

English Language Teaching Material in an ESL Context: A Textbook Analysis Case from Pakistan

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Abstract

The significance of English Language in Pakistan is inevitable due to its supreme status and usage in various domains of power, politics and education. However, English Language teaching in the country remains an inexplicable phenomenon due to limited resources, primitive language teaching methods, less trained teachers and ineffective instructional materials. The conventional English language teaching practices in Pakistan rely on locally published textbooks as teaching learning material. The textbooks have a number of limitations both in content and language. This study aims to analyze a Grade Seven subject English textbook published by a local publisher. The book is analyzed for its effectiveness to meet its objectives for English language development, specifically: reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, in addition the analysis also focuses on developing vocabulary and grammar skills as set in the objectives of the book. A checklist was developed to analyze the textbook for its content (topics covered) and coverage of the language skills. Findings of this study reveal that the textbook lacks in providing quality content which is equally interesting and appropriate for the learners' age and background. It has a number of limitations in providing opportunities and exercises to the learners that can develop their basic English language skills, vocabulary and grammar as claimed in objectives of the book. Hence, the study recommends that locally published textbooks should be made more target oriented which can facilitate the development of learners' basic English language skills. Furthermore, quality and level of reading passages/ chapters included in the books should also be gauged carefully.

Key Words: English language teaching material, ESL, Pakistani English textbooks, textbook analysis.

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 English language in Pakistan

English has enjoyed supremacy over Urdu and other indigenous languages functioning in Pakistan due to its official status since British rule in South Asia. According to 1973 constitution, English language should be used as the official language of Pakistan until Urdu accomplishes the requisites of an official language (Fareed, Ashraf & Mushtaque 2019). Though efforts to replace English as the official language with Urdu were initiated soon after Urdu was declared the national language of Pakistan in 1947, reiterated by Supreme Court of Pakistan in 2015 through implementation of Article 251, but have been unsuccessful till date. English is used within domains of power' such as, military, judiciary, civil services, mass media, trade, commerce, education, official communication etc. (Dar, Zaki&Kazmi, 2014; Mansoor 2015; Yousufzai& Fareed 2022). It is also considered as a gateway to white collar jobs (Ghani, 2003), moreover, it is the language of science and technology and social media in Pakistan.

Formal Pakistani Education system at school level can be categorized into public and private schools. The division can also be made on the basis of elite and non-elite schools, which exist both in public and private sectors. Though, English language has been made a compulsory subject in all public and private sector schools since pre-schooling (GOP, 2009; Shoukat& , 2015; Zaki& Dar, 2014;), but mostly, English is the medium of communication in the elite schools only, whereas Urdu remains medium of instruction in most of the non-elite schools. This elite and non-elite division associated with schooling system has been a legacy of the British rule that existed before independence and served the British political purposes (Mansoor, 2015).

As discussed above, English language is required in Pakistan for both academic and professional purposes; hence Pakistani students and professionals need to have reasonable command of basic English language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Since English language is the communicative medium of choice and often the only option, therefore, English language reading and writing skills are considered to be a pre-requisite for the educational and socio-economic development of the citizens and the nations (Shamim, 2007). Though proficiency in both Urdu and English is required in Pakistan, but, English language

proficiency becomes essential as it is a gatekeeper to higher economic opportunities (Mansoor et al., 2005). However, it is observed that, even after sixteen years of studying English, students lack communicative competence (Dar, Jawed & Awan, 2018).

English language teaching in Pakistan has a number of challenges, for instance, limited number of trained teachers, weak assessment, inappropriate language teaching methodologies, less focus on basic language skill development, teacher centered classrooms and ineffective teaching material etc. (Ahmed et al 2020; Shamim& Allen 2000; Shamim 2008; Warsi 2004). Since in Pakistan, materials used for teaching English language in non-elite and public sector schools are restricted to textbooks only, which include less amount of authentic materials with no provision of audio and visual aids (Warsi,2004). Reliance on textbook for teaching English in Pakistan increases because of the lack of other resources and trained English language teachers.

Textbook based education prevails in Pakistan from Grade I to XII. From pre-schooling to grade 8 there are two types of textbooks, first that are published by government textbook boards and the second are the textbooks published by private publishers, which are approved by the relevant textbook boards. Government publishers consult the experts in the field for writing textbooks, similarly private textbook publishers are also supposed to have the relevant experts in the areas. With the rise of local publishers in the past few years, it is observed that the quality of textbook is compromised as the textbook writers lack expertise and fall short of producing such content that is beneficial for students' English language development. According to (Nayyar& Salim 2005), the course-books are poorly written in terms of language and design, they also use outdated methodologies and are exam oriented.

A number of issues related to Pakistani English language textbooks have been reported. The problems include: insufficient content, less focus on language skill development (Warsi, 2004), less focus on communicative competence for learners, deficient vocabulary (Gurmani et al., 2021), inappropriate grammar and skill development tasks according to the level of the learners, insufficient guidance for the teachers etc. (Panezai&Channa, 2017). Moreover, textbooks especially prescribed for the public sector overload students with innumerable and inexplicable facts most of which are not clearly explained. In addition, books recommended by public sector schools overburden students with complex information which is not even clearly

explained. The knowledge taught does not provide practical exposure of the information and therefore “rote memorization” is promoted (Aftab,2011).

The purpose of this study is to analyze a grade seven subject English textbook published by a private publisher. The textbook is being used to teach English language to thirty to forty thousand students in the two chains of schools. This study concisely was designed to answer the following research question:

“To what extents the textbook fulfills the English language development objectives it sets?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching materials is a broad term that covers textbooks, videos, games, websites, blogs, articles etc. which can be used to facilitate teaching and learning process (Tomlinson, 2011). They play a significant role in effective language teaching and learning process. From materials development perspective, teaching materials can be grouped into: teacher-developed materials, commercial materials and technology-driven materials (Lopriore, 2017), from focus viewpoint, they may be linguistic, visual, auditory or kinesthetic. Based on the source of materials, they can further be termed as, authentic and standardized teaching materials.

Authentic teaching materials are developed from the sources which are not mainly created for teaching learning purposes. Most frequently used sources for authentic materials include: books that are not written for teaching purposes, directories, journals, maps, magazines, articles, pictures, images, TV programs, weather reports etc. (Rao, 2019). Standardized teaching materials are created with primary emphasis on teaching and learning. Because they have specific target, hence they are accompanied with practice exercises to the set learning objectives. Authentic and standardized teaching materials in the English language classrooms have multiple benefits: they are selected according to the basic learning needs, interests and profiles of the learners having different backgrounds, cultures, attitudes, learning habits and styles, they provide in-depth learning experience and they are also easy to learn and memorize. (Tomlinson, 2012)

2.1 Textbook as Teaching Material

A good textbook serves as a roadmap for teaching, which can affectively facilitate learners in formal education. They are one of the most effective and widely utilized instructional tools (Weninger, 2018; Wu & Liu 2007). Effective textbooks should target different types of learners

such as, auditory, visual, verbal, logical, kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal; they are also expected to cover current popular cultural and global topics, furthermore their organization should also be as per target syllabus and curriculum.

Researchers suggest a number of aspects for a language textbook, some of them include: writing tasks, pair work, group discussions, listening/ writing activities, note-taking, universal topics, learner-centeredness, visual illustrations and demonstrations, glossary of specialist terms, appropriate language, cultural and ethnical representations etc. (Jordan, 1997; Lathif, 2015; Richards, 2002). Furthermore, they should keep a balance between meaning-focused input and form-focused instructions.

Textbooks not only bring about general ideas but also prepare students for the next learning session and at the same time they serve as their reference for practice. Typical English language textbooks comprise of topics and units; each topic/unit aims to inculcate certain language skills in the learners. English language textbooks serve as a source of spoken and written material and provide fluency practice activities (Cunningsworth, 1995). In certain scenarios they also become a source of teacher training, providing a planning roadmap to the teachers (Celce-Murcia, 2001). For students, they work as a resource of engagement, intrinsic interest and creativity. They are also expected to cater the linguistic, personal and future professional needs of the language learners.

2.2 Textbook Analysis

Textbook analysis is a thorough process of analyzing the exterior and the interior of the book. The analysis can also cover layout, design, content, visuals, methodology, language, ethnicity, target culture and places (Ali, 2013; Byrd, 2001; Cunningsworth, 1995; Grant, 1987; Littlejohn, 2012; McGrath, 2002; Mukundan, 2011; Sheldon, 1998; Weninger, 2018). According to Weninger and Kiss (2015) framework for analyzing textbook should focus on: content analysis, critical discourse analysis and multimodal analysis. Common methods of textbook analysis include: impressionistic, checklist or in-depth methods (McGrath, 2002). Littlejohn (2012) proposes three levels of textbook analysis: first level consists of book description and physical aspects, second level covers- tasks, exercises etc. and the third level deals with the implications of the textbook for both learners and teachers.

2.3 Textbook Analysis and Evaluation

Textbook analysis is the first step towards textbook evaluation. It involves in depth scrutiny of the material in terms of its content, design, potential value and purpose (Littlejohn, 2012). It takes into account what materials comprise of, what are their aims and objectives and what tasks they require from the learners to perform. Analysis is a description of what the materials contain and what they do not (Tomlinson, 2011). Whereas, textbook evaluation is concerned with the effectiveness of materials for the learners and includes decision making about the materials whether they should be a part of the curriculum or teaching/learning process or not.

The content of textbook is analyzed on the basis of both internal and external approaches to evaluation. (McDonough, Shaw & Masuhara, 2013). External evaluation focuses on the physical outlook of the book, its cover, table of contents etc. Internal evaluation deals with the content presented in the textbook, its tasks and exercise. Tomlinson (2011) states that materials are evaluated on the basis of their appeal, whether they are interesting for the learners or not, their validity and credibility for the teachers and learners, their flexibility and adaptability and their short term and long term learning.

Textbook analysis and evaluation can be carried out through impressionistic, checklist and in depth methods. Different checklists for ESL materials evaluation have been proposed by researchers such as (Littlejohn, 1998; McGrath, 2002; Sheldon, 1988; Tomlinson, 2013; Mukundan, 2016). Firstly, impressionistic method involves evaluating textbooks on their outlook: cover, design, content, topics covered etc. Secondly, checklist method evaluates textbooks on the basis of certain aspects such as lexical, grammatical items, topics via checklists based on likert scale. Thirdly, the in-depth method includes analyzing the aims and methods of materials, learners' needs and usefulness of resources in the classroom. As per ESL materials are concerned Tomlinson (2013) states that they must achieve impact. They should be relevant with learners' needs, various learning styles, simple and comprehensible in terms of content, moreover; they should increase learners' intellectual, aesthetic and emotional involvement.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study analyzes a grade seven subject English textbook published by a private Pakistani publisher. The textbook is used by two chains of schools in Pakistan that have more than sixty

campuses within the country. The book is taught to more than thirty thousand students at both of the chains of schools.

The textbook was analyzed following guidelines as suggested in the textbook analysis and evaluation methods: impressionistic, checklist and in-depth, furthermore the guidance in textbook analysis checklist developed for this study was taken from a number of researches mainly including (Littlejohns, 2012, Masuhara, 2010; McGrath, 2002; Mukundan et al, 2016; Sheldon, 1988; Tomlinson, 2013,). The textbook consists of 7 units. Each unit comprises of prose, poetry, reading and writing skill activities. The units are based on religion, local events, beliefs, cultural and social aspects. The book was analyzed for the content and the following exercises in accordance with the objectives set by the book.

4 Findings

Findings of this study cover reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar and vocabulary parts of the book. It also covers the practice exercises and unit texts for their suitability.

4.1 Reading

Reading is a process that involves word recognition in the first place, interpretation of meaning at second and integration of both words and meanings for fluency and accuracy at the third place. The textbook comprises of both authentic and created texts. From reading skills perspective the book can have following challenges for the students. Firstly, the content of the book seems less appealing to the students. Topics such as ‘Glassmaking’(p.22), ‘Carbon’(p.160), ‘Oil spills’ (p.55) may not be interesting for grade seven learners. Secondly, the content in terms of concepts, diction and setting appears difficult for the target students in Pakistani context, as it can be observed in Poems by Khalil Jibran ‘Pity the nation’ (p.24), ‘Leisure’(p.53) by William Henry Davies and in prose unit 5 ‘Large Asteroid headed for impact with earth in January 3016’ (p.109) .Thirdly, the textbook has less clarity in providing language concepts, for example ‘metaphors’ given in one of the exercises in the book is exemplified as (relies on calculators, pushed by an internal clock) (p.36), and (combat the situation, join the team, mobilize their resources, extend device) (p.68). Fourthly, the book presents overgeneralized statements such as, ‘It is the winner who is portrayed as kind and generous liberator. The losers are despots and cruel. History is therefore one person’s bias or propaganda.’(p.83),’, ‘News and talk shows are the soul of propaganda machine’(p.110).

Additionally, according to experts such as, Sheldon, (1988) the whole reading text should be based on the same theme so that the reader- students in this case do not get confused, but in the textbook in the same unit different themes are included such as, in the unit two ‘Calendars’(p. 42) another short reading text ‘Aeroplane’ is included. Similarly, in unit 1 ‘Superstitions’ (p.22) a different themed short text ‘Glassmaking’ is included which can result in confusing the students.

Furthermore, the book lacks in providing adequate reading based exercises to engage students in effective reading practices. The exercises for reading also have unclear instructions, for example exercises on (p.34) instruct students as, ‘Pick three of the most important of these and give reasons why you think they are important?’. The word “these” in exercise instructions is not clear what it refers to. Similarly the book provides missing information for ‘Limericks’ (A five-line poem of English origin. “The first, second and fifth lines rhyme and the third and fourth lines rhyme” (p.38) are difficult to link to the standard understanding of the term. Moreover, exercises on (p.2), (p.16) have unclear instructions also. Reading comprehension questions have a limited variety, for instance, in unit 1, Out of ten reading comprehension questions, three questions start with ‘what’ and seven with ‘why’ in (p.7). Similarly, in unit 2 (p.32), seven out of ten are ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions. No other type of reading comprehension questions such as, MCQs, blanks, matching items etc. are made part of exercises.

Lastly, the book contains spelling errors or typos which show that it has not been thoroughly proof read before publication. Example, ‘differentiate’(differentiate)(p.42.) (This only briefly explains the exterior of the gigantic mechanical bird interior hold a myriad of objects)’myraid’(myriad) (p.42) ‘introduces’ (introduces)(p.43), ‘deviding’ dividing (p.36).

4.2 Writing

The book offers a variety of writing exercises to the learners. Each unit comprises of two or more writing tasks which include writing character sketches, stories, paragraphs, essays etc.

Moreover, the book has six problems regarding writing exercises. Firstly, the instructions for writing exercises such as, writing character sketch, paragraph, story, essay, and letter are ambiguous "Look at the above paragraph and complete the shopping"(p.70). Another activity of changing simile to metaphor is given in unit 4 when no simile is present in the referred

paragraph. 'Find the simile in the sixth paragraph rewrite the sentence changing simile to metaphor (p.98)

Secondly, the book requires students to perform writing tasks for which no schema is generated. There is some mismatch between the provided reading text and the following writing exercises related to the text. For instance unit 1 (p. 19) reading text portrays a negative character, whereas the corresponding writing activity requires students to write character sketch of the same with positive attributes which is opposite of information in reading text and can be confusing for the students.

Thirdly, some writing exercises do not link with the themes in units and are out of context. Example, an exercise on 'Cars' appears in unit 2 which is about 'Calendars' (p.43), 'telephone', in un.4 'Tariq Bin Ziyad', 'grasshopper' in un.5 'Propaganda'. Similarly, an exercise based on making sentences about 'Duck, Spider, Corn, Tortoise' (p. 44), 'mad computers', 'rocket ship', 'speech on worst student of the year' etc. (p.103),(pg.125) are completely out of context.

Additionally, the writing exercises are not designed according to grade 7 student level. Students are expected to write poetry which is difficult for them (p.25,54).Example, "describe yours and your friend's qualities in a poem" (p.146). "Now write your own Ghazal" (p.147). Such instances require students to write at the highest level without considering their age and expertise.

Lastly, writing exercises lack in clarifying concepts and tasks to the students. The definition of Limericks is incomplete followed by writing templates in exercise (p.37). Another weird Explanation of narratives and writing activity is "write a fictional narrative that begins: 'suddenly I was changed into a ...'" (p.102).

4.3 Listening

The textbook does not contain any audio or video recording like a CD or DVD. The textbook caters only one type of listening i.e one way listening. There is only one listening text in each unit as monologue which the teacher is supposed to read aloud followed by an activity. Moreover, in unit six there is no listening activity. The listening activities are taken from the internet but the credit is not given to the sources. The teacher is supposed to read the listening text

from the back of the book. Example, “The teacher will read out each statement twice: Students will choose the correct answer.”(p.51).The listening exercises are out of context for the students such as navigating street maps (p.21) and global maps (p.105).

4.4 Speaking

The book offers activities and texts for speaking practices such as dialogues on (p.20), (p.77), (pg.104).Each unit except unit 7, has one speaking activity. The speaking activities include debate about superstitions (ch.1, p.21), job interview (un.2 p.50), role playabout oil spills (un.3, p.77), presentation on behavior (un.4, p. 104), conversation about exams (un.5, p.125) and group activity about crime (un.5, p. 144). All the above mentioned activities have unclear instructions and most of them are not linked to the themes in units’ reading texts.

4.5 Grammar

The textbook claims to provide adequate grammar exercises needed by second language learners. However, there are four major problems with these grammar exercises. Firstly, the grammar concepts such as active/passive are explained with the help of formula, which are not practical in modern language teaching (p.16) and appendix 10.Secondly, exercise on punctuation is too difficult for students as it requires them to punctuate translation of Quranic verses from Surah AL Tawah. (p.15). Thirdly, instructions are unclear for a number of exercises. Example, “We define objects using Present Indefinite Tense. First we determine the class name of the object and then state its distinguishing characteristics. Fill in the table below and then define the objects given in the columns.”(p.90). Lastly, some of the exercises are inappropriate as they require answers that are not even possible. Example, “Complete the given table by writing the correct form of the word, make adjectives, noun, verb and adverb.” For each word, all four classes are not possible e.g probably, accuracy, circulate. etc. (p.35).”Complete the (word) family e.g quiet, haste”.(p.93).Not every word has all four classes.

4.6 Vocabulary

The book doesn’t provide the vocabulary, required for classroom communication and other targeted speaking activities in the provided contexts. Additionally, the difficult words explanation provided in the textbook exercises are incorrect. Such as ‘*residue*’ is defined as ‘legacy left after all dues are paid’, ‘*crude*’ is elucidatedas ‘unfinished’ , ‘*change*’is described

as ‘coins.’ (p.64). Furthermore, unclear vocabulary based exercises are given (p.65), similarly, self-developed terms such as, “Thermometer words” are used, which can be confusing both for the teacher and students, like wise students are required to write synonyms for words like ‘walked, standing, went’ which are quite unusual in case of their syntactic type. Finally, Instructions are unclear in vocabulary exercises on (p.115, p.34, p.135). Example, ‘Make a list of all “said words” in the text. Pick 10 from the list and fill in the web below.’ ‘Said words’ are neither indicated nor defined in the textbook. (p.19)

5. Discussion

The significance of textbook in ELT is undeniable. Most of the teaching and learning that takes place in language classrooms in Pakistan is through textbook. Moreover, in Pakistan due to lack of adequate resources and trained English language teachers, most of the time the instructional materials are limited to textbooks only. With the rise of local publishers in the past few years, it is observed that the quality of textbook is compromised as the textbook writers lack expertise and fall short of producing such content that is beneficial for students’ English language development. This can be seen in a number of flaws which students encounter while using the book. Tomlinson & Masuhara (2013), also assert that the textbooks are less appealing and irrelevant for the actual learners. They further state, these textbooks require learners to find predetermined answers rather than making their own discoveries.

The analyzed subject English textbook, which is written for grade seven students claims to develop students’ reading, writing, speaking and listening skills with additional focus on grammar and vocabulary.

Firstly, as claimed by the textbook, to inculcate the local culture in reading texts some of the local text is included, but the book has both adapted and adopted the foreign texts as well. As the findings reveal, in terms of content, the textbook lacks in providing interesting topics to engage learners. Additionally, the information provided in the reading texts is incomprehensible and difficult according to the learners’ language proficiency level. Similar findings have been reported by Aftab (2011) in his study on Pakistani ESL materials. Also the reading exercises have a limited variety and do not engage learners in analytical thinking. As also reported by other local studies (Warsi, 2004; Mansoor, 2015; Panezai & Channa, 2017). Besides, a number of exercises have unclear instructions which make it difficult for the students to solve them.

Moreover, the reading texts contain a number of spelling and grammar errors. Furthermore, language concepts are wrongly described.

Secondly, as far as the writing skill is concerned, the textbook does not facilitate critical thinking and creative writing among students. Most of the exercises have unclear instructions with irrelevant and boring topics. As in case of reading skills, the writing tasks too are not graded according to students' language proficiency level.

Thirdly, though the textbook claims to develop students' listening skills, but the book does not accompany any audio/video aids, which practically makes it difficult to develop the students' listening skills. The teachers are expected to read aloud the provided text in the book twice for the learners and the learners are expected to answer the question following the provided listening text. This is not an effective way to develop the learners' listening skills. The suggested listening activity also becomes boring for the learners specially in this digital age. The listening exercises are fewer and out of context.

In addition, the speaking activities are also fewer and limited in terms of variety. Most of the speaking activities are not coherent with the themes in the chapter. Fifthly, explicit grammar teaching method has been employed in the book. Some of the grammar exercises are insufficient as they lack in providing conceptual knowledge to students with modern methods and techniques functional in English Language Teaching. Solutions for some of the exercise are not even possible that shows inadequacy of the textbook.

Lastly, the vocabulary exercises have unclear instructions with little room for introducing new words to students. Some exercises are inappropriate and do not provide correct meanings of the words which are rather confusing for the students. This problem of lack of vocabulary coverage in Pakistani textbooks has also been identified by (Gurmani et al., 2021).

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, it can be said that overall, the book does not meet the requirements of an effective English language textbook. The content of the textbook is less appealing and the exercises are incoherent with the themes of the chapters. All macro skills along with vocabulary and grammar are dealt inadequately in the textbook. The content is not graded in accordance

with students' English language proficiency level and background. Thus the textbook does not meet its set objectives and may not help the learners develop their basic English language skills. However, the text book is an effort to local material devilmnt for English language teaching. The book can be made more effective if the identified areas in reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar and vocabulary are improved. Similarly, practicality of the book can further be enhanced if specifically Pakistani ESL contexts kept in mind and generally ESL material development guidelines are followed.

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