

An analysis on the Effectiveness of English for Today in Secondary Level Education in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT: In Bangladesh, the state-sponsored National Textbook and Curriculum Board (NCTB) has been developing textbooks for primary to intermediate levels since its inception in 1983. Its goal is to create and reform a national curriculum that will prepare the next generation of leaders and accurately point them. The NCTB updated the English for Today textbook series in 2013 to reflect the recommendations made in the National Education Policy (NEP, 2010) and National Curriculum (NC, 2012). The paper aims to evaluate the effectiveness of English for Today (EFT) as it claims to enable learners to be competent in the communicative language, the ELT material in schools and madrasas in Bangladesh. This research is solely drawn upon English Paper 1; hence, it does not relate to English Paper 2. At the pre-intermediate level, it is expected that the learners will be able to communicate competently in real-life situations. Students are expected to acquire competence in all four language skills, i.e., Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. However, literature and study indicate that the goal of the textbook developed by the NCTB to teach communicative English did not achieve. The study reveals that all four skills are not equally emphasized giving extended importance to reading and writing. In addition, poor illustration, fragile paper quality, overlooking three levels of reading comprehension and no vocabulary list at the end of the book are few notable drawbacks. The study suggests that the textbook needs to be revised and redesigned in order to meet learners' linguistic and communicative needs. Along with analyzing the book, data has been gathered from various literature and teachers from different institutes in Sylhet with a semi-structured questionnaire.

Key words: National Curriculum, competence, language skills, NCTB, textbook

I. INTRODUCTION

English is an international language, and it is taught and studied widely across the world (Marlina et al., 2018). As a developing nation, Bangladesh accepted the trend of developing English as a lingua franca (Arafat et al, 2020) to access education, international trade, scientific research and innovation. Farooqui (2014) states that English language proficiency is regarded as a sign of success in Bangladesh. It shows a commitment towards developing competence in English and therefore, introduced several language teaching methods in the curriculum. The latest development in teaching English in Bangladesh for students in higher secondary school is the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), introduced in 2001 (Roy, 2016). The Bangladesh National Curriculum aims to develop learners' communicative competence by exposing them to textbooks designed based on the CLT approaches. Introducing CLT method in the curriculum was a significant breakthrough in Bangladesh. However, Islam (2019) argues that even after implementing CLT in the national curriculum in Bangladesh decades earlier, learners' ability to communicate in English is still disappointing.

Textbook plays a significant role in language teaching and learning a second language. Saud (2022) argues that textbooks serve as the primary means of introducing new languages to students, and the demands placed on teachers regarding these resources are relatively comparable. It leaves a significant impact on teaching and learning in several ways. The themes and ideas that are taught in the classroom, as well as how they are presented to students, are primarily determined by the textbooks (Stern and Roseman 2004, p. 539). Textbooks play a highly vital role in the field of language teaching and learning. While Gak (2011) defined the textbook as one of the many resources that enables teachers to deliver quality instruction. Poljak (1983) considered the textbook to be the fundamental teaching and learning material that allows students to acquire the necessary knowledge, develop critical, creative, and dialectical thinking, and develop their mental skills.

Deuri (2012) identifies the textbook as one of the most critical instruments in the arsenal of a language instructor, especially one teaching a foreign language. He further adds that without a textbook, a language can

be learned, although this could lead to repetitions that are not necessary. Without a textbook, there could be essential omissions while teaching a language. Lots of time and energy would be wasted. Less planning will go into the progress. A textbook can be a helpful tool for the teacher and the student if it is planned and followed properly.

The secondary curriculum has been changed to emphasize studying English as an international language for communicating locally and worldwide, following the objectives set forth by the National Education Policy of 2010. The key to achieving the goal should be the textbook used to teach English in schools. In order to assist students in being proficient in all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—the English For Today textbooks have been developed. According to Bahar et al. (2013), curriculum development and the creation of instructional materials both require an accurate appraisal of a textbook.

Importance of learning English:

It is impossible to downplay or disregard the significance of English (Nishanthi 2018, Ilyosovna 2020). Imam (2005) argues that even factory workers in Bangladesh who make less than the minimum wage now need to know a little bit of English because that is the language used on labels and packaging for products. Since English is the most commonly spoken language, its value cannot be downplayed or overlooked. English is the official language in 53 nations and is spoken by almost 400 million people worldwide. One in every four people speaks English (British Council, 2013), making it the most widely spoken language in the world. According to a 2012 poll by the Economist Intelligence Unit, nearly 70% of CEOs believe that their employees will need English proficiency to realize business expansion objectives, and 25% believe that more than 50% of their workforce as a whole will require it (British Council, 2013).

Language impacts how people construct their knowledge, values, and social realities (cf. Ott 2014, p. 254). Thus, a critical area of textbook research that spans many scientific disciplines, including linguistics (Ott 2014), language studies (Hadley 2013) and education (Reichenberg 2013), is how language in textbooks may affect students' knowledge construction. English is a language that increases chances of getting an excellent job in multinational companies within the home country and abroad. British council predicts that by 2020, two billion people will be using English – or will learn to use it. English is the dominant business language. It is almost necessary for us to speak English if we want to access the global workforce. Again, learning English gives access to the internet and entertainment.

For a developing nation like Bangladesh, studying English as a second language is absolutely essential in the twenty-first century (Arafat et al, 2020). Significantly, the importance of English as a dominant language has been acknowledged since the inception of Bangladesh in 1971. Therefore, English has been included in the national curriculum aiming to educate the country to leverage strength and capacity to make a mark on the global market economy (Arafat et al, 2020). In the year 1998-1999, the much-needed development has brought and made it compulsory for students to speak English in real life by introducing the Communicative Approach or the CLT. Numerous studies showed that even though English has been taught in Bangladeshi schools for ten years, most pupils still struggle to communicate well orally and find it challenging to handle in day-to-day settings (Podder, 2013). Arafat et al, (2020) argue that despite the fact, the outlook for English language instruction and learning in this place is still bleak.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The current curriculum was created in 2012, and modifications were planned to begin in 2017 but were not finished in time. The English for Today textbook series was updated by Bangladesh's National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) in the academic year 2013 to reflect the recommendations made in the National Education Policy (NEP, 2010) and National Curriculum (NC, 2012). Systematic reviews and critical evaluation of the ELT textbook series' pedagogical value and limitations have been taken into judgement ever since they were first released and implemented in language classrooms. Islam et al. (2021) have gone through acritical evaluation to learn its effectiveness and noted some strengths and weaknesses of the textbook. The diverse contents and the writers' consciousness of "global subjectivity" are exceptionally remarkable (Khan & Rahaman, 2019, p.169) as the strength. Islam et al. (2021) on the other hand, noted the absence of listening skills, inadequate communicative tasks and activities, excessive use of conventional assessment techniques, and subpar illustrations and imagery as the weakness of the book.

EFT is one of the most crucial resources for secondary-level students, according to Hossain (2010), because this level is vital for pupils to advance their abilities. Uddin (2021) suggests sincere attention to the curriculum and materials developers along with acknowledging the textbook's rewarding features. According to him, to enhance learning outcomes and satisfy curriculum goals, the textbook should go through further modifications both internally and externally.

Along with NCTB, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) also contributed to the textbook formation. For the benefit of the students, these materials were organized according

to the four fundamental language skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In addition, these books cover a wide range of topics from both national and international viewpoints that are crucial to learners from a thematic, cultural, and linguistic perspective (Oishi, 2020). Language proficiency was frequently linked with adequate grammatical components so that the ideas taught and learnt in the classroom may be easily applied in real life. The reality is different from this hypothetical use of a single book across the nation. Students from rural areas cannot access guidebooks and question banks, whereas students from urban areas are more drawn to them. In mainstream schools and colleges in Bangladesh, English is a compulsory subject. Despite this, most students lack sufficient English proficiency, particularly in speaking. In “English for Today,” a book from the NCTB, the authors try to inspire both teachers and students to practice speaking. The core objective of the textbook is to assist students in developing their English communication skills. Nevertheless, it is gloomy that despite all efforts, achievement is still a long way off. The difficulties in teaching and learning spoken English in Bangladesh are due to a lack of logistical and administrative facilities, proper teaching and learning strategies, and a lack of a supporting environment (Kabir 2014).

Qualities of a good English text book:

The purpose of modern textbooks is to assist students learn competences, abilities, and “powerful knowledge” (Young, 2011), such as fundamental scientific ideas. According to Hossain (2009), most people practice two or more skills simultaneously. He argues that a textbook is a resource that allows students to practice two or more skills simultaneously. A perfect textbook contains extra practice activities for learners to work on their own skills. A book should be Informative (informing the learner about the target language), Instructional (guiding the learner in practising the language) and Eliciting (encouraging the learner to use the language). Agarwal et al. (2012) argues that the educational input that is most consistently linked to improvements in student learning is textbooks. Textbooks are the main means through which topic information is conveyed to students, particularly in developing nations, and teachers base their lesson plans on the material provided in textbooks.

Textbooks play a significant role in determining both the subjects and concepts that are taught in the classroom and how they are conveyed to students (Stern and Roseman 2004, p. 539). Thus, textbooks have a wide range of educational and pedagogical effects. According to Moulton (1997) and Kira and Bukagile (2013), each textbook should have these three qualities. First, the content: a textbook should include all themes, be well-illustrated, free of factual inaccuracies, and avoid promoting unfavorable societal attitudes and values. Second, the pedagogy: a textbook should consist of engaging, gender-neutral learning and teaching activities that foster socialization, self-assurance, and cognitive abilities. The third factor is clarity and design: a textbook should have clear language and a pleasing layout.

A book should be linked to the curriculum. It should be authentic in terms of text and task. A good book should encourage learners to develop learning skills and motivate them to apply their skill to the world beyond the classroom. A qualified book has to fix objectives. Objectives describe what learners will be able to do after finishing a book. The textbook aims at teaching the materials that have to be taught to the class. For example, if a book’s objective is to make the students able to read English, there will be several passages in English that students have to read and understand.

Vocabulary knowledge is associated with language learning. Alqahtani (2015) argued that vocabulary is essential for successful foreign language use. Without a good command of vocabulary, a language learner will not be able to use the structures and functions they may have learned for comprehensible communication. Vocabulary is an essential part of writing skills as described by Nation (Mehrin, 2005). In contrast, Cambridge Dictionary defines vocabulary as all words that a person knows and uses.

An excellent English textbook should focus on grammatical structures. According to Neuleib, grammar is an integral part of a language used by all native speakers of a language (Hartwell, 1985). It is necessary that students are introduced to new structures, which help them to cope with advanced English. According to Harmer (2001), a definition explains how words can take on different forms and be joined to construct sentences in that language. These ways are the grammar rules, which are fundamental components of every language and integral to writing (Hartwell, 1985).

A well-planned English textbook should be fully illustrated. Illustration means providing an example either in writing or in picture form. An illustration is a decoration, interpretation or visual explanation of a text. So, it is helpful for students to understand the lesson better. Wahab (2013) asserts that practical textbook illustrations consist of transparent headers and sub-heading, appealing, imaginative, culturally sensitive, valuable images, proper font size and type, quality paper, binding, and printing. In terms of the pictures and print quality, the textbook is of subpar quality.

In language teaching, the new structures and words should be repeated. Such repetitions should be properly spaced to firmly fix the structures and words in the students’ minds. Some enlightened teachers and meteorologists suggest that a new linguistic item should be repeated at least four times in the first lesson in

which it has been introduced for the first time and about ten times in the subsequent lesson. Thus, it will be easy for the students to memorize new structures and words.

National Curriculum of English (classes 9-10)

Since 1990, Bangladesh has been in the process of a change in the teaching and learning of English. Considering the learning need traditional grammar-translation method is replaced by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). A communicative curriculum for the secondary level was introduced in 1996. And since then, the need for a change in methodology contents and attitudes in teaching and learning English has been growing increasingly urgent. Communication in English has become a crying need.

The curriculum focuses on teaching English as a skill-based subject so that learners can use English in real life. The National Education Policy 2010 also emphasizes the learning English for communication purpose. This curriculum suggests CLT approach that gives important on all the four language skills. CLT approach advocates “learning by doing” and proposes that grammar is not to be taught explicitly instead, the structural and functional aspects should be presented in a systematic and graded way within contexts. New vocabulary should be introduced at every class. However, vocabulary taught in the previous classes may be repeated. This curriculum considers the importance of developing young learners as competent human resources for a digital Bangladesh and a global world.

The language skills practice activities based on the text materials have to be carried out effectively, keeping in mind the following principles:

- i. All the four basic language skills would be practiced in class.
- ii. Skills should be practised in an integrated manner, not in isolation.
- iii. Skills practice should be done in meaningful contexts, for example, practice in language use should go beyond the textbook and include real-life situations.
- iv. Interactive activities should be carried out between teachers and students and, more importantly between students and students.
- v. There will be supplementary reading materials to develop learners’ reading skills.
- vi. Grammatical elements will be integrated into the text materials.
- vii. With a view to reinforcing learners’ proper use of language, communicative English grammar will be taught simultaneously.

Objectives of Curriculum

The preface of the textbook clearly highlights the intentions of the book. It says, “The English For Today textbooks have been developed to help students attain competency in all four language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing” (see preface).

1. To acquire competence in all four language skills, i.e., Listening, Speaking, Reading and writing.
2. To use the competence for effective communication in real-life situations at the pre-intermediate level.
3. To acquire the necessary grammar competence in the English language.
4. To develop creativity and critical thinking through the English language.
5. To become independent learners of English by using reference skills.
6. To use language skills for utilizing information technology.
7. To use literary pieces in English for enjoyment and language learning.
8. To be skilled in human resources by using English language skills.

Curriculum Matrix

Assessment:

Students’ learning activity will be assessed through class work, continuous assessment, terminal/public exams using teacher-prepared or centrally prepared tools. It is noted that test tools will be based on all the learning domains where necessary.

Listening:

Students’ ability to listen and understand English with acceptable pronunciation (such as sound, stress and intonation through student-student, student-teacher and student-technology interaction) will be assessed.

Test items:

True / False, MCQ, gap filling, listing.

Speaking:

Students’ ability to speak acceptable English with understandable pronunciation (such as sound, stress and interaction through student-student and student-teacher) will be assessed.

Test items:

Role play, acting out, dialogues, conversations, debates, describing, narrating

Reading:

Students' ability to read text and authentic materials of appropriate level for comprehension and higher order thinking will be assessed

Test items:

MCQ, answering questions (open and close-ended questions), gap filling with and/or without clues, matching, substitution tables, information transfer, flow chart, rearranging, summarizing.

Writing:

Students' ability to write correct English of an appropriate level for expressing ideas, thoughts, feelings, and emotions will be assessed.

Test items:

Asking and answering, completion, dialogue, postcard, formal/informal letters, emails, CV, application, paragraph, poster and report writing.

Drawbacks and Suggestions:

Identifying the drawbacks and loopholes is necessary to make the text more effective in finding practical solutions. Based on their classroom experiences, Bangladeshi teachers are significant stakeholders and have expressed noticeable concerns about the textbook design's efficacy (Hani & Siddika, 2018).

Poor illustration

According to Morgan (2014), well-designed textbooks have the potential to increase learning's enjoyment, durability, and significance. They may also actively engage learners' cognition in a variety of ways, including through mechanisms like verbal reasoning, visual processing, analytical thinking, and questioning and testing hypotheses. To help students grasp the material, visuals are used throughout the textbook. However, Khan & Rahaman (2019) argues that the black-and-white, blurry photos featured in the textbook prevent them from having much of an impression on the students. In order to excite and encourage students to learn both inside and outside the classroom, better printing standards and appealing pictures are essential. According to McGrath (2002), illustrious textbooks also aid students in maintaining their interest and attention while reading the textbook.

In addition, the textbook was printed on subpar paper, letting the textbook get torn and damaged in less than two years. The cover art is shoddy and overly superficial. The textbook is of sub-standard quality Islam et al. (2021) in terms of illustrations and print quality. The authority should be more vigilant to improve the quality of the paper and illustration to draw students' attention.

Listening and speaking are less emphasized

Though the purpose of higher secondary curriculum states clearly that after successfully completing it, students will be competent in four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, listening is one such skill which received less importance among those four skills, putting maximum importance on the text has emphasized reading and writing skills more than the other two skills. Uddin (2021) and Islam et al. (2021) argue that listening skills have received less attention than other skills. The textbook lacks a listening activity explicitly focusing on various macro- or micro-skills.

The textbook has shown a pedagogical lacking of giving adequate importance to speaking skills. The majority of the speaking opportunities for pupils are reserved for warm-up exercises. Only a few speaking exercises are included in some sessions, and according to Islam et al. (2021) different macro- or micro-skills are not given enough emphasis. Speaking is limited in a few dialogues, whereas no explicit instruction is made to encourage learners to speak in English. More exercises on real-world language skills, including situational conversations in several contexts, such as calling to make bus bookings, hotel reservations, restaurant orders, and bank account openings, might be included in the book.

The more they listen, the more they will be able to speak. If they practice their speaking skill with their teacher and classmates, in future, they will be able to speak outside of the class with anyone without hesitation. Thus, another aim of the curriculum will be fulfilled: to use the competence for effective communication in real-life situations at the pre-intermediate level.

No vocabulary list is included at the end

The vocabulary and grammar topics included in the book have been downplayed by the authors. No lesson or unit is expressly intended to teach vocabulary, and no unit objectives reference having an operational command of grammar (Uddin, 2021). The fact that secondary school students study a separate book on grammar and composition can be used to justify omitting the book's grammatical focus. However, it is not acceptable to forgo explicit vocabulary learning activities. Additionally, there does not appear to have been any hierarchy in the way that lexical elements were distributed across the text in terms of range, frequency, and familiarity.

In addition, there are not vocabulary lists in this book. Words which can be predicted that students cannot understand the meaning, should be added in each lesson. Then it will be helpful for the students to understand the meaning of the lesson. Furthermore, it will enrich students' vocabulary level. Thus, students' writing skills will develop alongside improving the vocabulary stock. When speaking, they will be able to use new words to level up their speaking skill.

Overlooked Three Levels of Reading Comprehension

Reading is challenging to learn because so many variables are involved. One way to divide the reading challenge is to consider three reading levels. According to Poddar (2014), teaching English is run by the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) overlooking NCTB-prescribed three levels of reading comprehension while the teachers and students did not clearly understand English reading skills. He also notes the inclusion of seen passages, insufficient training of teachers, and lack of monitoring and supervision from the education authority. Like in other nations (Balfakeh, 2009; Marland, 2003), Bangladeshi teachers had a wrong idea of assessment when it came to reading (Balfakeh, 2009).

Though the reading and writing skills got maximum importance in the textbook, it is suffering from the pedagogical issue. Even though the themes of reading passages have been arranged according to a conceptual continuum from the learner's more acquainted to less familiar areas, no principle for the sections has been stated clearly in the textbook. By planning thorough training for teachers in reading instruction and assessment, managing large classes, and integrating monitoring and constructive feedback, the stated obstacles can be reduced to a minimum.

Grammatical items are missing

Students in high school generally deal with challenging writing assignments. The vocabulary and grammar complexity of the exam are the main issues they face. Uddin (2021) argues there does not appear to have been any hierarchy in the way linguistic elements were distributed across the text in terms of range, frequency, and familiarity. Grammatical terms can be added in each unit. It will be helpful for the students letting them learn all the necessary grammatical terms they need to advance (Binoy et al. 2016). And when they answer the questions and write paragraphs, compositions, dialogues etc., their writing will be grammatically correct. Thus, their writing skill will improve gradually.

No extra practice at home

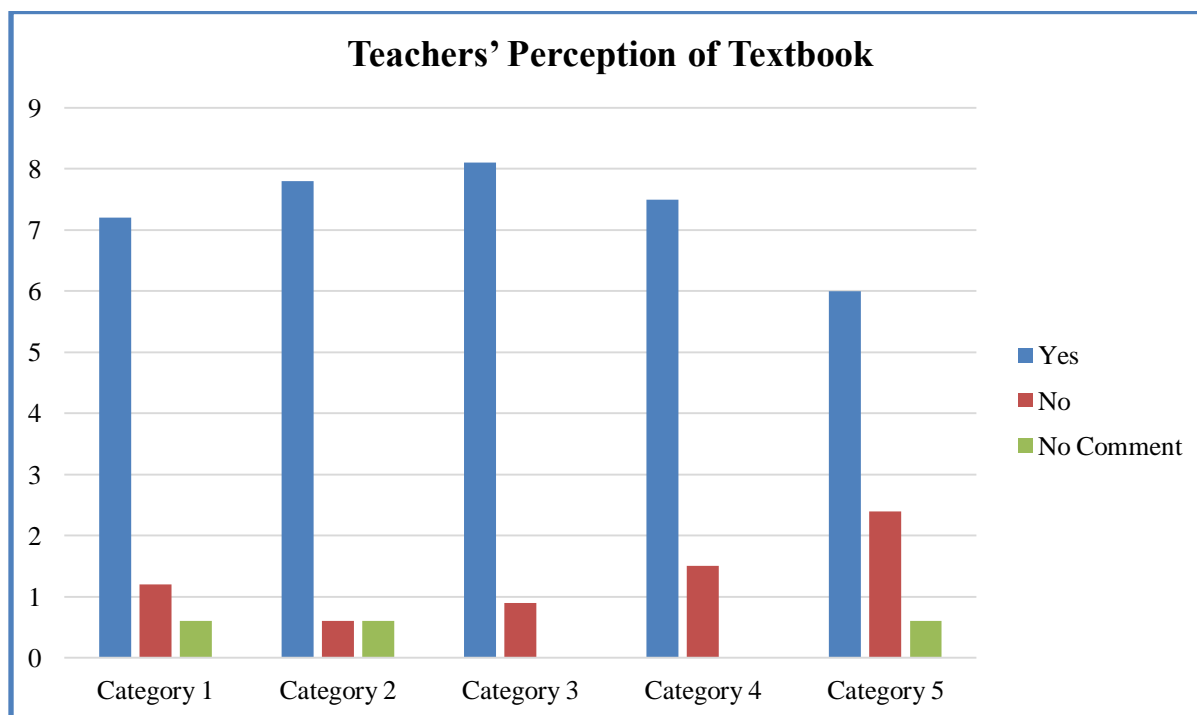
The book is found to be designed exclusively for classroom study lacking extra practice activities for learners to work on their own time. Although the teacher assigns homework for each lesson, the book itself directs nothing to do at home, limiting the book in the classroom. Though urban students with plenty of opportunities to have a private tutor can manage to study, this aspect is not convenient for rural students as they do not find proper tuition and qualified teachers there.

No answer is provided at the end of the book

This book can be designed as a workbook that learners can write; at the back of the book, an answer key should be provided to give feedback to the learners. Thus, students do not have to rely on any guidebooks. Though in writing a paragraph, dialogues etc. items it is not possible to give feedback, in listening, reading and other kinds of writing items' answers or feedback can be given at the back of the book. It will be helpful for the students.

Teachers' interview:

Teachers' interview is one tool that helps to draw a logical conclusion from the study. Since teachers' opinions of the textbook significantly affect how well students learn English using it, (Rabbi et al., 2021), it is crucial to understand what they think of it. We asked them to share their expertise with the following aspects to get their opinion. We asked some 30 teachers randomly selected from different institutes in Sylhet and its surroundings.



As the chart indicates, the vast majority of the participants agreed with the queries asked by the interviewers. They responded in yes/no/no comment options.

It is found that almost everyone was satisfied with this book's presentation of four essential skills and was optimistic about the future. According to them, it is a praiseworthy action towards teaching and learning English. Only four participants disagreed with the first query, while two declined to comment.

According to most respondents, the instructions for classroom activities are enough, and the textbook plays a crucial role in teaching and learning English. However, they think the textbook requires to go through some revisions and reformations. Finally, nearly one-third of them believe that the textbook does not align with the national curriculum goals.

III. CONCLUSION:

Mahmood (2009) argues that curriculum changes result from advances in science and technology as well as other global developments. These changes have had an impact on the textbooks' presentation as well as their substance. The textbook is the primary educational tool that has always been well-liked globally.

The findings indicate a mismatch between the objectives of the National Curriculum and the contents presentation of this book. The book is more focused on reading and writing than listening and speaking. Thus, the first objective of the National Curriculum of attaining all four language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing, remained unfulfilled.

In addition, even sometimes instructions for some tasks are not given properly. This is confusing for the students. The main point of these objectives is language skills. But there is no guarantee that students can communicate in English after finishing this book. In communication, listening and speaking skills are very important. These two skills are not given priority in this book. In each lesson, students have to read passages and answer the questions. Thus, students' communication skills will not develop.

There should be a balance among the four skills or listening and speaking skills should give more importance. Students must learn English as a language, not as a subject. In addition, a few creative writing tasks inspire students to write from their own thoughts and experiences. We have suggested more creative writing so students will stop memorizing. And we also have suggested a vocabulary list in every lesson. A vocabulary list will help students understand the lesson's passage or story.

Finally, this book should be more colourful and illustrated. Students will find it more interesting if the illustrations can draw learners' attention. If this book is redesigned based on the National Curriculum's objectives, it will be a perfect fit for English learners. Learners' need is to be able to communicate in English, so this book should fulfil learners' needs. Except for some drawbacks, it is evident that the book makes an excellent attempt to accomplish the National Curriculum's objectives.

Appendix 1

- Are the skills presented in the book enough to be proficient in the target language?
- Are there enough instructions for classroom activities?
- Is the book playing a vital role in English language learning?
- Should the textbook get revised and reformed?
- Does the textbook conform to the aim of the National Curriculum?

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