Chapter 3
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Analysis of Student Needs

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Chapter 3

Analysis of Student Needs

Needs analysis is an essential prerequisite for any language teaching programme. Therefore, Alan Cunningsworth, in his book on evaluation of materials in English language teaching courses, rightly says, "When dealing with this subject, one inevitably embraces a wide field of study including needs analysis, syllabus design, the methodology of teaching, theories of learning and the theory and practice of teaching" (v).

In this chapter we have made an attempt to ascertain the Assamese students' needs for English, mainly through their own perception. For this, a field study was conducted by administering a questionnaire to a cross-section of students. The views of students regarding the difficulties in prescribed textbooks and their suggestions for making them suitable for their learning purpose were collected through the second questionnaire. The third questionnaire was administered to the teachers of English in higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges to find out how far they are aware of the developments in the field of materials production in English Language Teaching (ELT). Their views on the prescribed textbooks and suggestions for
improving them were collected too. The evaluation of the proposed textbooks to be made in subsequent chapters will be based on the findings from the field study.

(For the sake of convenience of research we will use the term 'Assamese' for all those who live in the State of Assam. The mother tongue of some students in Assam may not be Assamese but they certainly use this language in majority of their communications in society outside their family circle.)

3.1 Hypotheses and assumptions

We have made the following hypotheses and assumptions in this chapter:

1 Students' needs for English in the three general streams of arts, science and commerce are different from one another.

2 The views of students regarding their difficulties about the prescribed textbooks in General English are different from one another at various levels. Their suggestions for the improvement of the prescribed textbooks in General English may follow a similar pattern.

3 An average teacher of English in higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges is not aware of
the developments in the field of materials production in ELT.

4 The views of the teachers of English on the difficulties in the prescribed textbooks in General English and their suggestions for improving them are essential as they are aware of the classroom situation in the State.

The analysis of students' needs for English and related matters will be made in this chapter on the basis of the above hypotheses and assumptions.

3.2 Description of questionnaire 1

We have framed a questionnaire to collect the required data to ascertain the Assamese students' needs for English. It contains 51 questions. Besides collecting information regarding the general background of students the questions seek to find their reasons for studying English and their exposure to the English language in the four linguistic activities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Questions about how the students use English in both classroom and extra-curricular activities are asked too. The questionnaire contains two questions which seek responses from the students who are continuing their postgraduate studies and from those who have passed their Bachelor's and Master's degree
examinations regarding their sense of inadequacy in English.

3.3 Rationale for the selection of the sample

In a study like the present one it is neither possible nor necessary to cover the entire student population at the higher secondary and T.D.C. stages. So a sample of 134 students from 26 higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges all over the State are taken for administering the questionnaires. Similarly, a sample of 21 teachers of English at higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges are taken for administering a questionnaire.

3.4 Conduct of the field study among students

The printed questionnaires were given to students in the selected higher secondary schools and colleges and they were asked to give their responses to each question. To yes-no type of questions they were asked to respond either in the affirmative or negative. To questions with multiple choices they were asked to select one by ticking it. There were also questions with several suggestions and students were asked to rank them 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 in order of their preference. Some respondents needed explanation of several items in the questionnaire.
in Assamese and we explained to them in Assamese.

3.5 General background of students

Responses were received from 90 students from the arts stream. Out of 90 respondents 22 (24.4 per cent) were from urban areas and 68 (75.6 per cent) from non-urban areas. The occupation of their parents was recorded as cultivation 32 (35.6 per cent), service 36 (40 per cent), business 19 (21.1 per cent) and others 3 (3.3 per cent). Eighteen (20 per cent) students out of 90 had studied in English medium schools and the rest 72 (80 per cent) had studied in the regional language medium schools, mostly, Assamese.

Twenty-nine students responded from the science stream. Out of them 21 (72.4 per cent) were from urban areas whereas 8 (27.6 per cent) belonged to non-urban areas. Their parental occupation was found as the following: cultivation 10 (34.5 per cent), service 14 (48.3 per cent), business 3 (10.3 per cent) and others 2 (6.9 per cent). Seven (24.1 per cent) students out of 29 had studied in English medium schools and 22 (75.9 per cent) in Indian language medium schools.

Out of 15 respondents from the commerce stream 10 (66.7 per cent) belonged to the urban areas whereas 5 (33.3 per cent) belonged to the non-urban areas. Their
parental occupation was mentioned as the following: cultivation 0 (0 per cent), service 3 (20 per cent), business 10 (66.7 per cent) and others 2 (13.3 per cent). Nine (60 per cent) students had studied in English medium schools and 6 (40 per cent) in regional language medium schools.

We find that the majority of students are from non-urban areas. Their parental occupation is mainly cultivation. They have studied mainly in Assamese medium schools. Although some of the students after passing the higher secondary and degree courses in arts, science and commerce may go for higher academic studies many are like to pursue their parental occupation of farming with improved scientific methods. They may also follow some other occupation like being insurance agents, working in co-operative societies, starting tiny rural industries or serve as clerks and teachers in offices and schools respectively. So, these students' needs for English are to be able to read and understand information literature on scientific methods of cultivation, on insurance, tiny industries, business, co-operatives and official correspondences, and to be able to write simple, correct and appropriate English for communicative purposes.
The students who are from urban areas are most likely to go for higher academic studies including professional courses in law, medicine and pharmacy and start small scale industries and business. They are also likely to go for services in offices, business firms and industries. They generally prepare for competitive examinations for services at all India level. So the needs for English of these students are of higher standard than those of the majority of rural students. They need to be able to read and understand information literature on insurance, business and industry; official correspondences in clerical jobs; and textbooks and allied materials in different subjects in postgraduate and professional studies. They also need to be able to write simple, correct and appropriate English for communicative and academic purposes.

Therefore, we have to see that the textbooks in General English are so designed as to meet the above needs of both urban and non-urban students. The subject matter of the passages chosen should be familiar to both. There should be a judicious mixture of the passages based on rural and urban life. As the majority of students have studied their school courses through Assamese medium the difficulty level of the passages and textbooks should gradually be upgraded keeping in view the entry behaviour of average students.
3.6 Students' reasons for studying English

Twenty-five probable reasons for studying English were given in the questionnaire and respondents were asked to rank them each in descending order of importance in accordance with their choice. The responses received have been processed. Only the first three objectives in terms of priority have been taken into consideration for the sake of convenience of research. Each ranking 1 is given the value point of 3, the ranking 2 the value point of 2 and the ranking 3 the value point of 1. The average mean value point of each reason has been calculated. Then they are listed in the descending order. This process is followed for all the three streams of arts, science and commerce.

(Details of the responses received have been shown in Tables 1, 2 and 3 in Appendix 2.)

When we analyse the data we find that most of the students in all the three streams study English for a job, either in the public or in the private sector, which they want to apply for on completion of their education. They also want to study English because the knowledge of this language will help them to communicate with a greater variety of people in the society besides the Assamese. They feel the necessity of learning
English because it will help them to read books and journals in English related to their subjects of study. As English is used in official correspondences in the State, the students aspiring to get a job under the government need to be conversant with the language. The fifth most important reason of the higher secondary and degree students for studying English is to be able to continue their postgraduate studies because in the universities the medium of instruction is only English. Other notable reasons given by the students are the liking for the language, the use of English in all India level competitive examinations and a desire to read national and international newspapers, journals and books on current affairs. The students also want to have a knowledge of English as it is required for inter-state correspondence and travel. Science and commerce students specially need the knowledge of English because this language is, in fact, the medium of instruction for them at the higher secondary and degree levels, not to speak of postgraduate level.

On the other hand, the reasons such as reading and enjoying world literature in English, to be respected in the society and to travel abroad are placed low in the list.
Going through the responses of students to some related questions we find that the majority of students do not have a dislike for learning English. They not only study English for passing the examination, they also want to learn the language well.

To make a brief summary of all the important reasons and allied preferences of students for studying English discussed above, we conclude that they study English because this language is needed (1) in State and Central government jobs and the jobs in private and corporate sectors, (2) for academic purposes and higher studies, (3) for wider interaction, and inter-state correspondence and travel, (4) for competitive examinations and interviews, and (5) for reading national and international newspapers, journals and books on current affairs.

Now let us examine the question of how the above findings regarding the students' needs for English be useful in evaluating the prescribed textbooks and allied teaching materials for them.

When evaluating textbooks, as Alan Cunningsworth (6) says, we have to keep the students' learning needs in mind. Therefore, we have to see whether the prescribed passages and textbooks are designed to
develop communicative abilities in the students and to meet all the important needs discussed above. The 'learning units' in the textbooks should be related to each other in such a way that the learner can relate new language to what he already knows and can build up his knowledge of English by adding new learning units to his existing body of knowledge. We have also to see whether the selected passages and textbooks use the subject matter that is intellectually stimulating to which the students can relate personally. The textbooks, particularly, the exercises they contain, should also be usable with whole classes of students, with small groups and with individuals.

3.7 Students' exposure to the English language

The respondents were asked thirty-one questions to ascertain the amount of their exposure to English and their use of this language in the four linguistic activities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The responses received have been processed and analysed separately for each activity.

3.7.1 Students' experience of listening to English

Five questions included in the questionnaire tried to find out the students' experience of listening to English, mainly through mass media like radio, cinema
and television.

(Details of the responses have been recorded for arts, science and commerce streams in Tables 4, 5 and 6 respectively in Appendix 2.)

The analysis of the data points to the fact that more than 60 per cent of students in all the three streams do listen to English through the electronic media like television and radio. The programmes in English on quiz and sports, wild life and scientific topics, and news bulletins are mostly watched on the television by the students. But less number of students watch other programmes like discussions, movies and plays. The students also listen to radio programmes broadcast in English but it seems to be only for half an hour per day on an average. On the other hand, the frequency of witnessing film shows in English in cinema halls by the students is very very less, approximately, once a month on average.

To put the above findings in brief, we may say that the students are used to listening to English through mass media like television, radio and cinema. The television is used most for listening, the radio is used almost equally and the cinema is used less than both. Programmes on quizzes, sports, news, wild life and
science are either watched or listened to by the majority of students.

According to Breen and Candlin (18) when evaluating the textbooks we have to keep learner's interests in mind. Therefore, we have to see whether the textbooks contain topics on quiz, sports, current affairs, wildlife and general science. As the students are interested in listening to the programmes on these subjects, exercises and allied teaching materials in spoken English should also be designed by making use of the above topics, themes or ideas.

3.7.2 Frequency of the use of spoken English

The questionnaire also tried to find out how frequently the students use English in talking with their family members, friends, teachers and other people. (The data have been shown in Tables 0.7, 0.8 and 0.9 for arts, science and commerce streams separately in Appendix 2.)

(Each response under 'All the time' has been given Value Points 3, each 'Often' Value Points 2 and each 'Rarely' Value Point 1. The Average Mean Value Point has been calculated by dividing the sum of each set of Value Points by three for the respective item.)
By going through the data we come to the conclusion that the students in all the three streams use English when they talk mostly with their teachers and friends. They use this language less with their family members and other people. This implies that teachers and friends provide scope for practising spoken English in practical field. Therefore, realistic exercises and teaching materials in spoken English should be designed with themes of teacher-student interaction or relationship and friend-friend communication.

If there is any prescribed teaching materials for spoken English, when evaluating them, we will have to see whether they contain such themes so that they may be interesting to the students.

3.7.3 Reading habits of students

Parental support for promoting reading habits in students, students' reading preferences and their reading speed were probed into with 14 questions. Tables 10, 11 and 12 in Appendix 2 show details of the data for arts, science and commerce streams separately.

However, the findings show that the reading habits of the students in all the three streams are almost the same. Nearly 60 per cent of the students get access to
a daily English newspaper at home and the parents of approximately 50 per cent of the students have a number of books in English for general reading. Not less than 75 per cent of the students read general magazines, and books and journals in English related to their subjects of study. They also read newspapers, stories, books, journals and articles on sports, current affairs, politics and economics, and entertainment programmes like movie and music. The majority of the students like story more than other forms of literature. It is also found that the reading speed of the students is low as they take four to five minutes to read a printed page of prose.

As discussed earlier, when evaluating textbooks we have to keep the learner's interests in mind. Moreover, when a student likes to read a particular topic, he learns English through it more easily than through a topic which is repelling to him or which he does not like. Therefore, we have to see whether the textbooks in General English for the students contain stories, and topics on sports, current affairs, politics and economics, adventure and humour, general science, and entertainment programmes like movie and music. As the students like the story form the most, we should see that the textbooks contain a number of stories. Furthermore, when we find that the reading speed of the
students is low, such teaching methodologies or strategies should be adopted in the classroom which will develop reading skills in them.

3.7.4 Frequency of written assignments in English

Three questions sought to find out how frequently students get written assignments in English. The responses received are shown in Tables 13, 14 and 15 in Appendix 2 for arts, science and commerce streams separately. However, our analysis shows a close similarity of responses from all the three streams.

The majority of students do not get written assignments even once a fortnight. Nearly 45 per cent of the students cannot even complete whatever assignments they are given. Most of the students devote only three hours per week to homework.

According to Cunningsworth, as already discussed, the evaluation of textbooks also embraces syllabus design and theory and practice of teaching. Of course, it inevitably takes into account textbook design and testing. It is evident from the discussion on the data received that the frequency of written assignments in English given to the students is not at all satisfactory. Many students cannot complete the assignments too. The amount of time which the students devote to homework in English is not at all sufficient. Moreover, the present examination system in English
tests the achievement of students through writing only. As this 'writing' aspect is not carried on satisfactorily in the prescribed courses of study in English, we presume that this unsatisfactory stress on writing contributes to a great extent to the large scale failure in English in the higher secondary and degree examinations.

Therefore, in our evaluation we will consider those textbooks in General English suitable for the students which contain sufficient exercises for practice in writing on different aspects of the passages and textbooks. Teachers should also give sufficient homework to students and instruct them how to work out all the exercises given in the textbooks. The students should also devote sufficient time to their written assignments and complete them.

3.7.5 Students' participation in classroom and extra-curricular activities

The questionnaire contained six questions in order to find out how students use English in classroom and extra-curricular activities. The responses received have been recorded in Tables 1.16, 1.17 and 1.18 in Appendix 2 for arts, science and commerce streams separately. However, on analysis it becomes clear that
the responses from all the three streams follow a similar pattern.

We find that nearly two-thirds of the students do not get enough practice in speaking English in the classroom although about half of the students put questions to the teacher. Nearly 60 per cent of students feel encouraged when the teacher asks them questions. On the other hand, around 70 per cent of students do not take part in group discussions, seminars, symposia, debates or mock parliament in English. Very few of them write articles for the college magazine.

We hold the view that if students do not get enough practice in speaking English either in the classroom or by participating in group discussions, seminars, debates, etc., they will not acquire correct pronunciation of English. They will not develop confidence in themselves to speak English too. From our experience we know that students in Assam do not get any opportunity to speak English anywhere except in the classroom and in the college campus by participating in extra-curricular activities like group discussions, seminars, debates, etc. Therefore, when evaluating the prescribed textbooks and allied materials in General
English, which include the syllabus too, we will have to see whether the syllabus contains textbooks on spoken English. If the syllabus also does not prescribe participation in group discussions, debates, seminars, symposia, mock parliament, etc. as compulsory for the students, we may consider it a deficiency in the syllabus.

3.8 Students' views on and willingness for taking a course in spoken English and a special course in English

The questionnaire contained five questions regarding taking a spoken English course and a special course in English. We have noted down details of the responses received from students in Tables 19, 20 and 21 in Appendix 2 for arts, science and commerce steams separately. However, the response pattern is found to be similar in all the three streams.

More than 60 per cent of the students were not equally exposed to spoken and written English in their earlier course work. Nearly 90 per cent of the students think that a course in spoken English is helpful to them. About 90 per cent of the students are willing to attend a special course in English. Two-thirds of the
students would like to have some passages from their books in their subjects of study included in the special English course. The majority of students want to attend this course during the vacation.

Teachers and ELT experts support the view that sufficient proficiency in English cannot be acquired without acquiring proficiency in spoken English. The students think that a course in spoken English is helpful to them. Therefore, if we find that the prescribed syllabuses in General English do not contain a spoken English component, we will consider it a deficiency in them. We may also recommend to introduce a spoken English course for the students. As they are willing to attend a special course in English during the vacation, we will recommend its introduction for the weak students so that they may get their errors remedied and acquire adequate competence in English.

3.9 Sense of inadequacy faced by the students continuing their postgraduate studies

One question included in the questionnaire was meant to find the difficulties faced by the students who are presently continuing their postgraduate studies. Only a sample of nine respondents were taken from the two universities of Gauhati and Dibrugarh. The respondents
were asked to rank the suggested five difficulties by numbering them with 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 while 1 carried the highest value and 5 the lowest. Details of the data are shown in Table 22 in Appendix 2.

(In order to find the Average Mean Value Point the rankings 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 have been given Value Points of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively and the total for each difficulty has been divided by 5.)

Our analysis shows that all the respondents find it difficult to converse in English with their teachers and friends both inside the classroom and outside it. It is also difficult for them to answer questions in the classroom in English. A number of postgraduate students cannot understand lectures in their subjects. They cannot answer examination questions with felicity and also cannot understand clearly books written in English in their subjects of study.

If the present postgraduate students feel that their proficiency in English is inadequate the reason may be traced back to the degree and higher secondary stages. The students did not acquire sufficient linguistic competence in English at these stages to perform their linguistic functions at the postgraduate level. It may be mentioned here that although the
medium of instruction at the higher secondary and degree stages is Assamese, it is not so at the postgraduate level. The students have to study all subjects (except languages) through English.

So if the present higher secondary and degree students are made aware of the difficulties they will face in their postgraduate studies for not being proficient in English, they will probably be motivated to learn this language well. Therefore, in our evaluation of the textbooks and allied teaching materials in General English, we will suggest to include in the syllabus some passages or books which will highlight the problems being faced by the present postgraduate students due to lack of their linguistic competence in both written and spoken English.

3.10 Sense of inadequacy faced by Bachelor's and Master's degree-holders

The questionnaire contained one question which tried to find out whether those after passing their Bachelor's and Master's degree examinations faced any problems due to their low proficiency in English in the job market or in the service. A sample of nine respondents from nine different places of the State were given the
questionnaire. They were asked to rank the three suggested difficulties in order of importance. The data received have been shown in Table 23 in Appendix 2.

(To calculate the Average Mean Value Point each ranking 1 has been given the Value Point 3, each ranking 2 the Value Point 2, each ranking 3 the Value Point 1 and the total has been divided by 3 for each difficulty.)

Our findings show that the students who pass out from colleges and universities in Assam with their B.A., B.Sc., B.Com., M.A., M.Sc. and M.Com. degrees have to appear at competitive examinations and interviews to get jobs. But most of them fail to succeed in those examinations and interviews because of their low proficiency in English. Some of the respondents think that the persons who are fluent in spoken English are more respected in the society than those who are not. Several of the respondents say that even after getting a job they find it difficult to understand official circulars, letters and other communications which are mostly written in English.

It is worth examining how the sense of inadequacy of those high degree-holders can be related to the evaluation of teaching materials. Although the students
had received their degrees they could not acquire sufficient linguistic competence in English at the higher secondary and degree stages in order to be successful in the job market or to perform their linguistic functions on their jobs with ease.

From our discussion on the students' reasons for studying English we have already found that the most important reason of almost all the students for studying English is to get a job. So if the present higher secondary and degree students are made aware that their low proficiency in English will be an obstacle to getting a job in future, they will surely be motivated to learn this language well. Therefore, in our evaluation of the textbooks and allied materials in General English, we will suggest to include in the syllabus some passages or books which will focus on the problems faced by job-seekers due to their lack of sufficient linguistic competence in both written and spoken English. We will also suggest to design textbooks to teach functional English which is essential for jobs.

3.11 Views of people from various walks of life

We talked with teachers in schools and colleges and several others from the educated elite like doctors,
engineers, pharmacists, writers, textbook-designers, government employees, educated and conscious guardians regarding the students' needs for English. We also took note of the views of people expressed through newspapers. We also keenly observed the use of the English language in the society in different spheres.

It becomes sufficiently clear what people in general think about students' needs for English. Students need proficiency in English to compete for national level services; to study science and technology, medicine, agriculture, engineering and pharmacy; to continue postgraduate studies and research; and to read newspapers, journals and books.

3.12 Difficulty-level of the prescribed textbooks

Before going to evaluate we have tried to find out students' views on the difficulty-level of the prescribed textbooks through their own perception of it. Their suggestions for improvement of the textbooks have been solicited too. For these purposes we have administered a questionnaire to 143 students in a total of 26 higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges.
There are seven questions in the questionnaire. Besides four on the general background of the respondents three questions seek to find whether they think their textbooks very difficult and if yes, on which aspects — vocabulary, sentence structure, subject matter, thought, cultural difference or interest. One question solicits respondents' suggestions for improving the textbooks. Fourteen suggested measures are given and the respondents are asked to tick those to which they agree. The responses received are tabulated and the data analysed in subsequent subsections.

At the higher secondary level the same textbooks are prescribed for arts, science and commerce streams. But at the T.D.C. level the textbooks are different for each stream in both Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities. So when processing the responses received from the students on the difficulties in the textbooks we will record our analyses under the following headings:

1 Higher secondary course

2 Three Year Degree Courses (in arts, science and commerce), Gauhati University

3 Three Year Degree Courses (in arts, science and commerce), Dibrugarh University.
3.12.1 Higher secondary course

Responses regarding the difficulties in the prescribed textbooks in General English were received from a sample of 41 students at the higher secondary course in arts, science and commerce. Details of the data are shown in Table 2.24 in Appendix 2.

On analysis we find that more than 55 per cent of students consider the prescribed textbooks very difficult for them due to one reason or the other. The majority of students say that the passages contain a large number of difficult words, and complex and compound sentences which hinder understanding. Nearly 40 per cent of the students find subject matter of most of the passages unfamiliar and thoughts and ideas dealt with in them difficult. The same per cent of the students find poetry difficult to understand and appreciate. However, less number of students find the passages uninteresting. The students have also pointed out a number of words and sentences from the prescribed passages which they find difficult. They also consider the subject matter of some of the passages either difficult or uninteresting.

We find sufficient relevance of the above findings to the evaluation of teaching materials because as Breen and Candlin say, "... teachers may benefit greatly in
the evaluation, design and use of materials by engaging the help and the views of learners. Their participation will help to establish accurately the criteria for selection and design: their reaction to, and evaluation of, materials can be channelled towards the collective refinement of materials in use" (26). So when evaluating the textbooks we will make use of the views of the respondents judiciously.

It is possible that all the difficult words and lengthy sentences which hinder understanding are not listed by the respondents. But, however, if a passage contains a large number of difficult words and lengthy sentences like the ones pointed out by the students we may consider it unsuitable for their learning purpose. Further, if the subject matter of a passage is quite unfamiliar to the experience of the students or the thought and ideas and the style of their presentation difficult we may consider it unsuitable too. If a passage poses difficulty due to cultural difference or it is uninteresting, we may recommend to replace it with a suitable piece. Nonetheless, a detailed analysis of the textbooks will be done in the next chapter.

We, however, consider that the views of the respondents do not reflect adversely on the quality of
the writings as pieces of literature. Therefore, from the point of view of only suitability for teaching and learning the English language a rethinking may be necessary to include the passages pointed out by the students in the higher secondary course.

3.12.2 Three Year Degree Courses (in arts, science and commerce), Gauhati University

The data received from the respondents studying in all the three streams, on analysis, reveals that more than 70 per cent of them do not consider the prescribed textbooks in General English difficult for them. The rest of the students say that the textbooks contain a large number of difficult words and complex and compound sentences causing obstacles to clear understanding. They also say that the subject matter of the passages are unfamiliar and thoughts and ideas (their style of presentation) difficult for them. However, less number of students agree that the passages are uninteresting. Only a few say that they cannot understand Shakespeare's drama.

(Details of the responses are shown in Tables 25, 26 and 27 in Appendix 2.)

Nevertheless, we will make a detailed analysis of the textbooks in subsequent chapters.
Three Year Degree Courses (in arts, science and commerce), Dibrugarh University

We received responses from a number of students in all the three streams (Details have been given in Tables 28, 29 and 30 separately in Appendix 2.) As we go through the data we find a close similarity among the patterns of responses from different streams. More than 55 per cent of the students consider the prescribed textbooks in General English very difficult for them due to one reason or the other. More than half of the students say that the passages contain a large number of difficult words. Nearly 45 per cent of the students find a large number of complex and compound sentences in the prose pieces which hinder understanding. More than one-third of the students consider the thoughts and ideas in the passages difficult. They also find poetry difficult to understand and appreciate. However, less number of students say that the passages are uninteresting or the subject matter unfamiliar. Only a few students say that cultural difference obstructs understanding. Some students say that they cannot understand Shakespeare's drama.

The remark of one of the respondents is worthy of note. He says that the textbook in General English for B.Sc. students does not contain poems. Most of the
passages are also uninteresting. He points out that almost all the passages deal with the difference between arts and science. Similarly, another respondent remarks that the topics in the books are not interesting because they are not about the real essence of our contemporary day-to-day life.

Notwithstanding the above findings we will make a detailed analysis of the prescribed textbooks in subsequent chapters.

3.12.4 Students' suggestions for improvement of the textbooks

Before going to recommend measures for the improvement of the prescribed textbooks students' suggestions for the improvement of the textbooks and allied teaching materials were sought through questionnaire 2. Question number 7 offered 14 suggested measures for the improvement of prescribed textbooks. The students were asked to tick the measures to which they agreed. As we find the suggestions of both the higher secondary and degree students in all the three streams more or less same we are discussing them together.

(Details of the data have been shown in Tables 31 to 37 in Appendix 2.)
The majority of students would like to have classes and exercises on spoken English. They also want the exercises given at the end of the passages to be worked out in the classroom and the writings of students corrected by the teacher. According to the respondents the prescribed passages should be carefully selected so as to contain fewer new words. They also want some specially-designed textbooks to help them in learning the English language like a handy textbook on grammatical rules, sentence patterns, phrases and idioms and usage of words; a textbook on composition like writing letters, paragraphs and precis; and a textbook on contrastive analysis showing the difference between Assamese and English. Above all, the respondents want the prescribed textbooks to be designed by experienced teachers who have direct knowledge of the classroom situation in Assam.

Apart from accepting some of our suggested measures for improvement of the textbooks the respondents have offered some special suggestions for general improvement in the English language teaching. We mention them below:

1 Textbooks should be written with current affairs and important world events as the theme.
2 Any passage with archaic words and phrases should not be included in the course.

3 Spoken English should be made compulsory. Group discussions and seminars should be organized regularly.

4 Stories, poems, etc. should be so chosen as to interest the young and youthful learners, not the old.

5 A textbook should be so designed as to help the students speak English fluently. It should contain passages which will tell the students how the English language is useful to them in their future life.

6 Textbooks should contain topics on Indian life as well as Western society. A narrow academic approach to the teaching of English should be avoided. Textbooks should be so designed as to create living interest in students.

7 Audio cassettes should be given to students for learning correct pronunciation.

8 Prescribed passages should not be very lengthy.

9 The textbook in General English for the T.D.C. (science) students should contain poetry.
Textbooks should be written on events of day-to-day life so that they may be interesting to the students.

To add to the views of Breen and Candlin, quoted and discussed earlier, we may say that the suggestions of the students for the improvement of the prescribed textbooks and allied teaching materials are useful to make them more appropriate and effective for their learning purpose. However, we will make use of them judiciously in our evaluation after analysing the textbooks in detail. We will do it in subsequent chapters.

3.13 The teachers of English — their awareness and views

In a study like the present one we think it essential to ascertain the awareness of the teachers of English regarding the developments in the field of the English language teaching (ELT) materials production. Effectiveness of the textbooks depends on the way they are used by the teacher in the classroom. Moreover, the teacher knows intimately his students and their ability to understand the passages. Furthermore, we believe that the more the teacher knows about the developments
in the designing of textbooks the better he is suited to teach in the classroom. As the teacher is directly connected with students, classroom and textbooks, we consider his views on the difficulties in the prescribed textbooks and his suggestions for the improvement very useful. Therefore, a questionnaire (the third one) was prepared and administered to a sample of 21 teachers of English in different higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges. There were 32 questions in the questionnaire. Besides four questions relating to the general background of the respondents 16 yes-no type of questions sought to ascertain the awareness of teachers of English about the developments in the field of ELT materials production. Eleven yes-no type of questions tried to elicit their views on the difficulties in the prescribed textbooks. One question sought the suggestions of the respondents for the improvement of the textbooks in General English. Sixteen suggested measures were given and the respondents were asked to tick those to which they agreed.

(Details of the responses have been shown in Tables 38, 39 and 40 in Appendix 2.)

When we analyse the data we find that the majority of the English teachers at the higher secondary and T.D.C. levels are not aware of the developments in the
field of ELT materials production. Reports of two Study Groups on teaching of English in India stress the importance of designing good textbooks for school and college courses. But more than two-thirds of the respondents show ignorance of these two Reports. A General Service List of English words containing 2000 headwords was compiled by Michael West. A learner is expected to have mastered the use of these 2000 words by the end of his high school course. Textbooks for high school students are written using these 2000 words to teach English as a Second Language in different countries. A suggested vocabulary of 2700 words suitable for Indian schools was prepared by Bertha Hensman and published in the Report of All India Seminar of Lecturers of Secondary Training Colleges, held at the University Training College, Nagpur, from December 5 to 20, 1957. But the majority of respondents are not aware of these vocabulary lists. Neither are they aware of the list of grammatical structures given in the Reports of the Study Groups or in the Nagpur Report. A large number of teachers of English in higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges do not know what the Post-Graduate Diploma in the Teaching of English (PGDTE) awarded by the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), Hyderabad is.
These reports and allied materials have been useful to the textbook writers and teachers of English in different ways. The various vocabulary lists and the lists of grammatical structures help the teachers in planning their teaching in the classroom. But as the teachers are unaware of these materials they may be lecturing to students at both higher secondary and T.D.C. levels without taking their ability (entry behaviour) into consideration. Moreover, the PGDTE course conducted by the CIEFL, Hyderabad prepares teachers to teach English as a Second Language effectively and efficiently. Ignorance about this course of a large number of teachers of English in Assam speaks volumes of their lack of awareness of modern developments in the field of teaching English as a Second Language.

Therefore, it is required that every teacher of English in Assam is given some training on how to teach English to students properly at the higher secondary and T.D.C. levels. He should be asked by the authorities, at least, to acquire a PGDTE.

We also find that the majority of teachers of English consider present textbooks unsuitable for effective language learning due to several reasons. They think that the passages contain difficult words and
difficult sentence structures. They consider poetry difficult for the students. Some teachers find "Bertrand Russell" by Hem Barua which is prescribed for the higher secondary course difficult for the students. They say that this passage should be changed. It is also found from the responses that several teachers of English still use traditional Anglo-Assamese grammar books. They even do not recommend a good dictionary like Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English or Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary to their students.

The teachers of English have an intimate knowledge of their students' needs, ability and difficulties. Therefore, their views on the suitability of the textbooks for their students' learning purpose are essential in order to refine them (the textbooks) and make them more appropriate and effective for teaching and learning English. However, we will make use of the teachers' views judiciously in our evaluation of the textbooks after analysing them (the textbooks) in detail on rational basis.

The majority of teachers want teacher's handbooks to be provided to them on prescribed textbooks and allied teaching programmes. They also want spoken English to be included in higher secondary and degree
courses or, at least, classes held in it for students. For the improvement in English teaching programmes they feel that some special textbooks like a textbook on grammatical rules, sentence patterns, phrases and idioms, and usage of words; and a textbook on composition like writing of letters, paragraphs, precis, etc. should be made available to students. They are of the view that the students be made to undergo an intensive Bridge Course in English in the beginning of higher secondary and Three Year Degree Courses each for nearly two months in order to get their errors in English remedied before taking further courses.

The teacher-respondents have also given their own views besides accepting some of our suggested measures. To put them in brief, they find the entry behaviour of the higher secondary and degree students quite inadequate for the prescribed courses in General English. They also find the factors like very large classes, the use of cheap bazar notes by students, scarcity of teachers of English, lack of proper motivation on the part of students and lack of training to teachers of English in the techniques of teaching and communication skills responsible for the deterioration of the standard of the teaching and learning English in Assam.
Conclusion

The organization of the present chapter has been done on the basis of four hypotheses and assumptions made in the beginning of this chapter. They have proved true to a large extent. Although the needs of arts, science and commerce students for English are found same on several points they are different on several other points too. The views of the T.D.C. students in the three streams in Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities respectively and those of the higher secondary students on the difficulties in the prescribed textbooks in General English meet on many points. They also differ on several other points. Similar is the case with their suggestions for improvement of the prescribed textbooks in General English. It has been found that many teachers of English in higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges in Assam are not aware of the developments in the field of materials production in ELT. The views of the teachers of English on the difficulties in the prescribed textbooks in higher secondary course and Three Year Degree Courses (in arts, science and commerce) in Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities respectively and their suggestions for improving them have been found very valuable.
The evaluation of the prescribed textbooks and allied teaching materials in the higher secondary course and the Three Year Degree Courses (in arts, science and commerce) in Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities respectively will be done in subsequent chapters basing on the findings and discussions made in this chapter.