

English Language Textbooks at Government Schools in Nepal: Possibility of Cultivation and Promotion Creative Language Learning

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Article Info

Article History:

Submitted 20 May 2023

Reviewed 08 January 2024

Revised 18 January 2024

Accepted 26 February 2024

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Publisher:

Research Management Cell (RMC)

Janta Multiple Campus

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Abstract

The study is based on the analysis of English language textbooks at Government schools in Nepal. It is based on perceptions of English teachers teaching at Government schools in Morang district. Textbooks are materials prepared by Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) with the involvement of educators or subject experts to facilitate teaching-learning activities for achieving the goals of the curriculum. English language is being practiced as a Foreign Language through textbooks at Government school in Nepal. Moreover, English language textbooks have played a dual role in the context of Nepal. On the one hand, English textbooks have been teaching as a subject to overcome the examination, on the other hand, they have been using to create a real or real-like environment providing an ample opportunity of cultivation and promotion language learning to the learners of English. Textbooks are teaching-learning materials available in both forms hard copy and soft copy. The content coverage of English language textbooks seems to be effective to create better opportunities and promote a creative learning environment in the present context of Nepal.

Keywords: curriculum, English textbook, foreign language, material, activity

Introduction

With the change of teaching-learning environment and materials used in the classroom, textbooks are developed gradually in various forms (e.g. print or digital format) to meet the need of learners. Mostly, the print format of English language textbooks has been using at Government schools in Nepal. It has been a debated issue whether English textbooks at Government schools (designed to meet the curriculum) can provide better opportunities to the learners. To be specific, English textbooks for school levels can create an effective learning environment to enhance English language or not. So far concerned with the literature, English textbooks at Government schools seem to be appropriate to cultivate and create better opportunities for learners. In my experience of teaching, English textbooks are found to be strong enough to develop a real or real like situation.

Textbooks are effective teaching resources for teachers and learning resources for students in a classroom at government schools in Nepal (Awasthi et al., 2006). The need and importance of English textbooks have been increasing rapidly in the present situation of Nepal. For instance, some of the teachers (traditional teachers) who do not have ICT access to the supplementary materials for teaching fully depend on textbooks as teaching materials. Similarly, most of the students who are beyond the access of additional sources only depend on textbooks. While novice teachers who

have sound knowledge in ICTs and instructional materials may create a better learning environment with the materials beyond the textbooks. The supporters of the teachers of this kind also experience that students with ICT knowledge may have a high proficiency in dealing with the tasks given in the textbooks. Thus, textbooks can be flexible and helpful teaching-learning materials with rich sources.

Although there are many alternative ways to meet the needs of curriculum, textbooks seem to be inevitable for teaching and learning purposes at government schools in Nepal. However, some of the teachers (traditional teachers) have misconceptions about curriculum and textbooks. They treat curriculum and textbooks interchangeably. They believe that textbooks are only the source of delivering content in the classroom. While the novice teachers use textbooks as tools to meet the need for curriculum in the classroom. They do not only depend on prescribed textbooks designed and prepared for a particular level. Instead, they inspire the learners to go with the varieties of activities enjoying the students' textbooks and additional sources that may be beneficial to obtain the goals of the curriculums.

As a teacher of government school, I have obtained a good experience with or without English textbooks in my class. The class that I conduct with the textbooks becomes more interactive and meaningful than the

class without textbooks. This reveals that textbooks may be important tools for achieving learning outcomes. Moreover, textbooks are genuine and authentic sources that are introduced and developed after incorporating the recommendations of the educators and subject experts. Moreover, constructive feedback received from the seminars, workshops, and conferences attended by the concerned people like MC (Management Committee) members, parents, teachers, and students are collected to prepare the textbooks (Government of Nepal, 2007).

English Language Textbooks at Government Schools in Nepal

In my personal experiences, textbooks are highly used classroom materials at government schools in Nepal. They are supposed to provide learners with the required knowledge and skills to deserve their levels. Students always stay in the classroom with the textbooks given by the schools. However, Bista (2011) reveals that educational institutions (schools) do not have adequate access to provide textbooks and resource materials to the teachers and students timely. The same study further reported that students at government schools may not have provided a natural environment to learn English from native exposures. Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) is responsible for designing and implementing school level curriculum in Nepal. This centre involves in evaluating and reviewing school curriculums. The entire teaching-learning process are guided by the curriculum. CDC develops

textbooks addressing the curriculums for government schools in Nepal (Government of Nepal, 2007).

The present English textbooks for grades one to five contain the materials that provide children adequate opportunities for practicing language skills. Further, these books include enjoyable learning activities focusing on primary language skills (listening and speaking). Similarly, the textbooks for basic level English curriculum (6-8) contain a variety of materials and activities aiming to make the education relevant and practical. Moreover, these textbooks include texts and exercises that help children preserve and promote their own social norms, values, and respect in a multilingual community. Secondary level (9-12) English textbooks contain a variety of materials from various genres aiming to make education relevant, practical, and job-oriented. The textbooks integrate language skills and aspects along with ICT materials (Government of Nepal, 2007). In my personal experiences, English textbooks for beginners seem to be developed a foundation for English language. Children may be given a native-like environment to learn English language so that children themselves can create a moment to use the language. The textbooks with colorful pictures and activities motivate the learners. The textbooks for basic level students also include the materials that are drawn from various aspects such as environment, culture, sports, technology, and so on.

Skill-wise activities are designed to accomplish the goals of the curriculum. Comparatively, the subject matter and language of the secondary level English textbooks are standard enough to meet the needs and interests of the learners to cope up with the global village of English.

Although textbooks can be designed and prepared with the involvement of educators and experts, they are only limited sources to meet the goals of curriculum. However, Karki (2014) explores that textbooks may have become only the sole source of teachers for making their overall plans. This reveals that a textbook is a guide that leads to a proper direction through which teachers and students meet their goals. Similarly, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) add that textbooks are well-prepared teaching-learning materials determining learners' needs and interests for a particular level. With the application of ICT in curriculum, the goals of English language teaching in Nepal has been changed. As a result, English textbooks at government schools have been modified and designed and prepared to learn with recently invented technology such as mobile, computer and projector. To meet the recent practice of teaching, English textbooks may be designed demanding the application of new technologies as mobile-assisted language learning, computer-assisted language learning, and technology-enhanced language learning (Kattoua et al., 2016). This results in the change in teaching English at government schools in Nepal. Moreover, Bhandari (2019) study reveals that the strength of

English textbooks may be enlarged and expanded with the integration of information technology in ELT in Nepal.

The above literature reveals that English textbooks at government schools have brought a paradigm shift in education system in Nepal. This may create better opportunity for the learners of English

Methodology

This study employed survey design and explored the participants' experiences and practices in teaching English at Government schools. I obtained their experiences of textbooks through the questionnaire. So, questionnaire was a method for data collection. As an English teacher of Government school, I decided to choose the teachers of Government schools from Morang district as my participants. Also, I believe they could provide a rich information to meet my objectives. Then I requested 10 English teachers to voluntarily participate in this study. I tried to balance the gender of the participants to ensure the representation of both genders and the diverse experiences of both males and females.

Results and Discussions

On the basis of the information collected from the English language teachers teaching at basic and secondary level. So, this section presents the results of the data analysis about the English language textbooks at Government schools in Nepal. The focus of my study was on the experiences of teachers (School teachers) teaching at

Government Schools in Nepal.

Perceptions on English textbooks at Government Schools in Nepal

Regarding English language textbooks, all the ten participants showed their positive attitudes towards textbook. In response to English textbook, Ramila, a teacher of Bhagawati Secondary School said, a textbook is a teaching material for teachers and learning materials for learners. Similarly, Pramesh, a teacher of Radhika Secondary School said, textbooks are systematically designed by the experts for teaching and learning purposes containing texts, exercises and activities. It means textbooks are referencing materials both for teachers and students.

Regarding content of English textbooks, contents and tasks are presented in the balance of language skills and grammar. For this, Mohan, a teacher of Machhindra Secondary School said, most of the textbooks are concerned with language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. And activities are designed separately for specific skill. Pramesh said telephone conversations, descriptions, and giving directions are some examples of listening activities. It indicates that students prefer to listen to the varieties of texts and the prescribed texts. Similarly, regarding the speaking skill, Rojina, a teacher of Devekota said, speaking activities are enough and appropriate to develop communicative activities. She further stated that conversations focused on language functions are given to practice. Her opinion showed that textbooks are

designed to develop the speaking skill of the students. Students collaboratively engage in conversations with the teachers and their peers on different language functions. It also helps them to foster communicative language skills.

Concerned with reading portion, Ganga, a teacher of Tandi Secondary School said, reading portion contains poems, diaries, experiences, current affairs, issues, festivals and celebration, work and leisure. She also added that some reading texts are about science and technology, culture and traditions, biography. It means English textbooks are appropriate to the present context of Nepal to students because these topics are found to address the global and local contexts. The contents are also relevant to the present context of Nepal because they are fascinating to all the students based on their contexts, which also helps them compete globally. Highlighting Writing part of the textbooks, Diya, a teacher of Bakraha Secondary School said, varieties of writing activities such as writing letter, paragraph, email, news story, news article, conversation, condolence, biography, book review and interpretation of charts and tables. It indicates that textbooks are developed to foster students' creativity. These activities are also encouraged to master over the daily activity of an individual.

Besides, grammar is another important part of English textbook. Regarding grammar, Mohan said, grammatical items are presented differently based on the level. He further said, passive voice, reported speech,

conditional sentence and connectors are given more priority in secondary level. It indicates that all the grammatical items are not preferred in the single curriculum. Grammatical items are prioritized simple to complex. Focusing on the foundation of the level of the students, grammatical items are preferred in the textbooks.

Regarding the curriculum, Chandra, a teacher of Janata Secondary School said, textbooks are found appropriate to meet the goals of curriculum. She further stated that the varieties of subject matters of the textbooks help to exchange their ideas in English without any sorts of hesitation. Additionally, another teacher Rojina put his view, there are vivid exercises and activities to meet the goals of curriculum such as question-answer, demonstration, dictation, dramatization, role play, group work and pair work. These activities are found to foster creativity and widen the horizon of knowledge. Students are always show their curious eyes to take part in these activities. It showed that English textbooks are found curriculum-oriented materials based on students' interests and needs.

Regarding the specific techniques and activities, Ganga, a teacher of Tandri Secondary School said, classroom activities such as fun and engagement, songs and rhymes, think, pair and share and other are appropriate to the beginners. Similarly, Hira, another teacher said, reading activities prefer comprehensive exercises such as vocabulary games, choose the correct answer, fill the gaps,

True or False, answer the questions. It indicates that classroom-based activities found in the textbooks. These activities are found student-centered. They also help engaging students in the classrooms

Regarding the materials, Rojina said, although textbooks are authentic source for delivering the content, they are not available on time. It reflects that teachers wait for the text books to conduct teaching learning activities in the classroom. However, textbooks are not available on time. It showed that teachers use some other available sources in their school. For this Chandra said, we use internet as another source for teaching. It indicates that some of the teachers use internet for searching information and textbooks. It means teachers use technology devices in the classroom to deliver the lessons.

Regarding evaluation, Bimal said that although the curriculum suggests assessing the students using both formative and summative evaluation, we prefer terminal examination for upgrading students. Practical examinations are just for practical. It indicates that teachers use only the examination for the evaluation to the students. They ignore project work, class tests, group work and extracurricular activities.

Some teachers denied that the textbooks are not appropriate to the present context in Nepal. Hira said that textbooks are developed without considering students' needs and interests. It indicates that textbooks are not

upgraded in time and again. They do not have sound knowledge and skills based on the needs and interests of 21st-century learners.

Cultivating Creative Language Learning

Textbooks can have multiple purposes. A textbook can be taken as one of the key components in teaching English as both a foreign language and a second language (Yusuf, 2008). The same study further states that textbooks provide classroom materials in the form of reading texts, activities to be conducted and explanations to be made. Similarly, Allwright (1981) reveals that textbooks include a model lesson that requires an interaction between teacher, student, and materials that may be beneficial to learn the content. Concerning English language textbooks, they can provide good exposure to the learners of English as a foreign language. Moreover, textbooks may create an ample opportunity to practice and communicate in a natural setting (classroom) because they provide reading texts and learning activities with clear instructions.

With the growing demand for English in Nepal, English is taught as a core subject for all levels of learners (from grade one to Bachelors). English has been emerging as an inevitable part of school curriculums in Nepal. As a result, the trend of textbook writing has also been gradually shifting. Karn (2011) reveals that English medium textbook writing may be increasing rapidly to address the demand of the day. The same study further

states that this results in the promotion of a creative learning environment for the learners of English in Nepal. This can be reflected in educational institutions. For instance, children are likely to go English medium schools to enhance their proficiency in English. Similarly, parents also prefer to send their children to schools where English textbooks are practiced. However, Rana et al. (2020) report that although teachers at government schools may have provided adequate training through the government bodies, NGOs and INGOs, classrooms are limited lecturing the textbooks mostly in rural areas.

Textbooks may be provided with vivid exercises demanding the application of ICT tools such as audio recordings, PowerPoint slides, you tube videos, and CDs. Teachers are supposed to facilitate learners with these tools in the classroom or out of the classroom. Moreover, English textbooks with the various communicative and functional activities like writing an email, letter, article, making a call, participate in an international conference, and dealing with their personal and social matters provide better opportunities for the learners to enhance their careers. However, the government schools in Nepal do not have experts and access to manpower to address the demand of the English textbooks.

The above studies reflect that English textbooks have plenty of teaching-learning materials to experience for both the teachers and learners.

However, English textbooks at government schools may lack native exposure to the learners of English as a foreign language.

Promotion of Creative Language Learning

To meet the dire need of a global society, the education policy of Nepal has ever been changing. These days, English language may have given more priority by the government of Nepal. This can be reflected directly in the school curriculum and even in textbooks. Phyak (2011) reports that English language has been introduced as a foreign language and taught from class one in all government schools of Nepal since 2003. The same study further states that the main objectives of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching started at this level is to develop comprehensive communicative competence. Similarly, secondary level English curriculum is prepared to understand and use in daily activities like in personal, social, and academic sectors accurately and fluently. School-level English textbooks may be designed to provide a real experience or real like environment for the use of language. However, Baral (2009) reveals that although learners at government schools get materials (textbooks) of the target language context, they may not be able to contextualize the language in real communication in the context of Nepal.

The above empirical evidences reveal that the textbooks designed for schools may have plenty of communicative activities to promote

English language. However, learners may lack adequate exposure to enhance native like environment.

Challenges

The use of English language textbooks at government schools in Nepal can be perceived vividly. Some of the scholars/educators view that English has become a part and parcel of society. They claim that English language deserves the dignity of the state. Supporting this view, Khati (2013) reports that English language may be effective to promote learners' career and economic opportunities in various fields in the context of Nepal. However, Farrell and Giri (2011) argue that English language may provide good opportunities for very few people and discard the majority.

The government of Nepal does not seem to have a clear policy of teaching English as a foreign language in the multilingual contexts of Nepal. Phyak (2018) reports that lack of well-planned educational policy for the practice of teaching both English as a core subject and teaching of other subjects through English in Nepal may create a threat. Moreover, there does not seem to have a strong monitoring system whether English language textbooks at government schools have been using developed by authentic publications or not. This has created a gap between/ among learners from different geographical areas. The schools with high income and rich resources provide English textbooks designed and prepared by authentic publications and use English

as the medium of instruction. And the schools with low income and poor resources may lack such access and compel to use prepared by local publications. This may result that students who are from high class may choose English medium schools with rich resources that may get quality English education and may grab a better opportunity for a career than those students who do not have such access.

Conclusion

English textbooks can be regarded as the most effective teaching and learning materials in the classroom to foster English as a foreign language in the context of Nepal. Moreover, English textbooks may be introduced and included from grade one to an advanced level means to make children familiar with English, the most dominant language of the world. I, as an English language teacher in the same context, believe that the practice of using textbooks at Government schools has brought a behavioral change in every aspect of teaching and learning. This has also come up with many provisions and better opportunities for creative language learning. Textbooks serve a significant learning resource for the learners through which they can develop the skills of communications like writing an email, letter, article, making a call, participate in an international conference, and dealing with their personal and social matters. Thus, English textbooks that are to be designed to suit the levels, needs, and interests of the learners seem to be

effective to promote a creative language learning environment.

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