Research Article

Textbooks in ELT: A Dependable Pedagogical Tool in the Indian Context

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Abstract:

In the Indian educational system, English Language Teaching (ELT) is essential for facilitating learners' integration into a globalised world. The textbook continues to be the most dependable and widely utilised instructional resource among the several options available to English instructors. In light of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, this paper critically evaluates the use of textbooks as pedagogical instruments in Indian classrooms, examining their strengths, limitations, and potential for transformation. The study emphasises that textbooks offer structure and continuity; however, their excessive dependence frequently results in teacher-centered instruction and hinders communicative engagement. This is supported by classroom observations, literature, and qualitative interviews with educators. The findings indicate that the reflective use of textbooks and effective teacher training can improve learner autonomy and align pedagogy with the learner-centric objectives of NEP 2020.

Keywords: English Language Teaching (ELT), textbooks, pedagogy, India, NEP 2020, communicative approach, teacher training

1. Introduction

English serves as a bridge language in India, facilitating access to global communication, employment, and higher education by connecting diverse linguistic communities. Consequently, English Language Teaching (ELT) is regarded as an essential element of the educational curriculum in both public and private educational institutions. The textbook remains the primary teaching tool in the majority of classrooms, despite the development of digital and communicative methodologies.

A textbook that is well-designed provides a consistent pedagogical direction, graded language input, and a structured syllabus. It assists instructors in the management of large classes, ensures alignment with board examination requirements, and provides standardised learning experiences. The textbook is an essential pedagogical ally in contexts such as rural and semi-urban India, where access to supplementary materials and technology is limited.

Nevertheless, textbooks' prevalence has also garnered criticism. Mechanical teaching, which occurs when instructors strictly adhere to the text, can be the result of over-dependence. This approach frequently disregards learners' needs, cultural contexts, and opportunities for creative expression. This is especially apparent in teacher-centered classrooms, where the textbook dictates both content and methodology.

A paradigm shift in the teaching and learning processes is envisaged by the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), which transitions from rote learning to competency-based, experiential, and communicative education. It encourages educators to incorporate digital tools,

creativity, and critical thinking into their instructional practices. Within this reformative framework, it is essential to reevaluate the textbook's role. Teachers must perceive it as a pedagogical resource that can be adapted to foster active learning, rather than as a fixed script. Consequently, this study examines the function of textbooks as dependable yet evolving pedagogical tools in Indian ELT classrooms, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which teachers employ, adapt, and occasionally resist them in their daily teaching strategies.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Textbooks' Function in Language Instruction

Textbooks have historically been the foundation of instructional planning and classroom practice in English Language Teaching (ELT) in global contexts. According to Richards (2001), textbooks are "essential components of most language programs," providing teachers with pedagogical guidance, structured lessons, and organised content sequences. They not only contribute to the preservation of curricular consistency but also offer systematic exposure to linguistic forms and functions and measurable learning objectives. Similarly, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) contend that textbooks are "an almost universal element of teaching," acting as both a support system for the teacher and a guide for the progression of the learner.

Textbooks serve as an indispensable socio-cultural function in addition to their instructional capabilities. They contribute to the construction of identity through language and shape learners' perceptions of the world (Cunningsworth, 1995). In the Indian context, textbooks frequently serve as socialisation instruments, mediating the interaction between local realities and global English norms, where linguistic and cultural diversity coexist. Jayaram (2018) notes that Indian educators rely significantly on prescribed textbooks due to their ability to standardise learning outcomes, simplify lesson planning, and align with examination requirements. In low-resource classrooms, particularly in rural and government institutions, the textbook essentially serves as both a curriculum and a teacher, directing the content of lessons, the design of assessments, and even the discourse in the classroom.

Although this dependence guarantees instructional continuity, it can also result in pedagogical rigidity, where instructors adhere to the textbook without accommodating learners' contextual requirements (Richards, 2015). Notwithstanding, the textbook continues to be indispensable in multilingual classrooms, such as those in India, as a dependable pedagogical anchor that assists teachers in guiding large, heterogeneous groups of learners with differing proficiency levels.

2.2 Pedagogical Practices and Textbooks

Textbooks may simultaneously restrict instructor creativity and learner-centeredness, despite the fact that they facilitate instructional organisation, according to research conducted worldwide. Richards (2001) and Ross et al. (2014) warn that an overreliance on textbooks can limit teacher autonomy and discourage contextual adaptation. This "textbook dependency" frequently leads to a teacher-centered pedagogy in which the classroom is centered on the completion of the prescribed syllabus rather than the development of communicative competence.

Nevertheless, a number of scholars have emphasised that textbooks can be utilised in a flexible manner to facilitate communicative pedagogy and creativity. Mukundan and Ahour (2011) observe that effective educators employ textbooks as "springboards for creative classroom practices," converting reading passages into project-based learning activities, debates, and role-plays. Likewise, Tomlinson (2012) posits that materials should be employed as stimuli for language use, rather than as scripts for rote teaching.

The tension between textbook-centered and communicative approaches is particularly pronounced in the Indian ELT context. The majority of educators are evaluated on the basis of their textbook completion and examination performance, as English is frequently taught as a second or foreign language. This results in a practice known as "textual pedagogy" by Sarangi

(2020), in which content reproduction takes precedence over linguistic and communicative proficiency. The difficulty is in achieving a harmonious equilibrium—utilizing textbooks as reliable frameworks while simultaneously encouraging critical thinking, real-world communication, and learner engagement.

2.3 Textbook Transformation and the NEP 2020 Framework

The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) is a pivotal moment in Indian education, as it advocates for a transition from rote-based instruction to experiential, competency-based, and multilingual learning. NEP 2020 prioritises the cultivation of critical and creative thinking, the integration of indigenous knowledge systems, and the flexibility of curriculum and pedagogy (Government of India, 2020). In this perspective, textbooks are not merely content repositories; rather, they are perceived as dynamic instruments that foster reflective thinking, interaction, and inquiry (Kasinathan, 2021; Dey, 2022).

Nevertheless, the implementation disparity between the progressive ideals of NEP and the realities of the classroom is underscored by a number of studies. Gupta and Pal (2023) observe that the teacher's role as a change agent is acknowledged in NEP 2020; however, the actual transformation is contingent upon textbook reform and teacher preparedness. Maseeh (2023) contends that the ongoing prevalence of textbooks that are exam-oriented and prescriptive impedes the attainment of NEP's learner-centric objectives. Similarly, Sharma and Akalamkam (2021) discovered that teachers appreciate NEP 2020's emphasis on multilingualism and autonomy, but they express apprehension regarding the lack of institutional support and training necessary to modify curricula accordingly.

Additionally, digital integration—another critical aspect of NEP 2020—continues to be inconsistent in both rural and urban educational institutions. "Digital technologies have the potential to democratise learning," as Kasinathan (2021) observes. However, their effective use in the classroom is limited by infrastructural and instructional deficiencies. This underscores the enduring dependability of the traditional printed textbook in contexts where technological solutions are unevenly available, further emphasising its centrality.

Consequently, NEP 2020 redefines the textbook's purpose, transitioning it from an inert text to a pedagogically responsive medium that facilitates the learner's comprehensive development. Nevertheless, this transformation necessitates a consistent investment in curriculum design, teacher training, and evaluation reforms.

2.4 Synthesis

The literature consistently presents a dual perspective on textbooks: they are both potential constraints and dependable foundations in English Language Teaching. In multilingual and resource-limited environments, they offer curricular coherence, linguistic sequencing, and accessible content as reliable tools (Richards, 2001; Jayaram, 2018). However, they may impede learner autonomy, communicative practice, and creativity when they are uncritically followed (Tomlinson, 2012; Sarangi, 2020).

This duality is further complicated in the Indian context by systemic pressures, including examination-oriented teaching, large class sizes, and limited teacher training. Consequently, the teacher's function as a mediator between the textbook and the learner is of the utmost importance. The textbook must be not only implemented by teachers, but also interpreted, adapted, and extended to accommodate the communicative objectives and socio-cultural contexts of learners (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994; Mukundan & Ahour, 2011).

Subsequently, the efficacy of textbooks in Indian ELT is contingent upon institutional support, reflective pedagogy, and teacher agency. Textbooks can serve as catalysts for language acquisition that are consistent with the transformative objectives of NEP 2020 when educators are permitted to employ them as adaptable pedagogical instruments rather than as prescribed scripts.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the function and importance of textbooks in the teaching of English in the Indian context.
2. To investigate the patterns of usage and the instructors' perceptions of the textbook as a pedagogical tool.
3. To evaluate the extent to which textbook-based instruction is consistent with the communicative and learner-centered objectives of NEP 2020.
4. To ascertain the obstacles that educators encounter when attempting to modify textbooks to facilitate meaningful learning.
5. To propose pedagogical strategies that will improve the efficacy of textbooks in ELT classrooms.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study implemented a qualitative exploratory research design to ascertain the evaluations, classroom practices, and perceptions of English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks by teachers in the Indian context. This design facilitated the examination of intricate, context-dependent factors that influence the use, perception, and adaptation of textbooks in authentic classroom environments. A qualitative approach was selected due to its capacity to reveal in-depth insights that quantitative measures may fail to capture (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4.2 Participants

From the Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (TSWREIS) schools throughout Telangana, a purposive sample of fifteen English teachers was selected. A diverse array of teaching experiences, including rural and urban institutions, rural and urban upper primary and secondary levels, and 3 to 20 years of teaching experience, comprised the participants. This multiplicity guaranteed that perspectives from a variety of socio-economic contexts and educational environments were included.

4.3 Instruments for Data Acquisition

Two primary techniques were employed to gather data:

1. Semi-structured interviews, with an emphasis on the beliefs of instructors regarding textbook use, methods of adaptation, classroom challenges, and perceptions of textbook suitability.
2. Document analysis of NCERT and SCERT English textbooks, which will evaluate the lesson organisation, skill integration, inclusivity, and alignment with communicative teaching principles and NEP 2020 guidelines.

The interviews were conducted either in person or online, with the participants' informed consent, and lasted an average of 40–45 minutes.

4.4 Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework was implemented to analyse the data:

1. Familiarisation with the data
2. Generation of initial codes
3. Conducting a theme search
4. Examining themes
5. Identifying and identifying themes
6. Report generation

This iterative process facilitated the identification of critical recurring patterns, including teacher dependence, pedagogical adaptation, student engagement, and curriculum constraints. Thematically, the results of the textbook evaluation were also incorporated to offer a comprehensive comprehension of the function and sufficiency of English textbooks in the context under investigation.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 The Textbook as a Comprehensive and Dependable Instrument

The textbook was considered a reliable pedagogical aid and an essential component of classroom instruction by all participating instructors. It facilitated measurable outcomes, unambiguous progression, and compliance with state board examination requirements. Teachers underscored the importance of textbooks in providing structure, coherence, and shared reference points for both learners and instructors.

A teacher observed, "The class is incomplete without a textbook; it provides a shared understanding between me and my students."

In addition, the textbook evaluation conducted as part of this study demonstrated that the NCERT and SCERT English textbooks were pedagogically appropriate, as they effectively addressed all four essential language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Exercises for integrated skill practice were included in each unit, which guaranteed a balance between productive and receptive competencies. The content was made more relatable and engaging for students by the incorporation of local themes, cultural elements, and familiar contexts, which in turn facilitated comprehension and motivation.

This discovery is consistent with Mukundan and Ahour's (2011) assertion that locally contextualised textbooks not only facilitate learning but also improve students' communicative competence and cultural confidence.

5.2 Limited Flexibility and Pedagogical Dependence

Nevertheless, the majority of educators acknowledged their substantial dependence on textbooks, despite acknowledging their utility. Teachers were unable to delve beyond the confines of textbook content due to factors such as syllabus pressure, exam orientation, large class sizes, and limited instructional time.

One educator contemplated, "We rarely have the opportunity to delve beyond the confines of the textbook." Exams are the focal point.

This overreliance perpetuates a pedagogy that is centered around the teacher, in which lessons are determined by the structure of the textbook rather than the requirements of the learners.

Similar trends have been observed in other Indian studies (Jayaram, 2018; Kumar, 2021), indicating that systemic pressures restrict opportunities for communicative engagement and creativity.

5.3 Pedagogical Innovation and Adaptation

Many educators reported that they had adapted and utilised textbook materials in innovative ways, which was a source of encouragement. Examples included the transformation of reading passages into debates, the dramatisation of tales, the use of poems for intonation and pronunciation drills, and the connection of comprehension texts to real-life discussions. Teachers who had participated in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or NEP 2020 training were significantly more assured in their ability to adapt textbook activities to promote active learning.

These practices are indicative of Richards' (2001) concept of "transformative textbook use," which refers to the process by which educators transition from the sole delivery of content to contextual reinterpretation, thereby transforming static content into dynamic classroom interactions.

5.4 Obstacles and Restrictions

Participants identified numerous obstacles that impeded the effective use of textbooks:

1. In rural areas, there is a dearth of supplementary resources and the integration of ICT.
2. The pressure to complete courses before exams and the overloaded syllabi.
3. Inadequate teacher training in creative pedagogy and communicative adaptation.
4. Resistance to deviation from prescribed materials within the institution.

These results are consistent with the observations of Maseeh (2023) and Gupta and Pal (2023),

who underscore the necessity of comprehensive textbook reform and ongoing professional development for educators in order to achieve the transformative objectives of NEP 2020.

6. Conclusion

This study serves as a reminder that textbooks remain the foundation of English language instruction in India. In resource-constrained contexts, their dependable pedagogical foundation is characterised by their structured content, incorporation of local cultural themes, and reliability. The textbook evaluation verified that the prescribed materials are pedagogically sound, as they encompass all four skills, incorporate contextual themes that captivate learners, and provide meaningful exercises.

Nevertheless, their efficacy is contingent upon the manner in which educators engage with them. Communication and creativity are diminished by a rigid, exam-driven dependence, whereas these resources are transformed into instruments for empowerment and innovation through the use of flexible, reflective textbooks.

To ensure that classroom practice is consistent with the vision of experiential and communicative learning outlined in NEP 2020, the subsequent actions are recommended:

1. Enhance teacher training programs in contextual pedagogy and material adaptation.
2. Encourage collaborative textbook evaluation to guarantee cultural and linguistic inclusivity.
3. Enhance textbook activities by incorporating experiential and digital resources.
4. Promote reflective practice and peer sharing to improve pedagogical autonomy.

English teachers can preserve the structural reliability of textbooks while unleashing their potential as dynamic instruments of learner-centered education by transitioning from textbook dependence to textbook empowerment.

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