



Foreign Language Teaching and Development of Language skills:A Pakistani Perspective Dr. Syeda Naureen Mumtaz*, Dr. Uzma Quraishi**

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ABSTRACT

The study was attempted to explore as to what extent English language teaching in Pakistan has been able to develop language skills among the target learners. The researcher intended to evaluate the limit to which the textbook helps in generating competence of all four integrated skills, especially as laid down in the standards of the National Curriculum (2006). The purpose of this study was to create pragmatic awareness among learners, teachers and educational professionals, working in the field of English as Foreign Language. By method, it was a qualitative study, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were the tools used to elicit the data. The participants of this research were selected from public sector schools and organizations including, teachers, policymakers, curriculum developers, subject specialists, and students to examine the effectiveness of grade VIII's English language textbook on students' performance. For data analysis themes were developed, coded and summarized in a descriptive mode. The findings of this study reflected that the relevant textbook does not cater to the target learners' future academic and professional language needs. As a solution to the problems while teaching and learning English as foreign language in Pakistan; this study also offered a model to be followed by the policy makers and practitioners in order to make the existing English language textbook more effective in terms of foreign language teaching and learning and language skill development.



Introduction

Keeping in view the global demands of language learning, National Curriculum (NC, 2006) has focused on the development of the language as a whole; where each language skill needs to be paid equal attention.

Statement of the Problem

The study intended to determine the effectiveness of the current English language textbook with a special reference to English acquired as foreign language, and a source of developing language skills among the target learners. The study explicated the theory that instead of teaching the language as if it was nothing more than a repetition of grammar rules and isolated vocabulary items, it should rather address the real challenges faced by the target learners in real life communication situations (Kim, 2020). Integration of language skills imply that EFL teaching programs and the textbook should be inclusive of the tasks that challenge the learners to engage themselves in producing meaningful utterances (Mumtaz & Quraishi, 2020).

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out perception of learners about English Language and Grade VIII's English language textbook.
2. To find out the perceptions of the educational professionals about Grade VIII's English Language textbook
3. To propose a modified version of English language textbook for Grade VIII to promote foreign language acquisition and language skills

Research Questions

Q1. What is the learners' perspective about English language and Grade VIII's English language textbook?

Q2. What is the perception of the educational professionals about the Grade VIII's English Language textbook?

Q3. How does Grade VIII's English language textbook cater to the diverse needs of language learners in terms of foreign language acquisition and language skills development?

Significance of the study

The research findings will help to modify and reshape the existing textbook and its activities for effective language skills development and to help learners acquire English as foreign language in Pakistan. It is expected to be more practical for the target learners to acquire the desired level of competence in four language skills. Also, a general strategy for effective teaching and learning of English as foreign language will emerge, to help a wide array of teachers, policy makers, and theorists to develop their study of language skills development and the role of textbooks in assisting language acquisition.

Foreign Language Acquisition

Acquisition and learning of a language are distinct processes; "acquisition" implies learning unconsciously as it takes place in real life where errors are tolerated and there is less emphasis on grammar, whereas "learning" suggests possessing the formal knowledge about the language (Collier, 2016).

The current foreign language education emphasizes on language production and development of speaking skill has received much attention in the past four decades (Derakhshan, Tahery, & Mirarab, 2015). Zhang (2017) is of the view that language acquisition happens in a cyclical process.

Whether English is their first, second or third language, the learners have to learn its grammar, vocabulary and being able to predict the meaning in different social contexts. Troike (2012) defines foreign language as a language which is not widely used in learner's immediate social context. However, effortless foreign language learning (FLL) can happen at its best provided the learners have adequate exposure to the target language at an early (Troike, 2013).

Hussain (2005) looks at the whole language learning process as an attempt where learners can promptly use the acquired language skills. Language learning is not only about acquiring certain rules; rather it involves utilizing those learnt rules accurately (Widdowson, 1983, cited in Ohno, 2011). To teach English in EFL setting functional approach should be adapted by the teachers where there is adequate exposure to meaningful exchange of utterances (Collier, 2016).

With a total number of 14,734 middle schools in Punjab, (female enrolment 1165749, male enrolment 1106613, and teachers' total population 82752, Punjab School dept. December, 2017) it implies that there is an enormous number of grade VIII learners who may get affected as result of studying the prescribed textbook.

Language skills

According to Ramzloo (2007), Jack Richards recommends textbooks to be interactive, problem solving and information sharing. Longman's dictionary (2010) approves a textbook which is based on multi skills

syllabus. For McGrath textbook is a key component to language teaching, therefore its appropriateness deserves much attention.

For Tomlinson (2014), a textbook should include a variety of tasks; for example tasks on pronunciation, skills of reading, grammar activities, speaking, listening and writing.

Since 1970s learners have gained importance more than anything else; teachers, curriculum and learning; this means that all actions and activities primarily aim to facilitate learning. This research attempts to explore the present textbook used at grade VIII level in public sector schools to make it more useful for teachers and learners, with special reference to its relevance to face current challenges. Grade VIII's textbook should be flexible to incorporate a variety of tasks to help learners to use language independently.

National Curriculum (2006)

It was expected that new knowledge and skills will be introduced in each grade, while creating opportunities for integration of new knowledge and skills with the students' prior learning. It aims to offer academic and practical skills that learners can use to complete their studies or build their careers after graduating from school. Learning language functions and skills are important part of language learning by emphasizing on developing competency in all areas of the language. The teaching strategies ensure that practice in speaking, listening, reading and writing is integrated. Students are expected to learn to the information and ideas through reading and listening, and to effectively communicate their ideas through writing and speaking.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study; the qualitative data helped the researcher gain an in-depth insight into the perceptions about the textbook and English language teaching and learning in the public sector. The present study sought subjective interpretation of the phenomenon from the viewpoint of the participants involved in the study, therefore, the researcher thought it best to rely on interpretive research design (supported by Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Semi structured interviews and focus group discussions generated the relevant data for the study.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Instruments and Its Findings

The trustworthiness of the research findings, in a qualitative research is ensured by incorporating methodological techniques. Methodological triangulation guarantees more comprehensive findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). In qualitative research validity of the tools is interpreted as appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data, and the reliability is all about consistency (Leung, 2015). In order to get a clearer understanding of the research problem, methodological triangulation was adopted for the present study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Triangulated techniques were also used for confirmation of the collected data, therefore, the validity and credibility of the findings could be increased (Yeasmin, 2012, Bryman, 2004, & Silverman, 2014).

Olson (2004) defines methodological triangulation as a qualitative method. This methodical triangulation enabled the researcher to use different techniques to get access to different facets of the same social phenomenon. Triangulation also helped reducing the bias (Anney, 2014, Walliman, 2016).

Research Participants

For focus group discussions, 72 students from 4 schools of Lahore district were selected through convenient sampling by the researcher. Also, 6 educational professional were selected and interviewed.

Data Collection

The data collection procedure consisted of two separate stages; in each stage different stake holder was personally approached and interviewed by the researcher; initially the researcher approached policy makers, curriculum developers, and subject specialists, later, grade VIII students were interviewed. Interviews simply reflect life; as things are felt or expressed in real life (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). In the

present study, in-depth, semi structured interviews were used to collect data from policy makers, curriculum developers and subject specialists. Focus group discussion; another type of qualitative research technique was also employed, these were interviews on a specific topic with a small group of students in one session. In focus group discussions, participants shared some very innate information (Jamshed, 2014).

Data Analysis and Findings of the Study

After the interviewees' consent these interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed by deploying the thematic analysis technique. The researcher highlighted the relevant points related to the research questions. The researcher allotted the codes to those relevant points, and this helped emerge some major themes from the collected data.

Research Q1. What is the learners' perspective about English language and Grade VIII's English language textbook?

Analysis of Students' Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions focused more on subjective responses of the participants. In order to conduct Focus Group Discussions (FGD); the researcher approached four different schools, both female and male, in Lahore district. From each selected school a group of 18 students of grade VIII were selected to share their views about the English language textbook they were using. Altogether 72 learners participated in these discussions. The response of the learners on each question is recorded and presented below.

Q1. Which language (s) do you like?

Q2. Which language (s) do you speak at home?

The learners accepted that since they were unable to communicate in the target language so they preferred other languages over English. Many of the participants in the different groups claimed, "*It is not us when we speak in English language*". Nearly 50% of the learners opted for Punjabi, another half for Urdu, and very nominal for Pashto.

Q3. Why are you learning English?

For question number three, 54% of the learners were distinctly aware as to why they were learning English; remaining 26% only to impress others while 20% remained indecisive. Those of the learners who were aware as why they are learning this foreign language could relate it easily for better prospects in future; "*We want better earnings and better jobs*". For some, it was only to impress other, "*...to show off*".

Q4. Name any English story you have read?

Referring to question number four, it was difficult to believe that these learners had interacted with such limited range of texts (stories); no wonder they could not go beyond the textbook stories. Their reason for liking these stories was the simple fact that they had not been introduced/ exposed to anything in the target language other than the language textbook. There was no concept of library in these children's life, some of them did not have television in their homes for any further reinforcement of the target language nor they have this facility at school. The researcher is justified to suggest that the language textbook should be interesting and comprehensive to cater to the diverse language learning needs of the target learners.

Q5. Do you watch any English TV show?

Talking about their favorite television show the learners expressed that they preferred Urdu programs on the television, as some of them were deprived of this facility. 44% of the learners opted for cartoons on TV; the remaining 56% replied that they do not like watching English programs.

Q6. Can you read and understand your English language textbook easily?

The researcher further asked grade VIII learners if they can read and understand their English language textbook, 71% of them replied in an affirmative and 29% responded in the negative. "Reading" did not seem

to be much of a problem but understanding was for sure an uphill task for grade VIII learners. As the researcher observed (during classroom observations) that the teacher had to translate every single word for these learners to make them understand, however, they could “read” because they used to take turns to read aloud the text in the classroom (as it was repeated so many times, they knew well how to read it), and because they could read it they seem to enjoy the “reading” activity. “Apart from, “writing”, the target learners are good at reading” as claimed by the teachers.

Q7. Would you be able to write/ speak better English after studying this textbook?

For question seven, 54% of them were sure to be able to write better, remaining 46% expressed that they would be able to speak better. They further elaborated that because, “*we are not encouraged by the teacher to use the target language, and we feel shy and avoid using it as a way to communicate with each other*”. They continued, “*We can write because there is so much practice of written work, nearly everything we have to write*”. The researcher also supports their claim as during her classroom observations, she noticed that for oral development skills the textbook had different “Dialogues” which instead of being practised orally were written down.

Q8. Does your teacher encourage you to speak in English in the classroom?

Though the researcher did not have to ask them the next question on her list as during this discussion they frequently made a reference as to how the teacher did not take the initiative to encourage them to use/ practice the target language, yet in their attempt to not to offend the teacher, 33% of them replied in affirmative while the remaining 67% replied in negative.

Q9. Do you get any help to complete your English language homework?

For the final question 25% replied in the affirmative, that they had bought “key book”; for remaining 75% they did not get any help. Being irregular in submission of their home assignments was a major complaint of the teachers against grade VIII learners. Ironically, yet, true that only those students who could afford to buy the “Key Book”, with the solved exercises were found to be regular in their work, or those whose parents were giving them time and attention.

The researcher on the basis of these discussions realized that the grade VIII learners were very keen to improve, and tried their best to contribute to these discussions.

Research Q2. What is the perception of the educational professionals about the Grade VIII’s English Language textbook?

Analysis of English Language Teachers’, Subject Specialists’, Policy Makers’, and Curriculum Developers’ Interviews

Protocol 1 addressed to teachers

In order to gather the information, the researcher developed separate interview protocols, each protocol with a total number of 4 questions. In Lahore district, 16 male and female teachers from 4 different schools were involved in the interviews to know their perceptions about the textbook they were using. Most of the interviewees expressed that they were teaching the current English language textbook for more than two years, which implied that they were experienced teachers. A number of teachers exclaimed that though they were teaching English yet, “*they were not language teachers*”, and *we are teaching the subject for the simple fact we have studied it at graduation level*”. They unanimously complained about being overworked and being kept busy in numerous official duties other than teaching, “*it certainly distracts us from performing our duty (teaching) diligently, hampers our efficiency*”. Some of the most relevant and honest information, came from the teachers, who had been working in this profession for more than 20 years.

Q1. To what extent are you satisfied with the currently used English language textbook?

In their response the teachers fully supported the textbook; declared it error free textbook considering it a far better textbook than the version put in practice before 2015, yet at the same time they expressed that the

“ activities contain a lot of details, which consumes a lot of time..... ”.

Most respondents (teachers) appreciated the effort to revise the textbook to make it more comprehensive for language input; *“detailed exercises help us to teach better and children to participate more”*, they made an honest confession and were able to comment, *“ it (language acquisition and skill development) is a continuous process starting from grade I. And at this level (grade VIII) children should be able to speak a little, however, unfortunately they are not able to do so, one reason is that we (teachers) feel shy to speak in English in front of our students..... because we were never encouraged to speak this language”*.

Q2. Is there a teacher's manual to help them operate the textbook?

For this question the teachers' response was that since the textbook comprised of detailed activities, it is mandatory to supply teachers with the teacher's resource book, in the absence of such support they do face challenges. Concerned authorities claimed, *“foot notes, learning outcomes, and glossary”* are added to the textbook (each teaching unit) with the intention to facilitate the teachers, also trainings of these teachers is arranged (at DSD) to equip them with the required techniques and strategies.

Q3. Is the textbook supported sufficiently with essentials like audio/video materials?

There are no supplementary materials; audio or video assistance to make this textbook more interesting/interactive. Teachers found this facility as inadequate, complaining that it will consume much of their teaching time, also, except for very few schools multimedia facility is virtually non-existent (in the North and Center region).

Q4. How does the textbook support oral production?

The final question brought forth the information that since speaking and listening skills are not formally assessed in the examination, less time and space is allocated to these two areas respectively. By implication it is left to the discretion of the language teachers, how they plan oral activity in the classroom. In this regard *“Dialogues”* is the only activity to develop oral skills; it is practised in the classroom because it is assessed in the examination. Teachers claimed that on a scale of 10 the prevalent textbook supports 5% of oral production.

Protocol 2 addressed to Subject Specialists

Q1. After reviewing the textbook, what changes/improvements have been made?

According to the subject specialists presently used English language textbook has been in practice for quite a long time (before NC 2006), and interestingly not based on NC (2006), no wonder the SLOs are *“more ambitious than being realistic”*, (Authorities PCTBB, 2017). Reason being, these SLOs are *“taken from the borrowed curriculums (Bangladesh, Singapore) and they do not fit into the local setting and context in terms of textbook users”* (teaches/ students (subject specialists, 2017)). The overall impression these interviewees triggered was that improvements have been attempted in terms of progression and societal needs; redundant topics (computer related, *“Horse and cattle show”*) were removed and interactive situations have been incorporated for language development.

Q2. There is an equal distribution of skill development activities across the textbook?

On being asked whether there is an equal distribution of skills development activities across textbook, they agreed that there is still room for improvements; formal and lexical items are there, implying *“reading”* and *“writing”* is given preference over *“listening”* and *“speaking”* skills. In their response to Q4. (protocol 2) ,they commented clearly and quoted examples (mentioned above) how efforts have been made to make the prevailing situation better; how learners were provided interactive situations to converse in the target language, how students/teachers were encouraged to ask short questions/answers in the process of *“Pre and While reading”* activity. For a probe, on a scale of 10 the subject specialists rated this textbook as scoring 5 in terms of foreign language acquisition and CC development.

Q3. Language of the textbook is authentic?

In their response the subject specialists admitted that the language used in the current English language textbook is contrived, and special care has been taken to keep the text “simple” and understandable for the target learners. Keeping in line with the comprehension level of grade VIII’ learners “it would not be a good idea to introduce authentic material as a teaching/ learning resource.

Q4. Does the textbook promote interactive meaningful situations in the classroom?

Development of CC had been completely ignored before 2015, and there was no needs assessment before developing the SLOs (NC 2006). However, it has been realized and the task has been taken up by the concerned agencies to remedy the situation. Resultantly, this gap was addressed and the textbook was reviewed and revised to make the alignment better (Textbook and NC 2006) and to achieve the curriculum (2006) objectives in 2015. In their attempt, the authorities tried to make teacher/ student interaction better by incorporating certain activities which encouraged learners to communicate in the target language (Role-Plays), “Pre- Reading” activity is another example to promote oral competence (CC). Opportunities to grade VIII’s learners to experiment with the language and use it productively, instead of imitating the fixed dialogue, and fixed language pattern, is virtually non-existent in the current textbook.

Protocol 3 addressed to Policy Makers

Q1. Do you consider it important to develop Communicative Competence (being able to interact in the target language) among target learners?

Addressing the questions on NC (2006) the Director of the Institute shared that most of the SLOs mentioned in the NC are addressed in the textbook, however, he admitted that SLOs are more ambitious rather than being realistic, so the process to make adequate changes in the SLOs has been initiated, nevertheless, it will take a considerable time to be applied in developing English language textbook, “*from policy to practice, the cascading effect will take some time to be fully implemented*” (Director, PCTBB, 2017).

He continued that NC (2006) has been developed on the pattern of first language acquisition; however, in 2015 measures have been taken to revise these SLOs and make them more realistic, SLOs are rearranged which implies that they are made slightly more challenging for higher classes and less challenging for lower classes, at the same time some of the SLOs have been removed from the Curriculum to localize the document. The currently revised English language textbook (2015) is the result of this effort being made by the concerned authorities. In 2015, the process of rationalizing the SLOs had set in which aimed to develop textbooks up till grade V in different phases. Textbooks are developed according to the assessment scheme and listening and speaking is not part of that scheme; and to develop CC is not the priority from assessment’s view point. Up to grade IV teachers’ guide is also developed (in Urdu). In order to improve the quality of teachers, in 2017 new induction of teachers in public sector (80 thousand) has been completed which is expected to yield the desired results.

In a response to a probe (if the teachers are well versed in NC 2006) these officials shared that teachers were not aware of the requirements of the NC; and the skills which they were expected to develop, moreover, they do not have any access to the document as there are tens and thousands of teachers teaching at grade VIII level in the public sector schools in the Punjab province, and in comparison with this number only 3-4 hundred copies of the curriculum were printed.

The concerned authorities considered it important to develop Communicative Competence amongst the target learners (being able to interact in the target language) which is why improvements have been made in order to make the present textbook more effective for language acquisition, the concerned authorities certainly have expectations from the revised version that it will prove to be a fruitful exercise, and to some extent will enable the target population to improve their CC, or at least provide a platform to them to practice/ use English language. Although the content of the textbook is in alignment with the curriculum, and to some extent it fulfills the objective of the NC, yet in terms of developing language CC, “*We have to go a long way*” (Authorities PCTBB, 2017). These respondents continued that developing CC does not only

involve the textbook but also the teacher who delivers this textbook and the given content, teacher's teaching methodology and pedagogy is also a significant factor to make this textbook effective, in terms of teaching/ learning a foreign language and developing CC, "*Textbook is a teacher's tool(to develop CC), and how effectively or ineffectively she/ he utilizes the provided teaching/ learning material is entirely up to her/ his individual skills* (Authorities PCTBB,2017).

Q2. Do the activities develop meaningful communication (correct utterances, understanding and accurate responses)?

Finally, they expressed that they have made a sincere effort; whatever improvements/ changes they thought necessary to make the present grade VIII English language textbook being taught in public sector schools in the Punjab province more effective for foreign language acquisition and communicative competence development, they have tried to incorporate these revisions in the curriculum/textbooks.

Q3. What improvements do you suggest to make the present textbook more effective in terms of language acquisition and communicative competence development?

Q4. What are your expectations from the revised version?

The policy maker and Curriculum developers claimed and expected that the revised version of the textbook will help to develop CC among the target learners. In terms of opportunities/ situations provided to the learners to practice the target language, meaningful and contextualized activities are developed to encourage meaningful communication (correct utterances, understanding and accurate responses).

Protocol 4 addressed to Curriculum Developers

Q1. How far does the currently used English language textbook (grade VIII) fulfill the objectives of the curriculum?

Q2. Are all SLOs addressed in the textbook?

In response to the above mentioned questions the Curriculum Developers responded "*As far as fulfillment of the objectives of Curriculum (2006) is concerned we acknowledge that it is a borrowed Curriculum, therefore, there is a possibility that all objectives may not have been fully achieved by the English language textbook in practice....., objectives are a bit far from reality.....,In the classroom the teachers do not face an ideal situation..., however, while designing the revised version of the textbook efforts have been made to meet these objective. Also, the revised textbook contains activities such as "Dialogues" and many other similar activities to address the maximum SLOs stated in the Curriculum to equip the target learners with lifelong language skills.*"

Q3. Is the content of the textbook in alignment with the curriculum?

Q4. How do you rate the current English language textbook in terms of developing language acquisition?

The Director and the Deputy Director of the Curriculum Wing claimed "*Yes, the content has been developed on the guidelines provided by the NC (2006). We made sure that in terms of themes and concepts, the current English language textbook should keep in touch with the previous Textbooks in the series (Grade I-VII) and what these textbooks had to offer to the learners. The textbooks move in a smooth progression, introducing a complete concept to the learners.*

See, textbook is not the only factor we should hold responsible for language acquisition in our local setting, there are factors beyond our control...., teachers for instance and how they apply/use the given content is altogether a different debate. No textbook can claim to be the best and the final product.....,improvements have to be made from time to time in order to supply a fine product(textbook)to the textbook users. It is in this regard that the current English language textbook was revised in 2015 to cater to the diverse needs of the language learners. We are hopeful that the current English language textbook will prove to be an effective tool to develop language acquisition in Pakistan.

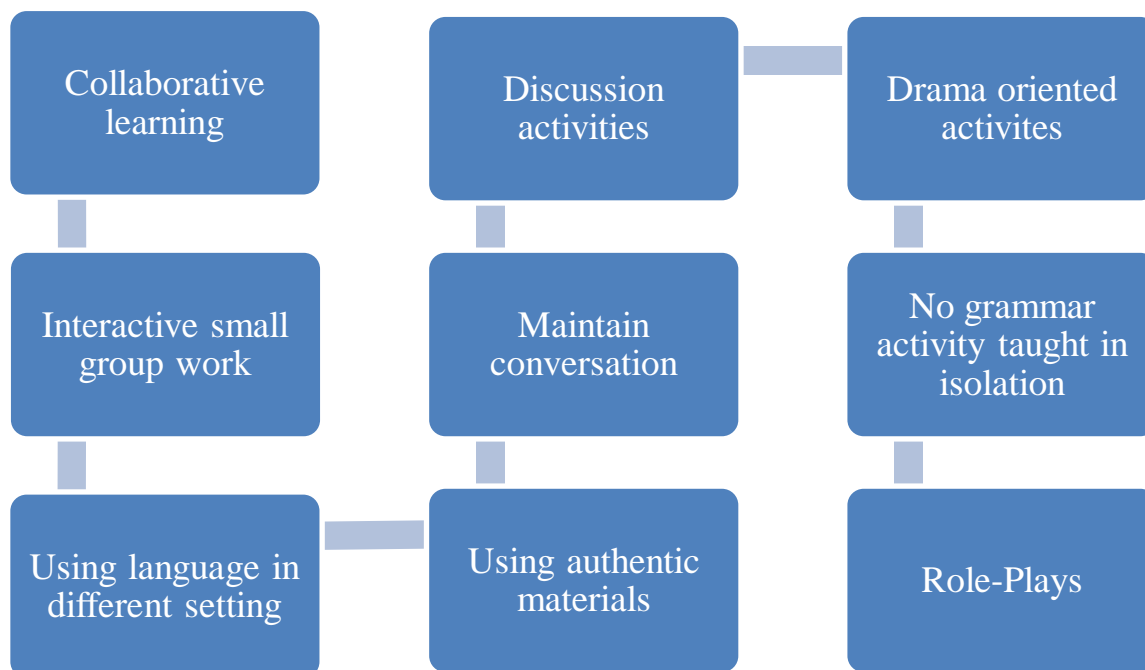
Discussion

Evaluating a textbook has always been popular with the researchers in and outside Pakistan (Ayu, & Indrawati, 2018, Naseem, et al. 2015, and Baloch & Khatoon, 2019). The purpose of any such activity is to find out potential of the teaching and learning material in its EFL/ESL context by identifying its strengths and weaknesses. Teachers, policymakers, curriculum developers, subject specialists and learners, all constituted as major stakeholders and contributed to a valuable addition to the textbook evaluation theory and practice for foreign Language teaching and development of language skills for the present study.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Research Q3. How does Grade VIII's English language textbook cater to the diverse needs of language learners in terms of foreign language acquisition and language skills development?

Communicative Language Teaching Model



The present study has fully answered the research question number three by furnishing a communicative language teaching model (supported by Richards, 2006) to teach and learn English as foreign language in Pakistan in an effective way, with an attempt to develop the four language skills for better performance of the target learners. The present research has contributed by expanding on the existing English language textbook development theory by incorporating different interactive activities which would result in integrating the four language skills by allocating equal time and practice opportunities using the target language for communicative purposes.

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