

An Evaluation of the First Year BA Compulsory English Coursebook at Sardar Patel University



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ABSTRACT

This article evaluates the Compulsory English coursebook prescribed for the First Year BA students at Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar (Gujarat). It is based on a survey.

Keywords: *Coursebook evaluation; Instructional Materials; Evaluation of materials.*

Introduction

As in the other states of India, learning English is increasingly becoming the order of the day in Gujarat. When the state of Gujarat was formed in 1960, English had already consolidated its position in school and university education in India. However, in Gujarat, English was introduced from standard V on a voluntary basis and it was an optional subject in class X. At the higher secondary level, English was compulsory only for the Science Stream students; it was not compulsory for the Arts Stream. The Government of Gujarat has made English a compulsory subject at the secondary level since the academic year 2006-07 and at the higher secondary level since 2008-09. This means that now English is a compulsory subject at the secondary and higher secondary levels. At the tertiary level, English was not a compulsory subject for the B.A students earlier in some universities in Gujarat, but from 2010-11 it has been

taught as a compulsory subject in all the universities. In the colleges offering the B.A. programme, there has been a great increase in the number of students who opt for English as the main subject.

Programmes like SCOPE (Society for Creation of Opportunities through Proficiency in English), DELL (Digital English Language Laboratory), and KMPF (Knowledge Management Programme for Faculty) by the Government of Gujarat can be considered to be significant landmarks in the history of English language teaching in Gujarat. SCOPE is a government initiative in collaboration with Cambridge University. The aim of this programme is to make the youth of the state proficient in English and thereby to open up a whole new spectrum of job opportunities for them. DELL is also an English Language Proficiency Enhancement initiative conceived, funded and launched by the Government of Gujarat. Under this project,

fully computerized English Language Laboratories are established in the institutions imparting higher education across Gujarat. The main thrust of these labs is functional English rather than literary English, so that the major gap between English proficiency and employability is bridged.

Today the Gujarati learner is aware of the importance of English and learns it for its practical value in life. He is aware of the important role English plays in the world today and has a highly positive attitude towards English. This is the reason why in Gujarat, in primary education, enrolment for the vernacular medium stream has seen a fall in number in favour of English medium schools. Recently, a group of renowned Gujarati writers and scholars started a 'Save Gujarati Language' campaign. It is obvious that the growing influence of English has adversely affected the status of the mother tongue in the state.

Importance of a Coursebook

Course books play a significant role in foreign/second language teaching, especially in India. They are not simply everyday tools of language teachers; they are an embodiment of the aims and methods of the particular teaching/learning situation. In the words of Cunningsworth (1995, p. 7), a coursebook is "a resource in achieving aims and objectives that have already been set in terms of learner needs." Through evaluation, we can assess whether the coursebook is the most appropriate for the target learners at various levels and in various teaching-learning settings.

According to Sheldon (1988), such evaluation assists teachers in making optimum use of the strengths of a book and recognizing the shortcomings of certain exercises, tasks and even entire texts.

Analysis of the Coursebook

The coursebook prescribed for the First Year BA students by Sardar Patel University (Mishra, et al., 1999) has been divided into ten units. Apart from these sections there is an introduction to the book, which outlines the objectives of the book and refers to the theme, exercises and language skills to be taught with the help of the book. The introduction also points out the special care that has been taken to make the textbook interesting for the young learners by presenting lessons that describe a variety of experiences human beings have had in their encounter with the world. But it is silent on the methodology that should be adopted by the teacher while using the textbook.

The ten units of the book consist of contemporary texts taken from a variety of sources including fiction (literary texts), newspaper/magazine articles (mass media), letters, advertisements and other authentic materials. Each unit presents two texts on one theme so that learners are exposed to different functions of language. A variety of subjects have been dealt with: sports, use of technology, environment, science, education, advertising, women and struggle for freedom. Each article is about 1000 words in length. Out of the ten units, only four units have been prescribed by the syllabus. At the end of each chapter

beginning with glossary and vocabulary tasks, there are exercises in grammar emerging from the text (and usually prescribed at the UG level), comprehension exercises, extension activities and general writing practice.

The evaluation checklists presented by different writers (Sheldon, 1988; Cunningsworth, 1995; Ur, 1996; McGrath, 2002; McDonough & Shaw 2003) for teachers and students provide criteria for detailed analysis of the materials. Experts in curriculum development and syllabus design have put emphasis on the importance of needs analysis for language teaching (see Clark, 1987; Nunan, 1988; Johnson, 1989). The researcher undertook this study to analyze and evaluate the English coursebook for the first year BA students in terms of appropriateness, language, communicative skills, language learning skills, activities, exercises included in the coursebook, as well as its merits and demerits.

Data Collection Tools and Procedure

The teacher is considered to be initiator, mediator, facilitator and promoter of language learning. His is a pivotal role in the language classroom. Therefore, it was decided to design a questionnaire to elicit the views of the teachers of English from different colleges of Sardar Patel University on the compulsory English coursebook prescribed by the University.

McGrath (2002) discusses three different types of material evaluation: *pre-use evaluation*, *in-use evaluation* and *post-use evaluation*, and emphasizes the importance

of in-use evaluation. Hence, the questionnaire was administered to the teachers who were actually involved in teaching Compulsory English to the First Year BA students in Sardar Patel University.

Sample

Since Sardar Patel University (Vallabh Vidhyanagar) is relatively a small university, all the teachers of English working at the undergraduate level were taken into consideration for the collection of data. First, a pilot study was conducted and necessary changes were made in the questionnaire (See the **Appendix** for the final version).

The subjects, as mentioned earlier, were teachers of English belonging to the colleges affiliated to Sardar Patel University. It was a heterogeneous group drawn from both sexes with teaching experience ranging from 1 year to 19 years. The students' feedback was not sought owing to the following reasons:

- As they were students of the first year B.A., they were not familiar with this type of research. The researcher met several students informally but they could not say more than 'yes' or 'no'.
- A majority of them had recently passed their Class XII exam where centrally designed textbooks were prescribed and taught. So, the students were not able to understand the purpose of the present study.

Apart from using the questionnaire, the researcher also interviewed the teachers to raise certain issues and seek specific information.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised thirty-two questions: 3 in the multiple-choice format, 26 asking for Yes/No responses and 3 open-ended questions giving space for the respondents to write down their opinions. Questions 1-15 and 30 sought to elicit the teachers' opinion on the English coursebook, questions 16-19 on the exercises given in the coursebook, questions 20-22 on the vocabulary included in the coursebook, questions 23-27 on the tasks/activities, questions 28-29 on the companion workbook if any, and the last two questions (i.e., 31-32) open-ended questions aimed at eliciting the teachers' opinions on the merits and limitations of the coursebook as well as their suggestions for additions and deletions to it (See Appendix).

Analysis of Questionnaire Responses

The first part of the questionnaire obtained the teacher's profile. It included information such as the name of the teacher, the name of the institution he/she worked in, his/her educational qualification and teaching experience. All the teachers were post-graduates in English. Some had an M. Phil. degree, while a few of them had a Ph.D. The second part contained the questionnaire proper. The responses were thoroughly analysed and on the basis of the analysis the researcher could come to certain findings and conclusions.

Major Findings of the Study

The significant findings which have emerged from the investigation conducted by the researcher are as follows:

- (i) The majority of teachers firmly believed that a coursebook must be based on the needs of the students. Their needs should be taken into account while designing the course. Getting a good job is one of the major needs of the students nowadays. This coursebook dealt with only three skills – reading, writing and listening – ignoring the speaking skill. If the students were not trained in all the four skills, it would be very difficult for them to get a good job in these competitive days.
- (ii) A large number of teachers felt that the contents of the coursebook were suitable to fulfill the objectives of the syllabi as the tasks and activities given in the coursebook were carefully prepared, catering to the needs of the students.
- (iii) According to them, the first year students found the materials interesting. Students could learn fast if the materials were interesting and appropriate for the students. The materials prescribed for the first year students were well balanced.
- (iv) They found the rubrics very lucid and clear to the students well supported by examples.
- (v) The course materials had potential to involve both learners and teacher. At many points teaching techniques such as group work and pair work were also given to facilitate the teaching of English.
- (vi) The materials in the coursebook were sufficient for the learners and

this level, as they provided for revision and drilling, and allowed the students to grow independently.

- (vii) The teachers were satisfied with the kind of exercises given in the textbook. They were of varying difficulty level to suit different students. The exercises given at the end of each chapter in the textbook were relevant and useful.
- (viii) All the tasks/activities had been carefully selected and presented in the coursebook, so the teachers did not feel the need to exclude any of the tasks/activities from the coursebook.
- (ix) The types of tasks/ activities given in the coursebook were as follows:
- Tasks/activities based on the chapters
 - Tasks/activities based on vocabulary and language items
 - Tasks/activities based on the grammar items.
- (x) The coursebook contained a glossary which explained all the words that the students might find difficult to understand.
- (xi) Almost all the teachers believed that the tasks/activities given in the materials promoted learners' language development.
- (xii) They also realized that the students required the help of their teacher so far as the tasks/activities were concerned.
- (xiii) The materials prescribed could be covered within the stipulated time.
- (xiv) The other merits of the coursebook,

as mentioned by the teachers, were:

- (a) It was handy and well designed.
 - (b) It was moderately priced and easily available in the market.
 - (c) It provided interesting materials on different subjects.
 - (d) It helped students develop their linguistic competence.
- (xv) The coursebook included articles written by well-known writers and thus they were authentic materials. However, the teachers felt that the exercises were contrived. They were intended specifically for teaching purpose.
- (xvi) The teachers in all the colleges agreed that their coursebook was appropriate for their learners' background. The prescribed textbooks corresponded to the textbook of the immediately preceding level, which was Standard XII.
- (xvii) The coursebook included chapters written by writers from different countries. As such, it could be said that different and appropriate cultural and social environments had been catered for, in terms of the topics/ situations presented.
- (xviii) The coursebook prescribed was the most attractive of all the textbooks in the university so far as its layout, design and organization of material were concerned. It was easy to use and successful in their teaching situations, in terms of time, effort and money.

- (xix) The exercises given in the textbook at the end of each chapter provided the teacher some guidelines for teaching different skills.

Limitations of the Coursebook

- (i) The coursebook included only essays. It did not include stories, poems, drama and dialogue.
- (ii) The coursebook failed to provide the right degree of challenge as the chapters and essays were not graded properly.

Suggestions

- (i) The teachers felt that the following elements should be added to the coursebook:
- (a) Exercises on listening skill;
 - (b) A chapter giving information about e-mails and blogs;
 - (c) A chapter related to our festivals;
 - (d) Some poems and short stories;
 - (e) One or two lengthy chapters;
 - (f) Writing skills like dialogue writing;
 - (g) The use of language lab.
- (ii) The teachers felt that the following elements should be deleted from the coursebook:
- (a) Some very easy chapters like 'Cleaner Cities';
 - (b) Boring chapters like "Ratan Tata".
- (iii) Major constraints with the teaching-learning activities were: large classes, lack of motivation in the learners and inadequate facilities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of this study was to analyze and

evaluate the instructional materials in terms of appropriateness, communication skills, language, etc. On the basis of the analysis and evaluation, the following conclusions and recommendations are given:

- (i) The instructional materials prescribed for the first year BA students in the university are interesting and useful from the point of view of the teachers.
- (ii) The coursebook makes use of realistic situations which are related to the learners' interests and experience.
- (iii) The editors have adhered to the requirements of an appropriate textbook while preparing the coursebook.
- (iv) However, a clear statement of objectives is not provided in the syllabus.
- (v) In the prescribed coursebook, speaking skill is not emphasized. The instructional materials should provide enough scope for students to develop adequate proficiency in all the four skills. Pronunciation exercises and group discussions should also be included.
- (vi) The coursebook does not cover all the topics of grammar prescribed in the syllabus, while some grammar topics included in the coursebook are not prescribed in the syllabus.
- (vii) Situations and themes should be imaginatively conceived and should have the element of fun.
- (viii) The textbook should also include short stories, one-act plays and

poems. There should be equal emphasis on language and literature.

- (ix) In the English language classroom there should be facilities for tutorials, individual work, seminars, use of audio-visual aids, etc.
- (x) The coursebook should be attractive to make learning a pleasurable experience for the learners.
- (xi) The University should prepare a teacher's handbook, as a teacher's handbook has a very significant role to play in language teaching-learning.
- (xii) Special training programmes for teachers should be arranged to make them familiar with recent trends in ELT.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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APPENDIX – TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

PART 1 – PERSONAL DETAILS

Name of the Teacher :
 College :
 University :
 Qualifications :
 Teaching Experience :

PART 2 – QUESTIONNAIRE

Tick your choice from the options given. [Y=Yes; N=No; SE=To Some Extent]

No.	Questionnaire Item	Y	N	SE
1	Does the university prescribe any other instructional materials apart from the coursebook? If yes, give details. _____			
2	Do you think that the instructional materials prescribed take care of basic skills of language learning?(a) Listening(b) Speaking(c) Reading(d) Writing			
3	What do you think are the objectives of teaching this coursebook at the FYBA level? Rank them in order.[] To provide students training in all the four skills[] To develop students' communicative competence in English[] To expose students to the works of literature, such as plays, essays, short stories, poems, etc. [] Any other? _____			
4	Do you think that the contents of the instructional materials are suitable to fulfil the objectives of the coursebook?			
5	Do you think that the instructional materials prescribed are appropriate for the FYBA students?			
6	Do you think that the instructional materials cater to the needs of the students?			
7	Do your students find the course materials interesting?			

No.	Questionnaire Item	Y	N	SE
8	Does the coursebook contain a mixture of different types of reading materials, such as poems, stories, essays, dialogues, etc.?			
9	Do you think that the course materials presented are well proportioned, well balanced and well unified?			
10	Do you think that the instructional materials are presented in a way which is clear enough to be understood and varied enough to be interesting?			
11	Do you think that the materials are presented through both the written and spoken forms of the language (i.e., some examples of dialogue are included)?			
12	Do you think that the instructional materials you use at present are sufficient?			
13	Do you find that the materials provide the right degree of challenge to the learners? If yes, specify. _____			
14	Do you find that the course materials, on the whole, involve both learner and teacher equally?			
15	Do you think that the materials provide enough training for your students to be independent in learning?			
16	Are you satisfied with the kind of exercises given in the coursebook?			
17	Are the exercises given at the end of the chapters relevant and useful?			
18	Do you think that the exercises are of varying difficulty level to suit different students?			
19	Are the exercises carefully prepared to realize the objectives of the coursebook?			
20	Does the coursebook contain a glossary of unfamiliar words?			
21	If yes, do you think that it covers all the words which the students find difficult?			
22	Are there enough exercises given in the vocabulary section?			

No.	Questionnaire Item	Y	N	SE
23	Which types of activities are given in the coursebook? Please specify. _____			
24	Do you think that the students can cope with the activities themselves?			
25	Do they promote learners' language development?			
26	Would you like to add any task/activity to suit this level? If yes, please specify. _____			
27	Do you feel that any of the tasks/activities should be excluded from the materials? If yes, please specify. _____			
28	Has the coursebook a companion workbook?			
29	If the coursebook has a companion workbook, do you think that it provides extensive further practice and review of:(a) pronunciation?(b) grammatical structures?(c) comprehension?(d) composition?(e) vocabulary?(f) any other?			
30	Do you think that the total content of the materials is such that it can be covered within the stipulated time?			

31. What, according to you, are the merits and limitations of the coursebook?

32. If the coursebook were to be revised, what would you like to add to the coursebook and what would you like to delete from it?
