English Language Textbook and Development of Oral Communicative Competence in Grade VIII Students of Public Sector Schools in Punjab

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Abstract

The researcher attempted to ascertain the extent to which the English language textbook, English for Class 8, endorsed by the Punjab Textbook Board is compatible with Pakistani learners' language learning needs. The purpose of the study was to investigate the degree the prescribed textbook facilitates language acquisition, its meaningful application, and development of oral communicative competence. A qualitative approach was employed. The findings of this study reflect that the textbook does not cater to the target learners' future academic and professional language needs because the incorporated activities do not focus on sociolinguistic and discourse-level aspects of the target language. Furthermore, many activities offer meaningless and discrete-point exercises which do not contribute to any oral skill development. There are limited opportunities to develop oral communicative competence. By incorporating adequate visual supplementary material the prescribed English language textbook can become an effective tool for developing oral communicative competence.

Keywords: Textbook evaluation, Foreign language acquisition, Communicative competence, National curriculum

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Introduction

English is assumed to be one of the most important languages understood by and used for communication purposes by people across the world (Anwar, Ihsan, Hayat, & Pevez, 2016). However, in Pakistan, only 11% of the total population uses this language as a means of communication (Tariq, Bilal, Sandhu, Iqbal, & Hayat, 2013).

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the degree to which the textbook helps in acquiring competence of all four integrated skills, especially as laid down in the standards of the National Curriculum, 2006. It emphasizes especially on the speaking skill.

The researcher as a practitioner has perceived that even though Pakistani language learners do possess an advanced level of proficiency in English as a second language and competence in grammar; students by and large, are not properly trained in sociolinguistic rules of speaking English. The researcher has observed that most Pakistani learners maintain constant contact with English language; 14-16 years of education, however, they are unable to achieve the desired level of functional proficiency, more so in the oral communicative competence. This study is based on the assumption that the textbook is an important tool to develop oral communicative competence and language skills among the target learners. The researcher, therefore, evaluated the current English language textbook and its effectiveness at grade VIII level. The prescribed textbook is taught across the province of Punjab; male and female student enrollment in North and Center region of Punjab is 2,313,033, (School Education Department, 2017), therefore, it has a huge impact on grade VIII's learners language development.

The prescribed English language textbook was revised in 2015; making it even more important for the researcher to investigate its effectiveness in terms of oral communicative competence development. Like any other developing country, teachers in Pakistan depend on the textbook to a large extent; this is researcher's standpoint. It is, therefore, important to assess the quality of the recommended textbook in terms of oral communicative development.

Research Objectives

1. To identify as to what extent the current, revised textbook has been effective in supporting the desired language development as mentioned in National Curriculum, 2006.
2. To analyze the content of the English language textbook of grade VIII with special reference to oral communicative competence.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. How far the English language textbook promote oral communicative competence and lead to independent language practice?
2. Which are the key areas where revisions are required to develop oral communicative competence of the students of grade VIII?

Status of English Language in Pakistan

In Pakistan people speak many languages, however, English is the official language of the country as well as the language of education (Fareed, Humayun, & Akhtar, 2016). English is the language of the offices, research and administration in Pakistan; therefore, it occupies a central position (Fareed et al., 2016). English textbooks in this context have a central role to play in developing important skills, especially, related to oral communicative competence. The status of English language is not confined to its place as an official language. It is also used as a medium of instruction in higher education; the researcher argues that oral communicative competence in English language is also criteria of social mobility. Oral communicative competence is significant in confidence building in young students preparing for higher education.

Textbook and its Evaluation

Evaluation is an effective way to measure the suitability and effectiveness of an existing practice; it is a useful technique to improve the quality of any existing document (Germaine & Dinkins, 1993). Textbooks undoubtedly, provide ready to use relevant material and road maps to the teachers to facilitate teaching. Lee (2013) valued textbook as an important tool for imparting language acquisition. Textbook evaluation increases the understanding of the researcher in understanding a particular phenomenon, and improves practice (Fong, DeWitt, & Leng, 2018).

Communicative Competence

The idea of performance is linked with competence (Chomsky, 1960s). For some linguists performance is more about the production of a language appropriate to a context (Aftab, 2017). The concept of communicative competence presented by Canale and Swain (1980, 1983) is a broader concept which is based on their theory that competence involves more than knowing the language rules and structures.

Right thing at the right time, to the right person in the given context is what is defined as the communicative competence (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986). The researcher primarily supports one of the popular theories presented by Bachman in 1990; for whom, language acquisition is based on knowing the rules and application of those rules in different situations. The researcher believes that oral communicative competence is the ability to use language appropriate to a context and correct application of rules of language to different situations with confidence.

Foreign Language Acquisition

Acquisition and learning of a language are distinct processes; acquisition implies learning unconsciously as it takes place in real life where errors are tolerated and there is less emphasis on grammar, whereas learning suggests possessing the formal knowledge about

the language (Collier, 2016). A review of literature shows that recently, the focus of language learning is on communicative competence, rather than on linguistic competence. Therefore, foreign language has education emphasized on language production and development of speaking skill in the past four decades (Derakhshan, Tahery, & Mirarab, 2015). Language production is precisely the ability of students in foreign language programs to write and speak fluently and comprehensibly in the target language.

Research Methodology

The English language textbook prescribed for grade VIII by Punjab Textbook Board, Pakistan, was selected for evaluation purpose. The textbook consisted of 14 units; each of the unit offered 4 different language skills, evaluated by the researcher by using a criteria checklist. A qualitative research method was adopted for the content analysis of the selected textbook.

The textbook was evaluated, first by the researcher and then by a second evaluator; ELT expert, on a 4 point Likert scale, in 5 different categories, such as quality of content, potential effectiveness, skills development, oral communicative competence, vocabulary and grammar. For content analysis the check list used in the present study contained different set of questions to assess the effectiveness of the English language textbook. Especially to what extent it helps foreign language acquisition and development of oral communicative competence.

The researcher developed her own class room observation criteria checklist to address the research question and the prevalent teaching and learning situation in Pakistan; for this purpose, learners' vocabulary, grammar, fluency, communication and pronunciation were taken in to consideration while evaluating their oral communicative competence.

Instrument Validity

In qualitative research, the validity of the tools is interpreted as appropriateness of the tools. Validity ensures transparency and reduces any bias of the researcher (Leung, 2015; Singh, 2014). In order to address the research problem, for the content analysis; it was considered best to use a criteria checklist developed by the researcher; this check-list was validated by experts, class room observations, and a second collaborative participant; an Assistant Professor of ELT evaluated the target textbook with the help of the same check list as used by the researcher to validate the findings, and the elicited data aligned with those of the researcher.

Data Collection

The textbook was evaluated against a checklist, developed by the researcher, to determine the oral competency as developed by the current English language textbook with the help of different activities. In order to get the first-hand knowledge about the target learners' oral performance, class observation sessions were conducted in 4 different schools of Lahore.

Data Analysis and Findings of the Study

The researcher presents the data analysis of the study with the help of different categories. First category: quality of content consists of 12 questions, ranging from learners' compatibility and comprehension level to the equal distribution of the language skills, important to acquire the target language. The following table presents researcher's responses based on a 4 point Likert scale that is, 0= to a great extent, 1= to some extent 2= to a limited extent, 3= not at all, to different questions set in this category.

Table 1
Response of the Researcher about Quality of Content

Quality of Content	To a great extent	To some extent	To a limited extent	Not at all
1.Topic's relevance to the activities	✓			
2.Subject was of interest to learners	✓			
3.Basic skills present in activities				✓
4.Learener could immediately apply the learnt skills				✓
5.Learners could easily apply the learnt skills				✓
6.social realities accurately reflected	✓			
7. Learners could relate to their values	✓			
8.Correct factual material	✓			
9.Ideas presented without bias	✓			
10. Learners could easily use the language				✓
11.Cultural shock to Learners				✓
12.Content compatible to learners' background Knowledge	✓			

As reflected in table 1, in this category seven statements fall into the category of to a great extent, implying that this is a positive feature of the textbook fulfilling the maximum requirements in this category. Topics are not only relevant to the activities but simultaneously, learners showed interest in reading them during class observations. Different topics in the textbook accurately reflected social realities such as educating students about traffic rules and road safety.

The textbook did not contain any biased factual material for example teaching units; about the Caliph Hazrat Umar and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). There was no cultural shock to the target learners; stories and their themes were derived from students' local social background; that is, local issues are presented in an easy language. Resultantly, learners could relate to their values. Finally, the content was found to be compatible to grade VIII's background knowledge.

However, learners failed to apply the learnt skills as observed during classroom observations; besides, many activities present in the textbook offer meaningless and discrete-point exercises; which do not contribute to any skill development and were not connected with idea of skills development. There is limited oral interaction presented in the textbook in the form of oral skill development; to a great extent these activities involve oral drilling of contrived language. It is important that the textbook includes balance between group and pair work to support language learning, moreover, the textbook containing engaging and inventive speech tasks to help develop oral communicative competence is necessary.

Table 2

Response of Researcher about Potential Effectiveness

Potential Effectiveness	To a great extent	To some extent	To a limited extent	Not at all
1.Material lets the learners use target language			✓	
2.Room for alternative activities			✓	
3.Supplimentary materials(audio)				✓
4.Supplimentary materials(video)				✓
5.Teacher's guide offered			✓	
6.Activities offer diverse learning Style				✓
7. Activities offer diverse teaching style				✓
8.Self-directed learning encouraged				✓
9.Tasks move from simple to complex	✓			
10. Tasks help under achievers				✓
11.Tasks objectives achievable		✓		
12.Authentic language			✓	
13.Variety of topics		✓		
14. Enjoyable learning experience for learners.			✓	

A clearer picture emerges in table 2 about potential effectiveness of the textbook as a teaching and learning tool to develop oral communicative competence; content analysis indicated that this was a weak and ineffective area. With a singular exception of

the criterion 9; tasks move from simple to complex, however, six aspects that is: 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 10, were absent in the activities. Four aspects: 1, 2, 5, 12, were reflected to some extent level. For the last element 14, keeping in view the learners' interest and findings of classroom observations it is assumed that the learners enjoy the prescribed textbook activities to a small extent.

Table 3

Response of Researcher about Skills Development

Skills Development	To a great extent	To some extent	To limited extent	Not at all
1.Activities initiate meaningful communication				✓
2.Balanced activities		✓		
3.Students are motivated to talk				✓
4.Activities promote discussions				✓
5.Equal distribution of skill development				✓
6.Tasks are authentic			✓	
7.All SLOs are addressed			✓	
8.Pronunciationcontextualized			✓	
9.Pronunciationtasks not Complex				✓
10.Equal distribution of free and controlled tasks				✓
11. Activities focus on fluent oral production				✓
12. Accurate written production of language	✓			
13. Activities promote creative, original, and independent responses			✓	

Writers of the textbook do ignore language skills development as reflected in table 3; listening and reading the texts, consisting of dialogues, poems and factual paragraphs have been prepared for the classroom; the textbook includes tasks like reading out the dialogues, completing the gapped sentences, answering questions, making short sentences, composing paragraphs, changing narration, identifying grammatical items, and sequencing the events. The major focus of the textbook is on form and not on function, the activities do not involve integration of four skills, and more importantly, there is no integration of skills or language practice at discourse level, which can lead to the development of oral communicative competence, which is considered a major weakness of the present textbook by the researcher. However, if the teacher uses the foot notes, which are provided for all 14 teaching units; a few activities do allow students to participate orally.

The textbook has mechanical form-based exercises which do not lead to independent language usage or language skills development. The provided dialogues are very limited and too contrived to be used in real life situation, also, learners are not provided any decision-making opportunities. Listening skill is completely overlooked and a few speaking activities offered in the textbook are more like oral drills aiming at teaching language structure.

Reading skill activities mostly require the learners to copy from the source text. Grade VIII learners lack the skills to apply, analyze, evaluate and create implying there is very little skills development. The overall impression of the textbook indicates that it lacks the effective integration of the language learning skills, thus failing to achieve the desired level of oral proficiency.

Table 4

Response of Researcher about Oral Communicative Competence

Oral Communicative Competence	To a great extent	To some extent	To a limited extent	Not at all
1.Opportunities to use basic social language			✓	
2. Learners ask appropriately for assistance(in target language)			✓	
3.Learners can develop appropriate answers			✓	
4.Learners interpret appropriately			✓	
5.Activities encourage learners. to share ide				✓
6.Learners ask questions to get answers				✓
7. Learners are able to offer an opinion				✓
8. Tasks let the learners maintain a conversation				✓
9. Learners can interject in to a conversation				✓
10. Learners can ask for clarification				✓
11. Learners can disagree with others				✓
12. Learners can correctly retell a story				✓
13. Learners can create a story				✓
14.Learners can describe a situation				✓

Researcher's opinion focusing on the oral communicative competence development as reflected in the English language textbook is presented in table 4. Mechanical practice refers to controlled activities that involve repetition and substitution drills. They are designed to practice the use of particular grammatical items (Richards, 2006, p. 15).

In many textbooks, this practice demands sentence completion, which is, usually with grammar activities in isolation, and it lacks conformity to reality as language is used in a real life; in the context of situations. Communicative practice embodies those activities in which language is not totally predictable. Language production at this level is more spontaneous and authentic, because meaning negotiation takes place within a real communicative context and real information is exchanged (Richards, 2006).

The current textbook incorporates mechanical to meaningful practice of language, however, communicative practice is lacking, and furthermore, textbook is not supported by any supplementary material including audio and video discourse. The textbook does not incorporate any manual for the teachers to support them in focusing on this area. Some guidance in the form of foot notes for the teachers is provided for chapters 1-14, as far as the activities are concerned, they apparently do not cater to the diverse learning styles.

Most of the time the learners are engaged in non- communicative activities; for example, passive listening, passive reading; reading aloud, passive writing; grammar and vocabulary drills are present in all teaching units. However, there are few opportunities found in the textbook to use target language; that is conducting an interview, visiting a doctor,and a limited number of role plays. However, there is no support for self- directed learning in the textbook because learners are not required to play an active role.

Table 5

Response of Researcher about Vocabulary and Grammar

Vocabulary and Grammar	To a great extent	To some extent	To a limited extent	Not at all
1.Grammar introduced inductively				✓
2.Contextualized grammar items			✓	
3.Appropriate load of new words	✓			
4.Simple to difficult load of vocabulary		✓		
5. Vocabulary appropriate lyre cycled	✓			
6.Words are contextualized			✓	

Here, in table 5 is presented the researcher's opinion about vocabulary and grammar activities as incorporated in the textbook, by and large, the textbook is centered on mechanical activities. Grammar teaching is a route for language teaching and learning; however, it ideally refers to such classroom activities which require active participation of the teachers and learners and not a mere display of form and rules. There are accurate sentence patterns in the textbook, and it is more concerned with the form of the language.
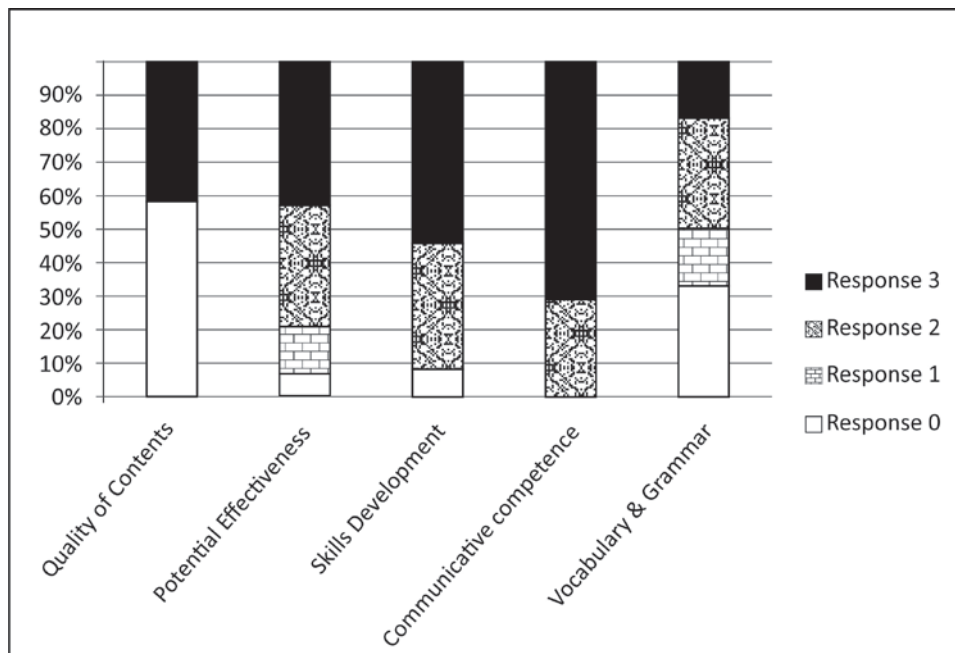
Figure 1 *Comparison of characteristics of grade VIII English lagnuage texbook*

Comparison of the above-mentioned characteristics of grade VIII English language textbook is presented in figure 1. The key of responses as reflected in the figure are presented like a 4point Likert scale, that is response 0 implies to a great extent, response 1 = to some extent, response 2 = to a limited extent, and response 3= not at all. More than half of the textbook activities satisfy the researcher to a great extent, where as some activities do not comply with the quality of content. Only seven percent of the activities are potentially effective to a great extent and can be helpful for effective foreign language acquisition and development of oral communicative competence in Pakistan at grade VIII level.

Skills development category also reflects the need to improve the quality of the activities presented in the textbook. In terms of developing oral communicative competence, the textbook is helpful only to a limited extent. Regarding, vocabulary and grammar activities, they are also not potentially helpful in developing oral communicative competence.

Table 6

Students' oral performance response as observed in four schools

School 1-4	Vocabulary	Grammar	Fluency	Communication	Pronunciation
Level 1 Novice	Use only basic expressions/voc. ✓-✓-✓	Uses basic structures with frequent errors	Hesitates too often ✓-✓	Purpose is not clear, needs a lot of help communicating ✓-✓	Frequent pronunciation errors ✓-✓
Level 2 Developing	Uses limited expressions/voc. ✓	Uses variety of structures with some errors ✓-✓	Speaks with some hesitations which often interferes with communication ✓	Tries to communicate appropriately ✓	Some pronunciation errors ✓
Level 3 Competent	Variety of expression/voc. with some errors	Variety of structures with no errors ✓-✓	Speaks with some hesitation but does not interfere with communication ✓	Generally, response appropriately and keep trying to develop the interaction ✓	Accurate pronunciation ✓

Classroom observation results as conducted in 4 schools in Lahore are shown in table 6. Learners' vocabulary in 3 schools was at a basic level, none of the learner could express competence in vocabulary, however, learners' grammatical skills and their application was comparatively better than vocabulary. Grade VIII learners do not possess the required level of fluency while speaking; in one school their fluency was developing while at another school learners were able to speak without any break in communication.

Only at one school learners were observed to communicate appropriately. Learners' competence level in communication reached level three. For pronunciation, learners at two schools made frequent errors while speaking, at another school pronunciation was still in the process of being developed, this was only one out of four schools where learners could accurately pronounce the words.

Discussion

The findings of the class observations supported and strengthened the findings of content analysis. Findings of the research questions reveal that there are several factors contributing to students' poor performance in English language at grade VIII level in public sector schools across the province of Punjab.

Naseem, Shah, and Tabassum, (2015) evaluated English language textbook for grade 9 prescribed by Punjab Textbook Board and reported that the textbook did not fulfill the general objectives of the target language learning. There is no balanced integration of the 4 skills development. Fatima, Kazim and Sultan (2015) evaluated English language textbook at grade 7 and 8 level for private sector schools and revealed that the basic skills are not emphasized equally.

Aftab (2012) also evaluated different English language textbooks taught at private and public schools at grade 6level. Her research findings were similar to what the present study has discovered in the textbook for developing oral communicative competence. Although, Aftab's (2012) research did not primarily focus on communicative competence or oral communicative competence, her findings do indicate that the English language textbook does lack the depth required to develop four language skills.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Post- use evaluation of the textbook was attempted to measure the effectiveness of the under-focus textbook. The content of the textbook is in alignment with the curriculum, and to some extent it fulfills the objective of the National Curriculum, 2006, yet in terms of developing oral communicative competence, the textbook has to focus on meaningful activities in order to cater to the diverse language learning needs of the learners. There is an over emphasis on structure and form through grammar-based activities rather than developing the integrated four language skills which are crucial for developing oral communicative competence.

For the development of oral communicative competence speaking and listening skills are to be given equal importance. These skills are to be formally assessed in the local examination system. Learners, instead of imitating the fixed patterns are required to be encouraged to experiment with the language in real life like contexts.

Oral communication is considered as one important component of language learning; in Pakistani EFL contexts, it is an area which requires special attention of the concerned authorities. It is the responsibility of all the stake holders to promote the target language practice at all levels, starting with grade I and moving on to grade VIII within the classroom. Adequate language input coupled with speech production activities can gradually enable the learners to attain the required level of proficiency as stated in National Curriculum, 2006.

Authentic oral texts like news bulletin, movie excerpts and advertisements can be incorporated in to the textbook for providing opportunities to the learners to practice language. Textbook is to provide adequate visual materials, such as CDs, flash cards, posters, video cassettes to help learners to learn English language in a motivating atmosphere.

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