CHAPTER ONE

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1.1 Background

The textbook is often described as 'the teacher's Bible.' This stereotyped expression is used so frequently and by so many people that it has now become a cliche. Nevertheless, it brings out the fact that the textbook is one of the most essential tools and in some cases the only tool for the teacher. It is a common observation that most of the classroom teaching in India is based entirely on the textbook, and for a majority of teachers implementing the course is synonymous with 'covering' or 'finishing' the textbook. This statement is supported by Pit Corder's (1983) observation that 'a textbook undoubtedly serves for the majority of teachers as the syllabus for the language course.' In the Indian situation where the resources available to the teacher are few and the teaching aids scant, the textbook undoubtedly occupies the central place in the process of teaching and learning. This is true about the textbooks of all subjects, and more so about the textbook of English where supplementary and enrichment materials are not easily available to the average teacher.
If one looks at the textbook of English from the viewpoint of the learner, it acquires even greater importance. Apart from the teacher, it is the only source available to the learner, and whatever exposure the learner has to English is in the form of textbook lessons. After all English is not very widely used in our society for the purposes of communication, and the learners, particularly in rural areas are rarely exposed to English outside the classroom. In order to learn English as a foreign language, the learner requires samples or models of English, materials for language practice, intensive and extensive reading materials, and materials for oral work. And for all this he has to depend, if not solely at least mainly on the textbook. Thus the importance of the textbook both for the teachers and learners of English can hardly be overemphasised. It indeed plays the most vital role in our ELT programme.

The textbook occupies the key-position in the teaching-learning situation in India. It translates the objectives and the syllabus-contents into the materials. It is the main support in the teaching-learning process, and the examinations are dominated mainly by the textual material. It is therefore not surprising that all Commissions and Committees on education in post-independence period have recommended improvement of the quality of textbooks. The Education Commission (1964-66) made
an alarming observation when it stated that "in most school subjects there is a proliferation of low quality, sub-standard and badly produced textbooks." Similarly, the National Policy on Education – 1986, known as the New Education Policy, demands a fresh look on all aspects of education including the instructional materials. Commenting on the implication of the New Policy for the development of effective materials, Dr. Khan (1986) has pointed out that "it should be our national endeavour to provide the best possible textbooks to the students."

Most of the Indian States have now introduced English at the primary level. There are thousands of children in primary schools who are learning English as beginners, and who are using the textbooks prepared and prescribed by either the Departments of Education or the State Boards of Textbooks. In view of the fact that each State prescribes a uniform textbook which is used by hundreds and thousands of students and teachers, the problem of its quality becomes immensely important.

1.2 Need for the Study

ELT specialists, teachers of English and even educated parents in the country have often expressed a similar concern for the quality of the present textbooks. At the CIEFL workshop on Teaching Materials, Alamelu (1978) emphasised the need for
'quality control at every stage of the development of teaching materials.' Distributed by the poor quality of the English Reader for Std. VII in Gujarat State, V.J. Trivedi wrote a long letter in The Times of India (June 23, 1964) which he concluded in these words:

"If this is the material on which our children are going to be fed, even the heavens will not be able to help them. It is high time our children's interests were protected by the courts. I wonder whether this letter can be treated as a writ petition and the courts can move in the matter."

The writer has expressed his views in the language which may seem to be rather strong. Nevertheless, the letter clearly brings out the fact that the textbook is far from being adequate, and it certainly needs to be improved.

ELT experts in India have also emphasised the need for the evaluation of teaching materials. It is pointed out that a large number of our teachers resignedly accept the textbook prescribed for them, and do not care to undertake its assessment in a systematic manner. In the near-total absence of scientific evaluation of the textbooks in use, the writers do not receive any feedback. So the same version of the book continues year after year. Regarding the evaluation of the textbooks of English, Dr. Tickoo (1978) has raised yet another point. According to him, "The existing criteria and methods for evaluating textbooks are most often unsatisfactory." A close look at the available criteria, checklists, and rating scales brings
out the truth of this statement.

It is clear that the evaluation of textbooks is a neglected area of ELT in India, and evolving a set of sound and satisfactory criteria is the first step necessary to correct the situation. The present study is an attempt in this direction.

1.3 The Problem

One of the recommendations made at the CIEFL workshop on teaching materials (1978) was to evolve 'more complete criteria for the evaluation of textbooks.' The need to improve the quality of the coursebooks was also recognized by the participants. This led the investigator to select the following problem:

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE COURSE-BOOKS OF ENGLISH PRESCRIBED FOR THE BEGINNERS IN SOME STATES OF INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN MATERIALS PRODUCTION

The first part of the problem implies the evaluation of the coursebooks while the second part aims to find out whether the recent developments in EFL materials are reflected in the Indian coursebooks.
1.4 Definition of Terms

In the statement of the problem, two terms - coursebooks and beginners - are specially important. They need to be defined. The investigator studied various definitions of the words in order to arrive at the specific definition of each term for the purposes of the present study.

(1) Coursebook

Dictionary of Education (1973) defines the textbook as 'a book dealing with a definite subject of study, systematically arranged, intended for use at a specified level of instruction and used as a principal source of study material for a given course.'

In Let's Learn English prepared by the CIEFL (1970) the word 'coursebooks' is used to include the Teacher's Guide, the Reader, and the Workbook. However, Luciano Mariani (1980) has used the word coursebook to mean the textbook, and he uses the two words interchangeably. In the context of this study the term coursebook is used for 'the textbook prescribed and sanctioned by the Department of Education of the State concerned for use in schools.'

(ii) Beginners

In this study the word beginners is used to mean the pupils who have not had any formal instruction in English, and who are learning English as a Foreign language for the first time.'
1.5 Objectives of the Study

In order to give a proper direction to the investigation and make it meaningful, the following objectives were formulated:

(i) To describe and analyse each coursebook in terms of the language and the contents.

(ii) To evolve a set of criteria in the form of a rating scale in consultation with course designers and ELT experts.

(iii) To undertake the rating of each coursebook in terms of language model, practice material, testing exercises, situations, themes, format, and the rationale.

(iv) To compare different aspects of the selected coursebooks on the basis of the ratings.

(v) To determine the adequacy of each coursebook on the basis of the raters’ assessment.

(vi) To outline the main features of the recent developments in EFL materials for beginners.

(vii) To examine the coursebooks with reference to the recent developments in EFL materials.
1.6 Focus of the Study

The present study is an investigation into various aspects of the EFL coursebooks used in India. Its main focus is the evaluation and comparison of the coursebooks in terms of the language samples, practice materials, testing materials, situations, themes, format, and the rationale. For the purposes of the inquiry the investigator set the following questions at the initial stage:

1. Do the coursebooks present samples of correct English?
2. Do the coursebooks present samples of acceptable usage?
3. Do the coursebooks contain models of natural and realistic language?
4. Do the coursebooks illustrate the functions normally associated with the language item presented?
5. Do the coursebooks contain samples of authentic materials?
6. Do the coursebooks contain materials to practice form, meaning and use of the items?
7. Do the coursebooks contain materials for pair/group work?
8. Are the tasks/activities included in the coursebooks enjoyable?
9. Do the coursebooks include materials to test the knowledge of form, understanding of meaning, and the ability to use language?
10. Do they contain exercises in varied forms?
11. Do the coursebooks use natural, lifelike, and interesting situations?
12. Do the situations contain elements of fun and fantasy?
13. Are the themes interesting and varied?

14. Do the coursebooks have attractive formats and appearances?

15. Do they contain purposeful pictures?

16. Do the coursebooks reflect recent views on the nature of language and language learning?

17. Are the coursebooks related to the learners' needs?

18. Do the coursebooks reflect recent trends in EFL materials?

19. Are the coursebooks included in this study adequate and effective tools for the teaching and learning of English?

20. Is there a significant, qualitative difference among the coursebooks in terms of the language samples, practice materials, testing materials, situations, themes, format, and the rationale?

1.7 Delimiting the Scope

1. The study covers the course books of English used in eleven states in India, and the textbook prescribed for the model schools.

2. The course books prescribed for the beginners during the first year of English are included.

3. The study does not include the workbook nor the teacher's handbook.

4. Coursebooks used in schools where the medium of instruction is English are excluded from the study.

5. Recent developments include ELT thinking in the '70s and the EFL textbooks published in the UK in the '80s.
1.8 Organization of the Report

This report consists of seven chapters and a comprehensive bibliography at the end. Chapter 1 describes the role of the coursebook in the ELT programmes in India and shows the importance of 'quality control' in teaching materials. This establishes the need for the study. It also defines the important terms and gives the scope and the objectives of the study.

A review of the relevant literature and a brief survey of the Indian coursebooks after Independence are presented in Chapter 2. This chapter also includes the implications of linguistic theories and course designs for the present study.

Chapter 3 presents the plan and procedure adopted for the study. It also shows how the rating scale was constructed and validated, how the coursebooks were evaluated, and how the data were analysed and interpreted.

Detailed descriptions of the coursebooks in terms of the language materials, situations and themes are presented in Chapter 4. In addition, special features of each coursebook are outlined along with the sample materials from the book.

Chapter 5 contains the ratings of the coursebooks. The ratings of each aspect and component of the book are presented in the form of tables, and interpreted with evidences from
the coursebooks. This chapter also gives the strengths and weaknesses of the coursebooks, and shows how they compare with one another.

Recent trends in EFL materials were identified on the basis of theoretical discussions and the courses for beginners which have appeared in the 80s. These features are presented in Chapter 6, and an attempt is made to find out whether these trends are reflected in the Indian coursebooks.

Finally, the findings of the study and the suggestions to the syllabus designers, coursebook writers, textbook evaluators and classroom teachers are included in Chapter 7. This part of the thesis also includes the recommendations for further research in the field which may improve the quality of the Indian coursebooks.

References


2. Report of the Education Commission

