



**REVIEWING THE “LANDSCAPE”: AN ANALYSIS OF THE
GENERAL ENGLISH (GE) TEXTBOOK FOR B.A. SEM I AND II,
GAUHATI UNIVERSITY.**

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Abstract

The use of English language has proliferated in every sphere. In order to avail the benefits of modern technologies, ensure higher education and employment opportunities, etc the study of English has become utmost important. Students after graduation normally go for higher education or in search of jobs. They need to acquire a good level of proficiency in English to compete with the outside world. All colleges in India teach English as one of its subjects. Nevertheless, there are factors affecting effective teaching- learning of this language. One of them is the lack of appropriate textbooks. The main objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a General English textbook “Landscape” based on G.U revised syllabus for B.A. Sem I and II. The data for this study was collected employing research instruments like textbook analysis, questionnaires and semi-structured interview. The findings of this study reveal that the textbook suffers from a number of pitfalls. The textbook does not allow for the integration of the four language skills. The poetry section contains no exercises and activities. No glossary and illustration is provided. The textbook fails to attract the interest of majority of the students. The assessment activities fail to test the learners’ real mastery of the language.

Keywords : *General English textbook for B.A. Sem I and II, textbook evaluation, effectiveness, inaccuracies.*

INTRODUCTION:

In today’s world, the English language has proliferated in every sphere. Without the knowledge of English, access to modern technologies and conveniences, better employment opportunities, higher education etc has just become unthinkable. More specifically, after

1975, there is a shifting emphasis of English as ‘literature’ to English as a ‘service’ and a ‘library’ language. With this shift of emphasis of English, there is a growing concern now for the learner’s need in the teaching of English. Students after graduation normally go for higher education or in search of jobs. It has become utmost important for them to attain the knowledge of English to keep pace with the faster growing world. Irrespective of so many regional languages in addition to Hindi as a national language in India, all colleges teach English and most of them have English as their medium of instruction. Nevertheless, there are factors affecting effective teaching- learning of this language. One of the important factors is the lack of appropriate textbooks.

Textbook has always served as an important resource and tool despite the development of a wide variety of innovative and modern ancillary aids in teaching English. Emphasizing the importance of textbook Hutchinson and Torres (1994) stated: "The textbook is an almost universal element of teaching. Millions of copies are sold every year, and numerous aid projects have been set up to produce them in countries. No teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook." (pg.315). Textbook gives the course a sense of structure. It serves as a guide to the content to be covered and provides the basis for variety of language practices the learners take part in. A good textbook benefits both the teacher and the learner in numerous ways. For the learners the textbook provides the storehouse of language information and also enables them to see the course as credible. The textbook serves as a support and ideal for novice teachers. Effective language teaching-learning cannot occur without the use and adaptation of proper textbooks.

While a good text book can act as the main facilitator of language learning, an inferior quality textbook affects the whole process of language acquisition. Nowadays huge numbers of ELT materials are produced instantly on considerations other than strictly educational. Sheldon (1988) has rightly argued that “Textbook represents not only the visible heart of any ELT program” (pg. 237) but also it is regarded as “the tainted end-product of an author’s or publisher’s desire for quick profit.” Such textbooks pose problems rather than help in effective teaching-learning.

The evaluation of textbooks therefore deserves serious attention since the quality of the textbooks largely influences the quality of learning outcomes. Ellis (1997) declared that textbook evaluation helps teachers move beyond impressionistic assessments and it helps

them to acquire useful, accurate, systematic, and contextual insights into the overall nature of textbook material.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to evaluate a textbook of General English “Landscape” based on Gauhati University revised syllabus for B.A. Sem I and II at colleges under it.

Significance of the study

Textbook selection plays a massive influence on teaching-learning process. In the absence of a good quality textbook, the objectives of teaching cannot be achieved. Material production needs a lot of planning and scientific thinking; the subject matter has to be presented in a psychological way.

The present study would be significant to the teachers, learners, authors, publishers, researchers, material planners and all those who are associated with English language teaching or learning. This study will also provide some insights to curve out an ideal General English textbook which relate to the needs and interests of the undergraduate learners.

Objectives of the study

- To evaluate the General English textbook “Landscape” based on G.U revised syllabus for B.A. Sem I and II.
- To find out whether the textbook shows a good understanding of the students.
- To know the students’ views regarding the effectiveness of the textbook.
- To know the teachers’ views regarding the effectiveness of the textbook.
- To provide a general understanding of the GE syllabus.

Method

For the present study, two methods viz. textbook analysis and survey method were used by the researcher.

Materials

- The General English textbook “Landscape” based on G.U revised syllabus for B.A. Sem I and II.
- Sample of 100 students from B.A. Sem I and II studying and 4 experienced college teachers (here coded as T1, T2, T3, T4) teaching English in affiliated colleges of GU in Sonitpur district.

Development of Tools

All data relating to this study were collected using the following tools:-

- Textbook analysis
- Questionnaires both close type and unrestricted type (to both students and teachers)
- Semi-structured interview (teachers only)

Analysis

The data obtained was qualitatively analyzed.

Findings and discussion

Based on textbook analysis:-

The researcher investigated the textbook and drew some insights about its table of contents, organizational pattern, length of the lessons, exercises and activities, treatment of new words etc. The results are presented as follows:

1. The GE textbook “Landscape” incorporates a total of 16 literary pieces belonging to different genres of commonwealth and Indo-Anglian literature as per G.U. syllabus. It has been divided into two sections- namely prose (Sem I) and poetry (Sem II).
2. The prose section comprises of three essays, four short stories and the poetry section nine poems.
3. No pre-reading activity signifying the aims is provided at the beginning of the lessons.
4. The length of the lessons is good except two- “Running Water” (11pages) and “Naipaul’s India and Mine” (17 pages).
5. New words are not treated effectively.
6. No glossary and illustration is appended.
7. The themes of the lessons are understandable to the level of learners.
8. Focus is more on the content rather than on the language.
9. There is little concern for developing the communicative competence of the learners.
10. As far the assessment activities are concerned, only the prose section contains a set of text-based descriptive questions. No comprehending exercise and activity is included in the poetry section.

Based on students’ questionnaire:-

Questions in the students’ questionnaire were designed to explore the perception of the students towards the textbook, their interest, needs, motivation, problems encountered with their General English textbook. The major findings are presented as follows:

Table 1: Interest of the learners towards the contents of the GE textbook

1) How do you find the topics of your GE textbook?

Item	Percentage of respondents
1. Interesting	10.5%
2. Boring	68 %
3. Some interesting some boring	21.5%

The above table shows that 68% of the students do not find the contents of the textbook interesting. 21.5% of students have medium level of interest for the contents of the textbook where as only 10.5% find the topics interesting. It suggests that the topics of the GE textbook hardly attract the interest of majority of the students. Low level of interest creates hindrance in the process of learning, so the presentation of the topics of the need to be revised.

Table 2: Difficulty level of language structures, vocabulary

2) How do you find the vocabulary, structures presented in your GE textbook?

Difficulty level	Percentage of respondents
1. Easy	10%
2. Medium	25%
3. Difficult	65%

From the above table, it is inferred that the vocabulary and structures presented in the textbook present difficulty to majority of students (65%). Only 10% of the students find the language structures and vocabulary easy. Complex language structures may discourage the learners to read their textbook. Therefore, glossary is needed to be appended.

Table 3: The textbook's focus on enhancing language skills

3) What do you think about the following statement?

The GE textbook helps me in-

Item	Yes	No

1. improving my reading skills	31%	69%
2. improving my writing skills	18%	82%
3. improving my speaking skills	2%	98%
4. improving my listening skills	27%	73%

As can be seen in Table 3, 31% of the students responded as “Yes” and 69% of them as “No” for item 1. For item 2 18% of the students responded with “Yes” while majority of them (82%) responded with “No”. For item 4 and 5, 27% of the students stated that the book helps them to improve their listening skills and only 2% think that the textbook is helping them to develop their speaking skills.

The results show that the textbook does not allow for the integration of the of the four language skills.

Table 4: Unsuitable and difficult materials

4) Which literary genre incorporated in your GE textbook do you find most difficult to deal with?

Item	Percentage of respondents
1. Essays are most difficult to comprehend	18%
2. Short stories are most difficult to comprehend	3%
3. Poems are most difficult to comprehend	79%

It is clear from Table 4 that majority of students (79%) find most difficult to deal with poems. It may be interpreted as their inability to deal with the complex and archaic language of poetry. Lack of exercises and activities in the poetry section adds to their difficulty.

Based on teachers' questionnaire:-

Teacher's questionnaire was designed to find out the views and opinions of the teachers towards the textbook, the inadequacies and inaccuracies of the textbook. The major findings are presented below:

Table 5: Appropriateness and effectiveness of the contents

1) What is your opinion about the contents of the GE textbook?

Item	Strongly agree	agree	disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The topics cover adequate variety of literary types	0	25%	75%	0
2. The contents are interesting and motivating	0	0	100%	0
3. The contents are selected according to the ability of all the learners.	0	25%	50%	50%
4. The contents are relevant to the students' daily life	0	25%	75%	0

As can be seen from Table 5 25% of teachers “agree” while 75% “disagree” with item 1. For item 2, 100% of the teachers responded that they “disagree”. Regarding item 3 25% of the teachers stated that they “agree”, 50% “disagree” while the rest 50% “strongly disagree.” Item 4 received 25% agreement and 75% disagreement from the teachers.

Regarding the variety of literary types provided in the textbook, one of the interviewed teacher T2 stated “the textbook should cover more areas- science, dialogues, novel extracts, one –act play travel etc”.

T1 stated that the current syllabus is not according to the mental level of all the students –

“there is not enough materials for the bright, average and weak.”

Regarding the relevance of the contents to the students' surroundings, T2 said that though the values reflected in some of the lessons might be beneficial in the learners' social life; there is a necessity of incorporating "some lessons on modern technology, current problems like global warming etc. which give practical knowledge to the learners."

Table 6: Focus of the textbook on enhancing the language skills

2) How will you rate the focus of the GE textbook on enhancing the language skills?

Item	High	Medium	Low
1. Reading	0	75%	25%
2. Writing	0	25%	75%
3. Speaking	0	0	100%
4. Listening	0	50%	50%

The results in Table 6 show that the textbook does not maintain the balance of the four language skills. For item 1, 75% of the teachers responded as "medium" and 25% as "low". Regarding item 2, 25% think that it as "medium" and the rest 75% of them as "low". 100% of the teachers stated that the book does not focus on enhancing the speaking skills. Item 4 received 50% of responses as "medium" and 50% as "low".

On being interviewed, T1 informed that focus on developing the oral skills is totally ignored in the current GE syllabus. Very few students can speak in English as informed by the teacher. T3 stated that writing tasks were sufficient to improve the students' proficiency in writing- "most of the students make mistakes even in the commonest structures of the language. They practise their writing skills only in their examination answer scripts which are mere representation of unintelligent cramming".

Table 7: Grammar section

3) What is your view about the inclusion of grammar topics in the current GE syllabus?

All the teachers informed that they were not interested to teach grammar as isolated topics from language teaching. They simply waste their time and energy by teaching grammar topics. Instead they proposed to teach grammar in context and as part of communication.

It is inferred that undue emphasis on grammar discourages the teachers.

Table 8: Physical qualities

4) Do you think that the GE textbook is effective in terms of its physical qualities?

Yes	No
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Table 8 shows that the textbook fail to appeal the learners in terms of its physical qualities.

Relating to this, T2 said, “No suitable illustrations are provided to make the subject matter attractive as wells help the learners visualize abstract concepts.”

Table 9: Assessment activities

5) Are the test items in the textbook sufficient to assess the students’ achievement?

Yes	No
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The results in Table 9 clearly indicate the inadequacy of the exercises to test the learners’ proficiency.

One of the interviewed teachers T2 informed “the text contains a set of descriptive questions which only demand reproduction from memory of its passages. There are not enough exercises and question types in the text which give practice in real language usage as well as encourage the creative side of the students.”

T 3 said “the major pitfall of the textbook is that there is no exercise and activity in the poetry section. Only when sufficient activities regarding the rhythm, rhyme patterns, various poetic devices etc used in the poems are provided, the students can truly appreciate poetry and it is possible to trigger creative writing among them.”

It is inferred from the above findings that the questions in the text encourage the unintelligent cramming and do not test the learners’ real mastery of the language.

Conclusion:

This paper has attempted to provide a detail analysis of a textbook of General English “Landscape” followed at the UG level of colleges under Gauhati University. Both close type and unrestricted type questionnaires were administered to students and teachers to find out

the problems of the textbook. It has been found that the General English textbook suffers from a number of pitfalls. Efforts should be made to improve the health of the General English textbook. As we know there is a greater emphasis now for the shift from the subject to that of the learners. So, in order to place an ideal textbook among the learners, their interest, needs, ability, age, etc should be taken into consideration. Vocabulary, language structures should be carefully selected and controlled, topics should be up-to-date, suitable illustrations, glossary etc should be provided. Most important, in today's world where English is playing its most important role as a 'service' and a 'library language', the teaching of English should be made more practical and language-oriented and material selection must accord it so that the learners can equip themselves with the all the requisite skills to keep pace with the faster growing world.

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