced listening at home using their textbooks. Furthermore, the textbook's speaking activities nearly had little impact on learners' confidence in English communication with others on familiar topics owing to a lack of challenging speaking questions and topics. This is also a shortcoming of English 10, 11, and 12 textbooks, according to T. T. M. Nguyen (2007), stated that many of these old textbooks' speaking activities are found to be non-communicative, failing to elicit negotiation of meaning and presenting unrealistic and unnatural discourse. As for writing skills, students reported being unable to write common administrative forms, such as CVs and leave applications, on their own due to the absence of this writing type in the Friends Global textbook. By stark contrast, T. H. Bui (2022) mentioned that Pearson's textbook tailored each unit around a specific topic and focused on two main text types - essays and descriptive reports of simple charts - along with other genres, including reports and CVs or job application letters. Additionally, as revealed during the semi-structured interviews, other key reasons for students' negative feedback about the textbook's productive skills encompassed teachers' underutilization of textbook resources for productive skills, lack of assessment, and current time

constraints. This aligns with T. T. T. Nguyen's (2018) study on five high school teachers in which most expressed concern about insufficient time and program allocation for writing, with only 45 minutes allotted, while students needed more. Similarly, Dat's (2008) study on the BAVE course in Vietnam, developed to enhance students' communicative competence, highlighted three conflicting pressures: the need to improve communicative learning mode, the need to adhere to the national examination structure, and the need to comply with time constraints set by the state curriculum. By contrast, our finding differs from T. H. T. Tran's (2024) research, which highlighted the widespread use of the Communicative Language Teaching approach in high schools, with teachers consistently using it to develop students' speaking skills.

On the contrary, they adopted fairly positive behavioral attitudes towards Friends Global textbook's reading skills, vocabulary, and grammar. In more detail, high school students acknowledged how reading activities increased classroom engagement, a distinct benefit of Friends Global textbook compared to older ones, which, according to Dat (2008), included boring texts and ineffective reading activities. In addition, students praised the textbook's focus on applying vocabulary and grammar in English communication with their surroundings, adopting a "focus on form" approach - a central construct in task-based language teaching (Long, 1991). According to Ellis (2016), the aforementioned approach would not only facilitate the gradual process involved in learning L2 linguistic features but also assist the development of form-function mapping, thereby enhancing both fluency and accuracy. This recognition suggested that the Friends Global textbook was useful in helping learners communicate in English, a goal not achieved by many textbooks in other countries. For instance, Lim's (2019) analysis of five Korean textbooks showed that too many form-oriented activities inevitably restricted learners' ability to use language for real communication and develop well-balanced communicative competencies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper was conducted to examine high school students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes towards the Friends Global textbook regarding learners' needs. As for the first research question, it is clear that high school students displayed positive cognitive attitudes towards the Friends Global textbook in terms of learners' needs, especially reading, listening, speaking, vocabulary, and grammar. Nevertheless, they opposed the textbook's phonology due to limited pronunciation practice materials. Turning to the second research question, students held positive affective attitudes toward learners' needs, including reading, speaking, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. Yet, they disapproved of phonology and listening, emphasizing the limited appeal of the pronunciation practice activities and the listening topics. Ultimately, concerning the third research question, the behavioral attitudes of high school students toward the Friends Global textbook were negative, particularly regarding listening, writing, speaking, and phonology. The reasons for such negative feedback about the textbook's role in boosting students' confidence and self-study encompassed the ease of listening tasks, the shortage of challenging speaking questions, unclear writing instructions, insufficient guidance on phonology, the teachers' underutilization of the textbook's speaking and writing activities,

washback effects, lack of assessment on these skills, and limited class time. Conversely, they adopted fairly positive behavioral attitudes toward the Friends Global textbook's reading, vocabulary, and grammar, acknowledging that reading activities enhanced classroom participation and that grammar and vocabulary were applicable in real-life communication.

Implications and Recommendations

The above-mentioned findings have several pedagogical implications, providing teachers, textbook authors, and policymakers with practical recommendations and insights into the Friends Global textbook's strengths and weaknesses. Specifically, textbook authors are encouraged to expand content on phonology, listening, speaking, and writing skills (including essays and common administrative forms), and add more engaging topics such as social media platforms, video games, aspects of youth school life, popular TV shows, music, and relevant political discussions (Rost, 2011). Meanwhile, teachers should use the study's insights to adapt their instructional planning by offering more speaking and writing practice and providing supplementary materials on phonology, listening, and writing skills. Furthermore, policymakers, along with the Ministry of Education and Training, should also reassess the time allocated to teaching productive skills and mandate the testing and assessment of these skills. By implementing these refinements, educators can enhance students' self-study, classroom engagement, and academic performance.

In spite of these pedagogical implications, some limitations still exist, from which several recommendations for future studies can be drawn. First, it only explored the attitudes of students at Gia Dinh High School toward the Friends Global textbook, excluding other stakeholders such as teachers, experts, authors, and publishers. Therefore, involving such stakeholders in the textbook evaluation process via interviews and questionnaires would allow for comparative analysis, rendering conclusions more objective and accurate. Second, the small sample size of 226 students and the study's focus on Gia Dinh High School—where most students excel in English—raise concerns about the representativeness of the findings, particularly in reflecting the attitudes of students with lower English proficiency in other schools across Ho Chi Minh City. Thus, replicating this study with a larger sample size or across multiple high schools would provide a broader perspective, offering high school chief specialists and teachers deeper insights into Vietnamese students' attitudes towards the Friends Global textbook. Third, researchers in the field of textbook evaluation could apply this study's conceptual framework to evaluate other textbook sets, especially those orientated toward the GEEC 2018. Lastly, given the limited research on textbook evaluation in Vietnam, there is a pressing need for studies that enrich and synthesize the existing literature on this topic.

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