

Physical Attributes and Course Contents of English Textbook (Prose II) Taught At Intermediate Level in Sindh Pakistan

Sahira Bano

PhD Scholar, Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Jamshoro
Corresponding Author
sahirabano79@gmail.com

Abdullah Laghari

*Department of English, Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Science & Technology,
Nawabshah, Sind Pakistan*
abdullahlaghari612@gmail.com

Inayatullah Kakepoto

*Department of English, Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Science & Technology,
Nawabshah, Sind Pakistan*
kinayat@quest.edu.pk

Abstract

The paper aims to see the physical attributes and content of the English Textbook used teaching English to intermediate classes in all public and private colleges in Sindh, Pakistan. It is a need-based and relevant study that matches with the discipline of social sciences subject. The authors employed concurrent research design of the mixed method. The researchers, at first level inducted two experts relevant the field, analyzed features and content of the textbook, and at second, researchers assessed 100 randomly selected teachers' perspectives to examine attributes and content of the textbook under the discussion of the study. This study recommends that intermediate English textbook (Prose -II) requires certain changes pertaining to colour images, appropriate font size, and proper margin setting, hence; it needs redesigning making it more attractive, appealing and reader friendly. Further, it recommends inclusion of interesting topics, colourful images and local culture of the province to attract mind of the students. Hence, colourful images, small chapters and updated information can make English textbook (Prose II) more beautiful and interesting for English language learning purpose.

Keywords: Physical Attributes, Course Contents, English Textbook, Intermediate Level.

Introduction

Curriculum is considered an essential element for all educational institutions of the world. It includes all activities carried out by an institute to bring constructive changes among students. It is perceived to be throbbing pulse of a nation. It can be a source of judging the states progress and the intellectual development of the masses of a nation. The textbooks are developed based on written curriculum and like any other country of the world, textbooks are used implementing the curriculum at every stage of education in Pakistan. Textbooks play paramount role in a classroom; because they benefit teachers and students in a variety of ways. Textbooks are measured an essential element for all educational activities, for bringing content knowledge, and determining what goes on in a

classroom (Hammel, 1998 cited in Librun et al., 2002). Moreover, it guides and supports assessing what students learnt and did not learn (Freemen and Porter, 1989 cited in Oakes and Saunders, 2004). Teachers believe that textbooks are the sole source of teaching (Maffia et al., (2003). Textbooks on one hand influence what learners learn in and outside of class, on the other side, affect what and how teachers teach in a classroom. In the context of Pakistan, “textbooks are considered as the sole and legitimate source of knowledge, both for students and teachers” (Bano, 2005:5). However, Tomlinson (2008) states that some materials/textbooks can facilitate language learning, while others hinder dependent on their characteristics. Consequently, in the field of language teaching and learning, evaluating textbooks is crucial task for researchers and teachers. Authors for instance McDonough & Shaw (1993), Rubdy (2003), and Tomlinson (2003) establish an opinion that textbooks evaluation is very useful for language teachers. Textbooks for language teaching need to be captivating, attractive and learner motivated. The present study focused analyzing characteristics of English textbook (Prose book II) used teaching English to grade twelve students in the province of Sindh, Pakistan. Mixed methods research mode was used for the study. The physical characteristics and course content of the English textbook (Prose II) were evaluated at two levels. First, researchers with two field experts analyzed the textbook and assessed it then administered an adapted questionnaire to 100 male and female teachers teaching English language in different colleges of Sindh. The obtained data were analyzed using SPSS (25.0) version through descriptive statistics. The same teachers were interviewed about physical attributes and content of the textbook. Findings suggest English textbook under study lacks physical attractive appearance. Additionally, it lacks other characteristics such as content and needs improvement in both domains.

Teachers’ feedback revealed that textbook needs improvement and betterment in terms of outer outlook, color, font size, images and overall appearance. However, they mentioned certain characteristics of the book such as less costly, easily available in all cities of province and easy to carry. Results further revealed that the outdated information given in the book and lengthy and boring chapters make learners less interested for learning English. The study recommended that the textbook (Prose II) used for intermediate level needs special attention and revision. Teachers also suggested that this textbook requires certain changes and advancements.

Research Questions

The present study answers following research questions:

- (i) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Intermediate English textbook (Prose- II) in terms of its physical attributes?
- (ii) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Intermediate English textbook (Prose- II) in terms of its course content?

Research Objectives

- (i) To analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Intermediate English textbook (Prose- II) in terms of its physical attributes.
- (ii) To analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Intermediate English textbook (Prose- II) in terms of its course content.

Motivation of Research

Intermediate English textbooks are taught from over the years even generations to generations and our teachers also certify this that they underwent the same textbooks. Around us, many changes have occurred and they are occurring in every field of life but surprisingly, English textbooks taught in Sindh have never been revised, changed and updated as per need and demand of the modern competitive market. As English language teachers, during informal discussions with colleagues, we found that many teachers exhibited their dissatisfaction with the standard of English textbooks used in colleges of Sindh. Thus, it was highly indispensable for researchers to know through proper mode of research the standard of English textbooks taught to college students as perceived by English language teachers who implement and teach them on grass root level.

Study Significance

Although textbooks are an essential element in the classroom and a very important source of material for teachers, there has been little investigation of English textbooks used in Sindh for college grades. This study is, at first significant and novel as no such study has been conducted so far in Hyderabad, Sindh as per knowledge of researchers. The current English textbooks prescribed for college grades in Sindh; have not been properly revised since the day they were introduced. This study would be useful for knowing the quality of English textbooks as perceived by the teachers, thus it may help to explore the strengths and weaknesses of English textbook. Thus, it might be valuable for curriculum designers, textbooks developers, reviewers, material selectors and researchers who evaluate English textbooks taught in the province of Sindh.

Study Context

Pakistan, is one of the largest Muslim countries in Asia continent. It shares its border with India, China, Afghanistan and Iran. The total geographical area of Pakistan is 770,998 Km² (297,684 sq. miles), and the current population is 195,578,792, which is equivalent to 2.26% of the total world population and is the sixth most populated country in the world. Pakistan is administratively divided in four provinces; e.g., Sindh, Punjab, Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). Being a multicultural and multilingual country; it has many ethnic groups having its own identity, culture, and language. Around 72 languages are spoken in Pakistan (Gordon, 2005). According to Rahman (2002) and Pathan et al., (2010) Pakistan is a multilingual and multicultural country in which six major and more than fifty-nine minor languages are spoken among 180 million population. English enjoys an undeniably privileged status in Pakistan. It enjoys a significant status and role in its educational institutions. English is taught as a compulsory subject from class I to university in Pakistan. It has been observed that students after having twelve year education (intermediate) and fourteen years education (graduation) fall short in achieving required English language proficiency. There can be numerous factors of students to be counted responsible for not bringing better English grades in our schools and colleges. Warsi (2011) mentions the standard of English textbooks as one of the main reasons for it. English language teaching in public sector colleges in Pakistan can be improved providing better teachers' training, proper supervision, teachers' education and raising standard of teaching material. in this modern age of globalization and industrialization around the globe textbooks quality is paid major attention unfortunately, in Pakistan it is still a neglected area which needs an urgent attention.

The Federal Ministry of Education presented a research report as:

“In Pakistan, the education publishing sector as a whole and the role textbooks and learning materials can play in the development of education are largely underdeveloped. The learning environment of the Government as well as many private schools is passive” (National Education Policy Review Team, 2006: 53)”.

Another research report illustrates few shortcomings of the English teaching material e.g., textbooks fail to develop students’ interest and intellectual curiosity, the textbooks produced in Pakistan for language teaching are poorly written concerning their design and language, and these textbooks support outdated methodology and are fulfilling examination requirements.

Conclusively, aforementioned assertions show that a considerable awareness is prevailing among all about the disappointing standard of English textbooks or teaching material used in Pakistan but nothing so far occurred which could prove as a remedy. A serious note is required on the part of officials and educators to handle this situation. Warsi (2004) recommends that good and appropriate material can be selected wisely from amongst the available material in the market keeping learners’ linguistics needs, levels and interests.

Research Method

Design of the study

This study employed concurrent research mixed methods. It is the most common and prevalent method in educational research. Creswell & Plano Clark (2011) states that mixed methods research design is a procedure that contains the elements of collecting, analyzing, and mixing of both quantitative and qualitative paradigms in a single study. In this perspective, obtaining set objectives of this study, the use of a single method or research tool was not enough to draw broader picture of the situation hence; both research methods with two different research tools were employed. Further, the study analyzed the textbook at two stages.

Data Collection

Level I: Analysis of Researcher and Experts

Researchers and experts made thorough analysis and complete physical strengths and weaknesses were discussed and listed down. Similarly, course content was analyzed and results were generated accordingly.

Level II: Teachers’ Perception about Textbook

At this level, data were collected through an adapted questionnaire administered to 100 randomly selected male and female teachers teaching English to college grades students in different public and private colleges and higher secondary schools in the province of Sindh, Pakistan. The questionnaire was prepared in light of literature and recent checklists used by experts for evaluating English textbooks.

At second stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 senior female English language teachers. The obtained data served to answer the last research question. Ten female teachers sampled conveniently were individually interviewed to explore teachers’ views about the

textbook under discussion. The interviews were conducted with prior permission from institution and individuals.

Participants

The Researcher

The principal researcher is serving as English language teacher since 2000 in different public and private colleges in Sindh and Baluchistan. She holds M. Phil degree in Applied Linguistics from University of Sindh, Jamshoro. Her research interest falls in evaluating English language textbooks. She is currently enrolled as PhD (scholar) in Applied Linguistics at Institute of English Language and Literature (IELL), University of Sindh, Jamshoro. Her PhD research project is, “Improving EFL learners’ Speaking Skills at the college level: An Action Research Study.”

The Experts

We selected two experts from the Department of English, Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Science and Technology, Nawabshah to support this study. They had PhD degrees in English Language and Literature.

Survey Participants

The intermediate English textbook selected for evaluation is taught in all private and public colleges and higher secondary schools in the province of Sindh, Pakistan. Participants were male and female teachers teaching English for at least ten years to intermediate classes.

Interview Participants

Ten (10) female experienced teachers were selected through convenient sampling approach and each participant was having more than fifteen (15) years of teaching experience at college level in public and private colleges or higher secondary schools in the province of Sindh, Pakistan.

Selection of Textbook

Six English textbooks are taught at intermediate level altogether for part I and part II. Out of these textbooks, the intermediate English textbook (prose II) was selected for examination and evaluation. The rationale behind this selection was the book is of prose and comprises of chapters and exercises. This book is mainly taught throughout the year whereas; other textbooks are related with poetry and novel, which the experts suggested are not mainly used to teach English language, and are partially used to appreciate English literature.

Research Instruments

Checklist

Checklists are the most commonly used tool for evaluating and assessing content analysis of any text material of a book. Cunnig Worth (1995) supports the use of checklist as a research tool for the purpose of content analysis. Moreover, the literature review is full of studies which have used checklists for assessment and evaluation of the text of the books. Therefore, checklists used in recent studies for textbook evaluation were selected for drafting and selecting categories and their items were included in the questionnaire.

Questionnaire

The research tool used in level II was questionnaire consisting of two main sections. There were various reasons for using the questionnaire. First, it was intended to collect certain demographic data about participants of the study. According to Mason and Bramble (1997) a large amount of personal information, such as teachers' academic qualifications could be easily and economically obtained in a relatively short time by using a questionnaire. Second, the main aim of the study was to evaluate English textbook, so questionnaire served better purpose for evaluating the book easily and objectively. Third, study participants were male and female teachers, and researchers found it convenient and feasible to collect data through a questionnaire in the context of this study. Though it took lot of effort, budget and time for preparing the questionnaire but when it was structured, piloted and drafted it was quite easy for use. 100 questionnaires were distributed among participants.

The structure of the questionnaire consisted of two sections having Likert Scale question items and multiple-choice questions. The first part of the questionnaire phase one contained ten questions regarding teachers' or respondents' personal information which helped getting an overall overview of the participants. In section one, fifty items of the Likert Scale were included. The twenty (20) questionnaire items were related to physical attributes and course content of the textbook and adapted checklists were used for evaluating English teaching material. The rating scale questions provide freedom to researchers to use measurement with opinion, quality and quantity (Cohen, 2009).

Table: 1. Sources used for construction of Questionnaire

S#	Category/ Variable	Total Items	Items	Sources	Year/context
	Demographic details items for participants' personal profile	10	1-10	Mukundan Nimehchisalem	(2012) Malaysia
1.	Physical Attributes	1-10	1, 2, 4 & 7 3, 5,6 ,7 ,8 9 & 10	Ghorbani Muhammed Demir & Ertas	(2012) Iran (2013) Saudi Arabia (2013) Turkey

Validity and Reliability of Questionnaire

For reliability test, Cronbach's alpha assessment was calculated and results were:

Table: 1.2. Overall Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of items
.903	50

Table speaks that there was a high correlation between each construct and the overall scale and reliability score was satisfactory.

Interviews

Construction of Interview Question

The following steps were taken for constructing Interview Questions.

An extensive related literature was reviewed for the basic terms, definitions and information about textbooks and their evaluation. All the information was presented systematically in literature review. A draft of interview questions was made based on aforementioned literature. Besides, the development of the questionnaire helped researchers to construct interview points. All open-ended questions mainly derived from research questions were targeting the research objectives. The interview questions were further validated by consulting those questions with field experts and senior teachers. The results obtained from consultation guided researchers to bring changes in wording of the interview questions and some of the questions were changed. A trial of the interview question was done to ensure practicality of the questions. A pilot interview was conducted with two teachers except those who were main study participants. Lastly, questions were included in semi-structured interviews protocol format.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using SPSS (25.0) version. Mean score, frequencies and standard deviation were calculated whereas; ranking was calculated using Excel ranking functions.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The individual semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and analyzed for emerging codes and categories. Color-coding was used for the transcription of interviews to highlight the categories and sub-categories for interpretation and discussions. The transcribed interviews were analyzed through codes and categories. Finally, the interpretation was made which served answering the research questions.

Results

After analysis of the obtained data, the researchers found the following strengths of the Textbook (Prose-II) in terms of physical features.

Strengths of Textbook analyzed by Experts in terms of physical features

- The outer cover of the textbook is colored.
- Its layout is good.
- The size is appropriate.
- Printing quality is average.
- It is portable, and easy to carry.
- There is a total of 43 pages and 10 chapters.

- Cheap, and easily available in almost all areas of Sindh.

Weaknesses of Textbook in terms of physical features

- The textbook lacks color and images or any pictures.
- The chapters are very lengthy, the text of each chapter is extending to 12-15 pages.
- Font size is very small, pages are small, thickly loaded with text.
- No proper margin is left on the pages.
- Unnecessary pages are devoted to the exercises after each chapter.

Strengths of textbook in terms of its course content

- Language is easy to understand.
- Good vocabulary words are used in the chapters.
- Reading skills are focused mainly on the chapters.
- In exercises of the chapters, writing skills are inculcated in the form of composition, translation and comprehension questions.
- Practice pages for precise writing are included.
- Extensive use of phrasal verbs is included after almost every chapter.
- Some of the chapters are interesting stories which make students enjoy the chapters.

Weaknesses of Textbook in terms of course content

- The content of the textbook does not seem to be compatible with the background knowledge of the students.
- Pithy ideas are discussed in many chapters.
- Outdated information is shared.
- The course content of the textbook is not appropriate to the students' age, needs and interests.
- Foreign culture is focused and local culture is not seen in any of the chapters.
- Speaking and listening skills and related activities are missing.
- All four language skills are not presented in balance.
- More stress is laid on the form of language than its use.
- Authentic language is not used in the exercises.
- The content is not supportive for students to improve their English language.

Teachers' perception regarding physical features of English Textbook (Prose- II)

The strengths and weaknesses of Intermediate English textbook (prose II) in terms of its physical attributes as perceived by teachers.

Table: 2. *Physical Attributes of the Textbook*

S #	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Level of Agreement/ Disagreement	Ranking
1	The textbook is locally available	4.45	.671	Agree	1
2	It is cost-effective.	3.87	1.054	Agree	2
3	Its physical appearance is attractive	1.83	1.220	Disagree	7
4	The layout is clear.	3.06	1.114	Neutral	3
5	The font size and type used in the book is appropriate.	1.59	1.074	Disagree	10
6	Printing quality of the textbook is good.	2.61	1.215	Neutral	4
7	Ample number of pictures in the textbook are added to present a real-life situation.	1.96	1.035	Disagree	5
8	There is white space given in the textbook showing clarity.	1.94	1.056	Disagree	6
9	This textbook edition is frequently revised.	1.81	1.100	Disagree	8
10	The textbook is colorful.	1.70	1.041	Disagree	9
Grand mean score: 4.45		Lowest mean score: 1.59			

Out of total 10 items of Physical Attributes of the Textbook, the grand mean score is (**Mean=4.45**) of Item 1, *the textbook is locally available*, which represents the availability of the textbook. The majority of the teachers agree that the intermediate English textbook (Prose- II) is locally available. And there appears probable reason for this, as the study is conducted in Hyderabad, which is the central city of Sindh province and there are good centres of book suppliers in the city besides under the policy of the Sindh government, the textbooks are supplied free of cost to students in all public schools and colleges. This makes the availability of the textbook possible and easy for students and teachers.

The lowest mean score is (**Mean=1.59**) of **item 10- The font size and type used in the book is appropriate**. The researchers studied the textbook carefully and noticed that the font size used in the textbook is indeed very small. And it is devoid of any color or picture, the whole textbook is black and white and there is not a single-colored page inside it, except its outer cover which has dull colored picture. S.D. in all the 10 items of the Physical Attributes of the Textbook is very low

showing that majority of participants agreed on the same stance and there is a very small difference in their agreement.

Table: 3. *Content Analysis of Textbook*

S#	Statements	Mean	S.D.	Level of Agreement/ Disagreement	Ranking
1	Textbook content is compatible with students' background knowledge.	2.27	1.078	Disagree	5
2	Textbook content meets academic needs of students.	2.12	.970	Disagree	4
3	Textbook content is quite feasible that creates interest of students.	2.10	.914	Disagree	3
4	The material of textbook is age appropriate.	2.31	1.034	Disagree	4
5	The thematic content is culturally appropriate.	2.33	1.021	Disagree	3
6	The content of the textbook is free from gender biasness.	2.69	1.234	Neutral	1
7	Activities and tasks are proficiently graded as per complexity.	2.59	1.210	Neutral	2
8	Students easily understand the language of the textbook.	2.14	1.102	Disagree	5
9	Textbook language is highly authentic and it relates to actual life situations.	2.04	1.026	Disagree	2
10	This textbook can simply improve students' English language.	1.82	.896	Disagree	1
Grand Mean= 2.69		Lowest Mean= 1.82			

In this section, the highest mean score is (**Mean= 2.69**) for item 46, *the content of the textbook is free from gender biases*. As per this result, majority of teachers who used this textbook agreed that the textbook (Prose-II) is free from gender bias. The lowest mean score is (**Mean=1.82**) for item 50, *the students can easily improve their English language with the help of this textbook*. The majority of teachers held the view that content of the textbook is free from gender bias; however, it does not help teaching English language effectively. About content of the textbook, teachers agree that this textbook provides sufficient reading material, new vocabulary words appear in every

chapter and exercises are valid from examination point of view. But, for other categories teachers' perception is unfavourable.

The teachers who used this textbook suggest that the textbook can present better image at first by bringing improvement in its appearance. It can be made attractive by colorful title page, inclusion of some images, colors and adequate pictures. At present, it is completely black and white, devoid of any picture that neither raises teachers' interest nor appeals to students for reading purpose. A teacher said:

“Well... .. as they say don't judge a book by its cover, but I think that this doesn't apply to this book, so far as it is not applied for this book, and! The physical appearance or the general appearance of this book is not that much appealing”

Teachers said the printing style, layout and publishing quality are very old and outdated and they found it very difficult to teach the student with such an unattractive book. Some senior teachers said that the font size used in the textbook is so small and there is no wider space have been provided between the lines, therefore it is very difficult for them to use it. They suggested the title page of the textbook should be made attractive that convey some message of literature or language in pictorial form. Further, teachers added that the font size used in the textbook may be enlarged, the size of the textbook may be increased and the physical characteristics of the textbook should be made better providing ample pictures and images in the textbook. Teachers also suggested that although this textbook is taught to adults yet it will bring a good impact on students if the textbook is physically appealing and colorful format.

Conclusion

This study concluded that teachers who used the textbook (Prose-II) in colleges were of the view that the textbook needs betterment and improvement in terms of physical appearance and content. It needs serious attention and the textbook used for teaching English to intermediate classes should be effective in improving students' English language and increase their interest in English language learning. It is only possible when certain modifications are made in order to make it appealing and attractive. Moreover, it generated an idea that inclusion of interesting topics, related to local culture of Sindh province, fun elements, short stories, colorful pictures or images and updated information can make the textbook not only attractive for students but teachers also. Further, they believed that the textbook is not fitting as per students' age, understanding level and academic needs of learners.

Recommendations

Recommendation for Textbook developers

It revealed based on findings of the study that teachers who participated in this research, perceived intermediate English textbook (Prose- II) unfavourable. They faced several problems while using

the textbook and suggested several changes. This indicates that intermediate English textbook (Prose- II) has not been revised since the day it is taught in colleges. Hence, it is recommended that the textbook needs to be revised and certain necessary changes be made. Moreover, alike foreign countries, in Pakistan, a mechanism be set by involving intellectuals of society, teachers, students, educationists and experts for developing and designing courses and textbooks by improving their quality and making them productive and friendly for teachers ad taught.

Recommendation for Teachers

As teachers have complete freedom to use the material the way they like in all colleges and every classroom in Hyderabad. So, it is recommended for teachers to look at the given material critically and carefully to use it at this level intelligently to fulfil the requirements and needs of their students. Moreover, teachers may bring into the classroom some other useful and authentic material to improve students' language skills, abilities and capabilities. Teachers' discussions and coordination to adopt the given material can bring betterment to this dimension.

Recommendations for Educators

Educators and policymakers need to emphasize improving teachers' education and trainings. Through proper training and education, teachers may be trained to select, adopt, utilize and develop material for students and they shall be capable using the textbooks in a variety of ways. Truly speaking, there is a dearth of teachers' education and training in public sector colleges, teachers' training, and workshops. Hence; seminars and refresher courses need to be designed to equip pre-service and in-service teachers for textbook adaptation and using textbook material wisely to meet students' academic needs effectively and efficiently.

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