

## Teaching English as a Foreign Language: Curriculum Development for Communicative Competence

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### Abstract

*The aim of this research was to analyze the ESL text books of Pakistan on factors such as general criterion and teaching communicative competence. Communicative competence is extensively acknowledged as an excellent way to ensure successful language teaching programme. Communicative competence is based on instilling proficiency in the target language by improving the abilities and potential of second language learners. For this purpose, questionnaire and discussion methods were used. The questionnaire was based on certain significant elements identified from various checklists employed for material evaluation along with a section based on the four techniques of communicative competence. The completed questionnaire was submitted by 10 English teachers who were teaching at different secondary levels from 05 selected government schools, later followed by a discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of their respective textbooks. In the second phase, the four important areas of Communicative competence were analyzed by selecting and evaluating three ESL text books.*

### 1. Introduction

This paper focuses on how communicative competence can be developed in second language learners through the four basic language skills and what part do the text books play in it. It is common knowledge that textbooks are the main teaching tool in EFL classrooms because the students rely heavily on at least one designated book as the primary guidance manual for language learning. A textbook signifies the foundation of the syllabus and it has to be covered within a specific time period. The vast majority of class work and home work are derived directly from the textbooks. Any additional material will always be regarded as a supplement to the textbook. Textbooks are known as the best tools for saving valuable time of teachers as well as that of learners; and they should also be designed with the purpose of saving learners' money by being cost effective. The pictures and graphic materials found in textbooks are deemed to be more elaborative than the teacher's description of an object or an action. Sometimes, it is difficult to bring different objects into the classroom, but textbook contains all the relevant graphic details, which support teaching. During the term all teachers are usually very busy, they do not have any spare time to prepare home-made teaching materials because their working hours extend well beyond the routine working days so in this case the textbooks are of great help.

All over the world second languages are being taught to learners with the goal of instilling communicative competence within the students. The term communicative competence describes the learner's proficiency and expertise in handling the target language in all kinds of communications in real life situations with confidence and understanding of how/when to use certain vocabulary items depending on contextual elements however this does not mean that the learner should have native like accuracy or fluency. Knowing and mastering a language is not solely the ability to write correct sentences but also the ability to communicate appropriately in all situations. Students become aware of the target language and they develop the required competence when taught appropriately how to handle the linguistic demands of different situations in real life outside the classroom. For that reason, ESL teachers look for a particular textbook to attaining the aforementioned goals and the functional aspect of language. Every good and proficient ESL teacher involves learners in different problem-solving tasks, interesting topics and subject matter. The term communicative competence was actually popularized by

the American linguist, Chomsky in 1995. He was the first linguist who found out a division between a learner's knowledge of the language and the actual contextual usage. He referred to the learner's knowledge as competence, and the actual use of that knowledge as performance. Later another linguist, Hymes (1972) described the notion of competence on the premise of the social context of communication. According to his work, communicative competence is achieved when the learners can use the language appropriately and adequately in all circumstances and situations. Canale and Swain (1980) also suggested a modular structure of four components to describe communicative competence.

As a language teacher for fifteen years I have always tried to find out those books in which functional aspects of language are emphasized because such books involve learners in different problem-solving activities, interesting topics and subject matter. These books also encourage learners to work in pairs or groups thereby fostering team work and greater harmony. Good textbooks provide authentic material for exchanging information socially and meaningfully because it is embedded in the students' psyche that without textbooks, it is impossible to have a serious learning environment. In order to keep them focused and motivated, a good textbook can respond to all of their needs.

I always wanted to analyze my textbook and at the same time I also wanted to assess the English textbooks of different boards of Education in Pakistan to reach a knowledgeable decision. Before elaborating further, I would like to explain how I define my own teaching situation & style based on the following parameters:

**a) Syllabus**

My first aim is always to chalk out my teaching objectives and then plan the syllabus in terms of incorporating communicative competence among the learners. It is important for me to identify whether the textbook under consideration does justice to structures, functions, topics, vocabulary, relative importance of the four skills or not.

**b) Availability of Teaching hours**

First of all we have to see the availability of our teaching hours. What is the duration of the course? Do we have 60-90 hours of class instruction?

**c) Learners' Age**

While designing or choosing the right book for learners we should keep in mind the age of the students. For instance, if we have adult learners in our class, then these learners want to read plenty of newspaper, magazines, political issues and global news as compared to the young learners who would like to read the children stories, dramas and cartoon stories.

**d) Learners' Interests**

The interests of learners should be kept in our mind. It is important that the textbook is used with pleasure and does not cause boredom to the learners. All topics should foster motivation in the learners.

**e) Learners' Background**

Most of the students come from a diverse cultural background, therefore the social and cultural background of learners should be kept in mind. What is their professional

background? Are they already studying somewhere or working? Are they from urban sector or rural class, or a combination of all these?

**f) Class Size**

The size of the class is a very important feature. In the case of a large class the teacher cannot give personal attention to each student. For instance, sometimes reading activity cannot take place because students cannot go for individual reading.

**g) Representation of Gender**

It is very important to find out the representations of men and women in (EFL) textbook. While designing the textbook, we need to assume that the number of both genders is fairly equal in each class and hence the ideal course book should signify & symbolize both males and females.

## **2. Significance of the study**

The matter of language acquisition and teaching has been a great concern of the linguists. The present study will discuss how the communicative competence in English can be developed in Pakistani context with the help of innovative and effective ESL textbooks. This study will help teachers to identify criteria for choosing and evaluating learner-centered, effective ESL textbooks. Similarly it would help course book designers to create program-specific criteria for designing textbooks.

## **3. Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of my study are:

- To develop learners, ability to communicate in real contexts, because when we use any language in context, it contains all traits of culture.
- To design precise contents on social communicative functions.
- To design precise contents on Linguistic competence for explicating the application of grammatical rules and the proper usage of vocabulary.

#### **4. The Research Question**

The study will address these questions:

Are language learning textbooks used as the primary tool for the development of communicative competence?

Do the existing textbooks possess the features that are vital for the acquisition of second language learning?

#### **5. Material**

To find out the answers of the above mentioned questions three ESL/EFL textbooks served as the corpus of my study. These representative ESL/EFL textbooks are currently being used in Pakistan for teaching English at secondary level. In order to maintain discretion, the titles of these textbooks would not be mentioned. I have labeled them with the alphabets A, B and C.

#### **6. Questionnaire**

In order to evaluate, I used the three crucial phases of analyzing a textbook namely, choosing/picking a lesson from the book, defining the criteria for evaluation and finally analyzing the textbook. For the second phase i.e defining the criteria for evaluating, which happens to be the major aim of this research, various checklists developed by the other researchers and authors were used and adapted by me to suit my research needs.

The questionnaire was based on five major sections (using yes/no questions) detailed as under:

- Questions on different features of communicative competence,
- Questions regarding the price and easy access to the textbook in the bookshops/book banks etc,
- Questions on representation of gender in ESL text books,
- Questions on Learners' age, level and background,
- Questions on Syllabus and availability of teaching hours.

#### **7. Participants**

A total number of ten ESL teachers from five government schools of Islamabad and Rawalpindi (Pakistan) took part in this research. Questionnaires were distributed to them and they were solicited for their opinions about the ESL textbook taught by them at secondary level.

#### **8. Data Analysis**

I selected three English text books for evaluation. The basis of their selection was that they are the latest books being taught at secondary level by Federal and Punjab boards of education in Pakistan and hence they are the recognized text books in Pakistan. These books are used in the classrooms with the target of inculcating communicative competence.

In order to analyze the four kinds of communicative competence recommended by Hymes (1972) and Canale (1980), three lessons were chosen as representatives from each text book. All the lessons in each of these books follow a set pattern. Basically, all the lessons have somewhat identical sections, roughly the same amount of activities and exercises. It was not deemed important to analyze all the data present

in each book because the structure followed in all the chapters was somewhat similar. After thorough analysis of the three textbooks, the researcher found out the specific similarities and strengths/weaknesses of these text books.

## **9. Findings & Conclusion**

After studying and analyzing these three books, the researcher reached the conclusion that out of these three books only one book fulfilled the criteria for communicative competence. The other English textbooks were not based on communicative approach methods as they had more aspects of mechanical practice rather than communicative competence. This also meant that these textbooks could not be solely used as the primary medium of language instruction in ESL classrooms.

Social communicative interaction and meaning negotiation are found but they do not provide real, contextualized activities of language practice as a whole. These books give more importance to grammar study instead of listening, writing, reading and speaking (Communicative skills). The results reveal that mechanical practice continues to be present in high proportion in the two textbooks (A&B). The activities based on mechanical practice consist of substitution drills, formal grammar study, drilling activities, and matching exercises, which are mechanical techniques used for rote learning of grammar tasks. So, actual communication cannot be carried out with the help of these activities.

The other textbooks carrying mechanical practice have inadequate practice exercises that lead towards a limited reach. These activities are actually planned to cater for the grammatical needs of the learner in isolation from usage needs. From the complete analysis, it can also be deduced that textbook “C” is the most meaningful one. The reason behind this is that this textbook doesn’t revolve around mechanical drilling solely rather it incorporates other facets of language practice also.

The most common type of language practice in English textbooks is meaningful. Meaningful practice features formats such as answering questions, matching activities, filling in the blanks, and multiple choice questions; other formats involve playing games, putting events in order, and writing questions. Almost all the tasks and practice exercises that form a part of the textbooks fall within the category of communicative competence.

In the context of other language skills, the aforementioned study shows that the textbook C has a number of listening activities. These listening activities are deemed to be more meaningful because they employ genuine effort and input of the learners by engaging them in meaningful activities.

The third aspect for analysis is, ‘format’. Book “C” has accurate Format. All activities are designed carefully, move from receptive skills (reading and listening) to productive skills (speaking and writing). And at the same time all activities are based on a proper methodological procedure which includes warm up, study, activation, and production.

The teaching of culture taught in textbook “C” has been introduced systematically. It shows that the culture of foreign countries might be quite interesting but it cannot supersede one’s own culture, as own culture is always better. Textbook “C” holds cross-cultural aspects and, therefore, it promotes intercultural awareness. Teaching material portrayed in textbook “C” has got a balanced approach towards men/boys and women/girls and different age groups. Both sexes have been depicted as being engaged in independent activities as well as in leadership role. Both sexes have been depicted equally in domestic situations: doing households chores and caring for children.

The textbook “C” is also quite attractive in appearance and motivates learners to learn and it’s evident that quite a substantial amount of time and creativity was employed in the compilation, design, content and illustration of this textbook.

One drawback was that this text book was not available in the local bookshops in good time for the start of the session, but it was available in the book bank of the university. Students can easily buy this book from the institution and the price of this textbook is quite reasonable too. By choosing this book teachers don’t impose any extra financial burden on learners or on their parents.

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