Chapter VI

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6.1. General

Language has been taught and learnt from time immemorial. Languages are learnt as first, second, third or as foreign language, in different settings and for different purposes. In the language learning setting, teachers, students learning materials, teaching methods, linguistic background of the learner, etc. play a vital role. The problems encountered while teaching and learning are also varied. A good learning environment is established with teachers, learners, parents, infrastructure available, and most important of all learning materials. However, it is to be observed that in the Indian learning setup, the teachers have to stick on to the prescribed textbook, otherwise, they would be looked upon strangely. Another practical problem is that they do not have time and resources to prepare their own material.

6.2. Findings

This study was conducted on the students belonging to the three boards of study, namely, Matriculation, English medium and Tamil medium of the higher secondary first and second year. The views of the teachers on the textbooks was also sought and analyzed. The findings of the study are presented below.
6.2.1. Some Observations

The prose item in some of the units does not have the author's name. In the first year textbook the name of the author in unit I and unit VI are not mentioned in the textbook. In the second year textbook also the author for the prose in unit II is not mentioned. In the board examination only 15 marks are allotted for the prose. An essay for 10 marks and a paragraph answer for 5 marks is asked in the board examination. There are no "explain with reference to the context" questions from the prose item. So the authors name for the prose item is not of great importance to the teachers or to the students.

The time allotted for teaching English in schools is only 10%, while 17.5% of the time is allotted for subjects like physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics. The textbook demands more time for a thorough practise of the assigned task. Another factor that seems to hinder the learning is the student teacher ratio, which is approximately one teacher and 60 students at a time. The total number of students a teacher handles is approximately above 150 in both the higher secondary classes. The tasks in the textbook are to be practised in the class room. It is a practical difficulty that the classrooms are not equipped to practise the tasks. There are no audio/video equipments available in schools.

There are long sentences both in the prose items and in the stories in the supplementary reader. The words in a sentence should be limited
to 30 words per sentence. But we find that long sentences have words of
even 40 words to 80 words per sentence.

As far as the long words that are used in the textbook the letters
per word is 14 to 17 which is suitable for the learner.

The printing in the textbook is clear, distinct and legible and needs
to be appreciated. The paper used is also good which needs a mention.

The illustrations in the second year textbook are appreciated by
the students than the teachers. But on the whole the illustrations in
both the textbook needs to be rechecked for clarity. The illustration
should be corrected in this regard.

Charts, graphs etc do not need any changes. Their occurrence in
the textbook is only scarce but is clear.

As far as the content of the textbook is concerned the textbook lead
from the known to the unknown, that is, previous level to the following
level. Majority of the students felt so.

The topics selected in the textbooks are easy and understandable for
the learners, has relevance to the students’ field of study and are graded
from simple topics in the beginning to complex topics towards the end.

The tasks in the textbooks are easily tractable for the users. It is to be mentioned that the tasks that are practised in the class are
limited. Only tasks that are tested in the board examination are
practised. The rest are omitted. The students felt that there are more variety in the tasks and that they are not stereotyped but nearly half of the teacher strength felt that the tasks can be more varied to avoid boredom in the classroom. They also feel that the number of tasks in the textbooks are vast and are not practicable. The tasks do kindle critical answers from the learner.

6.3. Suggestions for Improvement

The tasks in the textbook are too many and the user at times finds it difficult to find the prose and poetry item in the unit. The arrangement of the unit is, it starts with tasks to develop various competencies followed by the prose item, the tasks follow it. Poetry item appears towards the end and again the tasks appear. The page numbers were the prose item and the poetry item appears in the textbook is not mentioned in the contents. This adds to the hardship. The page, in which the prose or poetry starts, the unit number and the title, should be printed in the content.

Though the teachers agree that the sentences in the textbooks are simple in construction, nearly half of the students feel it is difficult. There are certain sentences which exceed 30 words per sentence. Such sentences should be made into smaller sentences so as to facilitate better understanding among students.
The difficult words/terms should be properly defined while introducing it. Such words and terms in the first year textbook is defined properly while the second year textbook needs to changed in this regard. Thus words should be emphasised in the text so that they are retained in the minds of the learner. The opinion of the users also emphasises this.

Until the introduction of this new syllabus the board examination tested only the memorising capacity of the students. There were questions which were allotted more marks to summarise the prose/poetry. There were essay type questions, paragraphs, explain with reference to the context etc. which were memorised by the students and presented in the examinations. But the new syllabus has incorporated these items only for a very less weight age of marks. The question paper tests the various language skills of the students. The question paper pattern in the board examination is based on the textbook. The students hither to are of the habit of memorising for the language exams are to sit back and put in lots of practise to fare well in the examinations. Those who rely on memorising cut a sorry figure in the examination.

Difficulties while using the textbook is found among the users. The teachers too support this view of the students. They find it difficult to teach to a classroom of Tamil medium students. The strength of such classes is also too large which adds up to the hardship of the teacher.
The textbook has a number of tasks under various competencies. There is no 'answer keys' provided for these tasks. The students are in a cloud of confusion. The teachers are also unweaponed to handle such a situation the students use bazaar guides. Bazaar guides are used by most of the students irrespective of the medium of instruction. They rely on the materials more than the textbook to prepare themselves for the examination.

To overcome this situation a key has to be prepared for all the tasks in the textbook and made available for the users. This additional book would help the students to achieve better.

No doubt the performance of the students has improved for the better after using this textbook. The users agree to this statement.

The covers of the supplementary readers have to be changed. Though the design of the second year supplementary reader is moderate, the first year supplementary reader's cover needs a change. The printing is clear. The stories in the first year supplementary reader is good and enjoyable, while the stories in the second year supplementary reader were not enjoyed by the students from the Tamil medium.

The student teacher ratio is found to be very large in the government schools. A class room in a section consists of students between 50 and 60. Each class has many sections depending on the groups such as first group, second group, third group, vocational etc.
Rarely there are two English teachers who handle the higher secondary classes (both Eleventh and Twelfth standard) where the teacher has to teach approximately 200 students in the first year and 200 students in the second year. Such large numbers of students are assigned to a single teacher. It is difficult to give individual attention to the students.

Another problem that is encountered is that the proper keys for the tasks are not provided to the teachers. The keys should be provided to the teachers for reference. The students too feel that the tasks are vast and do not suit their situation. The time allotted for English is only very less.

The time table that is followed in the schools allows only 4 periods, (45 minutes per period) in a week for the subject. To enter in to better under graduate courses, the students in the higher secondary aim to achieve more in their own area of specialization. In such an enthusiasm they oversee the learning of English. The students are demotivated. All these play an important role in the teaching and learning of English.

The teacher has to play an effective role to achieve the goals set by the curriculum designers. They should guide and supervise the students to achieve better. The textbook is prescribed for a particular age group of student from a large geographical location in vast numbers. Only the teachers know the strengths and weakness of the students, and accordingly they can decide on how to teach the textbook most effectively.
In addition to this slow learners are to be taken into consideration. They should be given special attention. Wherever a need arises the mother tongue can be used to explain the concept.

It is important that the teacher should highlight that the textbook is designed to increase their rate of learning so that they are not held back in their studies because of their difficulty with English.

In addition to this a lot of support and encouragement must be extended to them, especially when the slow learners attempt to complete a task even if they commit mistakes. Sarcastic comments must be avoided at all stages however wrong their responses may seem to be. This would discourage them, and hence should be avoided at any cost.

In the process of language acquisition, fluency should be developed and so even wrong construction can be encouraged, slowly the learners will acquire accuracy only if the learner participates whole-heartedly.

The teachers should also play an active role in this respect. In addition to this the teacher always does the talking especially in the language classroom. This has to change for good. The teacher can at times refrain from explaining and allow the students to explain by which the student can get more practice in English.

Government should take the initiative to establish language laboratory in all the government schools. The curriculum designers should enforce strict rules to the school for practical class in English.
The rates of the dictionaries available in the market are not affordable by the students. Due to this and lack of interest, and ignorance the students even at the higher secondary level do not own a dictionary. The textbook corporation should take steps in this regard and publish a dictionary, which could be used by the students. These dictionaries should be distributed to all the students only then the students can use the textbook effectively.

The cover design of the textbooks and the supplementary readers, needs to be changed to motivate the students. More bright colours can be used and the pictures on the cover have to be changed so as to attract the learners.

The number of tasks is voluminous for the students to practice. Hence the tasks can be reduced. The teachers practice tasks that are tested in the board examination and omit the rest of the task.

6.4. Remedies

The following suggestions are made on the basis of the results of this study. These suggestions, if implemented would make the textbooks a better user friendly one.

1. There are a good number of discourse tasks in the textbooks. They are wasted as they are not practiced in the classroom due to lack of time and because the strength is too large. So the time
allotted for the subject has to be increased. Efforts are to be taken to practice all the tasks in the classroom. The interference of the mother tongue pronunciation in the second language should be identified and rectified in the classroom. Only by practicing the students could achieve what the textbook aims.

2. To improve the grammar competencies the tasks are to be taught first to the learners and the tasks in the textbook are to be practiced sincerely in the classroom. The seriousness of the problem should be understood by the teacher. Correcting the errors in the tasks should be done in the classroom and they have to be discussed for the benefit of the whole class.

3. Use of dictionary should be emphasized to enhance the language of the learner. This would no doubt improve their language in the long run.

4. Unknown vocabularies and new term are to be introduced, defined and emphasized in the reading material. By constant use of the word in various contexts the learner would understand the usage of the word in various contexts and would retain the words.

5. The listening tasks passages can be tape recorded and played for the students as many times as possible. This will lessen the teachers role of reading the passage many times. So steps are to be taken to facilitate this. At least tape recorders and cassettes are to be provided if not a language laboratory.
6. There are some long sentences, both in the textbooks and the supplementary readers, which frequently run into paragraphs. Such sentences are to be identified and split into small sentences.

6.4. Limitations of the Study

This study represents only the tip of the iceberg, sophisticated assessment techniques have to be adopted and entire curriculum has to be evaluated and the possible loopholes are to be fixed. Efforts have been taken to evaluate the textbooks and the supplementary reader only. The teaching methods adopted, teachers, etc. have not been evaluated in this study. The students' performance in various competencies have been identified and the problems of the learners have been taken into consideration while using this textbook. Suggestions for improving the text book in whatever respect is also suggested.

6.5. Future Scope

On the basis of the present study, some of the areas are identified in the same field for further study. A group of students from all the board of study can be identified and this group can be pre-tested on the performance before they are introduced to the textbook in various competencies. The performance of the students can be studied after they have completed the textbook. This post-test will reveal the level of improvement in the competencies. Thus the textbook can be analysed on the basis of the performance of the learner before and after the use of the textbook.