A Critical Evaluation Of Various English Books

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ABSTRACT

English language teaching plays a vital role in today’s scenario because of the global status of English. It should be the effort of the Indian educational system to teach English to every Indian child and to ensure that she/he gains proficiency in it and not suffer discrimination for lack of it. In this endeavor of English language teaching, textbooks play a prominent role and considered as the primary agents of conveying knowledge and fulfilling the objectives of a course. In view of the importance of textbooks and their role in developing language proficiency among the students, researcher has done an evaluative study of existing NCERT English textbooks of class VI to VIII. Based on self analysis, observation, interaction and response to the questionnaire at Kendriya Vidyalaya Schools, the researcher presents an overall evaluation of the textbooks and discusses the suggestions.

1. INTRODUCTION

In India English is being taught as a second language and the language of progress and development. In the process of English language teaching at school level, the roles of learners, teachers and the textbooks are considered very important. As Hutchinson and Torres (1994) stated “textbooks are playing a very important and positive role in the process of teaching and learning and offer the necessary input into the classroom lessons through different activities and explanations”. Therefore, textbooks will always endure on the grounds that they meet certain needs. They not only provide a framework for teachers in achieving the aims and objectives of the course, but also serve as a guide to the teacher when teaching lessons in the classroom. In view of the importance of textbooks and their role in developing the language proficiency among the learners, the researcher has done an evaluative study of existing NCERT English textbooks of Class VI to Class VIII at CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) schools.

1.1 The main objectives of the study are:

To what extent teachers and students are satisfied with the present NCERT English textbooks. To analyze and evaluate the textbooks in terms of its suitability, usability by the teachers and students To find out the strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks

2. NCERT – AN INTRODUCTION

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is an autonomous organization Established for providing continuous academic support in improving the various policies and programmers for qualitative improvement in school education system at the national level.

3. TEXTBOOK EVALUATION-AN INTRODUCTION

In Indian school context, textbook serves as the primary resource for students to receive the language input and the language practice that takes place in the classroom. The term textbook has been defined as, “basic book used in a particular course of study or programme”.

4. ANALYSIS OF UNIT STRUCTURE

All units in present NCERT English textbooks of Class VI to Class VIII are thematically organized. The researcher found that all three NCERT textbooks of class VI to VIII were almost same in its unit organization and sequence. They were well established and integrated. All units in the textbooks were organized according to the simple to complex principle. Activities presented in these textbooks are creative and interesting for learners because of visual elements for each lesson and topic. There was an effort to develop the four language skills in an integrated way in each unit, but there was a little flaw also.

5. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Researcher administered questionnaire to twenty English teachers who take the classes VI to VIII from different schools to collect their opinion on the English textbooks and also administered questionnaire to the students from class VI to VIII from Kendriya Vidyalaya schools through prescribed questionnaires and informal discussion; elicited their opinion of the present English textbooks. Following are some of the analysis from their responses. When researcher asked the teacher’s difficulty in the present English textbooks of class VI to VIII to cover the syllabus and to achieve the objectives; 60% of teachers mentioned that they don’t have any difficulty in covering the syllabus and achieving the objectives of present textbooks, whereas 40% teachers stated that they have some sort of difficulty. The following diagram gives the details.
Figure: 1. Difficulty in covering and achieving the objectives of the syllabus
Researcher tried to find out whether they are aware of the main objectives of NCERT textbooks for teaching English from class VI to VIII. The following pie chart shows their opinion on achieving the English objectives through the present textbooks.

Figure: 2. achieving the objectives through NCERT English textbooks
To find out whether the textbooks are relevant to the learners level are not. The following figure gives the details.

Figure: 3. Relevance of the textbooks to the learner’s level
For the question how the teacher encourages their students to work at their classroom exercises and difficulty in understanding the textbook material, the table below gives the details.

Figure: 4. Difficulty levels of materials
Regarding to the textbooks activities; most of the teachers accepted that textbooks exercises are varied and challenging in all three classes. But the given activities under each unit are not sufficient to develop the language proficiency at this level. They need more listening, speaking and vocabulary tasks.

Figure: 5. Scope of activities for real life interaction

6. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS
As mentioned by the textbook writers all these textbooks followed skill based syllabus and therefore it covers and integrates both productive (speaking and writing) and receptive skills (listening and reading skills). However it placed a lot of emphasis on speaking, reading and writing skills. As we know many prominent authors in ELT emphasized integrated approach. Skill wise present textbooks strengths and possible suggestions have been mentioned flowingly.

7. LISTENING SKILL:
7.1 Textbook with appropriate listening skill has the following advantage:
It demonstrates how a language is spoken (the pronunciation, the structures, the usage, the intonation and how the vocal aspects are manipulated to reflect various emotions of the speaker. Hence, the verbal and vocal aspects can profitably be learnt by a second language learner if he gets adequate exposure to listening).

7.2 Suggestions for restructuring listening skills
Textbooks does not consists audiocassettes/ CDs for listening tasks in the classroom. This assumes the competency of the teachers in reading a text with proper word stress and its pronunciation. The pitch, intonation, accent of the teachers varies from one another. To avoid this, textbook should supplement with Audiocassettes/CDs to develop the language.

8. SPEAKING SKILL:
Strengths
There are several real life situations provided as contexts for individual, pair work, and conversation practice. For example one student from each group can speak alternately with the teacher help. One of the students may write down on the board.

SUGGESTIONS FOR RESTRUCTURING SPEAKING SKILLS
One of the major limitations of the present textbooks is that it is not supplemented adequately with audio and video support. Each textbook needs to focus more on production
activities. There is also a need to have well-designed worksheets/Activity sheets containing diagrams, charts, pictures and photographs at the end of each unit for practice. More speaking activities like Ice-breaking, Family Tree Activity, Mind Map activity, JAM (Just A Minute), Presentations, Anecdotes and extempore are required to develop speaking skills. It is better to mention some additional sources like Internet websites, e-learning programmes and authentic audio and video sources for teachers.

9. READING SKILL: Strengths
All the units are balanced with sufficient activities and reading passages. The reading texts contain different themes like thoughtful stories, comic stories, picture reading, animals and their life, historical events, greatest scientists, sports, and disaster managements (Tsunami). These are very interesting and according to their level.

10. SUGGESTIONS FOR RESTRUCTURING READING SKILLS
The culture-specific texts are really helpful in developing language skills. These texts can create interest in the learners' mind as they are naturally attracted by their own culture. The reading materials presented in the textbooks should be based on specific cultures because learners can easily understand and guessing is possible. [According to Tomlinson (2003) Materials should help the learner to develop cultural awareness and sensitivity (Byram and Fleming, 1998; Tomlinson, 2000b)]

11. WRITING SKILL: Strengths
The nature of writing tasks in theses textbooks are such that it gives adequate practice in paragraph writing. Suggestions for restructuring Writing skills The material should focuses more on the process approach to teaching writing rather than on the product approach. Practice in letter writing (Letters to editors, letters of complaints, letters seeking permission or application, notices etc...), simple messages, invitations, short paragraphs, applications, narrative and descriptive pieces should focus at these stages according to NCERT guidelines. Hence practice is more required to write messages, invitations and applications with sufficient exercises.

12. GRAMMAR:
Strengths
All these textbooks contain some grammar tasks/activities/exercises under the section of 'working with the language' in each unit. The main objectives of these grammar tasks are to make the students to explore the language.

Suggestions for restructuring Grammar
According to Tomlinson, the most important thing that learning materials have to do is to help the learner to connect the learning experience in the classroom to their own life outside the school. In other words, the textbooks should include all these. there should be proper introduction with clear instructions, it is better to mention some tips for teaching grammar and for learning grammar It's more effective by containing some songs and grammar games for the learners to learn grammar very easy way. After each unit it should contain some handouts with more tasks on each grammar items, and details of e-learning sources for teachers to access and use in the classroom.

13. VOCABULARY: Strengths:
All these three textbooks contain some vocabulary tasks/activities/exercises under the section of 'working with language' in each unit. These activities mostly include words/phrases, synonyms, opposite words, question words, phrasal verbs, idioms, prefix-suffix, word-formation activities, etc. from class VI to VIII. And some activities like word search, word ladder, jumbled words, rhyme words, and crossword puzzles also presented to improve the vocabulary. There should be a slot for familiarizing apt vocabulary through activities.

14. SUGGESTIONS FOR RESTRUCTURING VOCABULARY
The materials should provide enough opportunities for vocabulary development. A list of words should be increase with transcription and stress mark on page glossary. Dictionary skills, dairy writing, and creating own libraries are useful activities for students to develop their vocabulary. Textbooks should concentrate more on these things.

15. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH
Result of the present study would help in making some appropriate suggestions for the textbook designers, teachers and students at school level.

16. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY
The present study “A Critical Evaluation of NCERT English Textbooks” is limited in scope and focus in that it evaluates present existing NCERT English textbooks of Class VI to VIII. Textbook designers and teachers who are using these textbooks need to be more critical and creative in overcoming the limitations by designing learner friendly textbooks.

17. CONCLUSION
Textbook evaluation is the systematic investigation of the worth of an ongoing or continuing activity. It plays an important role in the success of any teaching learning process. It is particularly needed in the school level because it is still in its embryonic stage and pioneering activities are taking place within the society. Since materials play a prominent role in achieving the objectives of a course, the present study has undertaken an evaluation of the existing NCERT English textbooks of Class VI to Class VIII with a view to proposing suggestions for revision. Following the close analysis of the materials, and based on the feedback received from the users of the textbooks, it is apparent that despite the positive features, the textbooks have a few gaps and shortcomings which need to be addressed in future revision.
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In this research A Critical Evaluation of NCERT English Textbooks has been performed. It is useful for category students and faculty.

BIBLIOGRAPHY