



AN EVALUATION OF THE SYBA COMPULSORY ENGLISH TEXTBOOK *PANORAMA*

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Abstract

Text book evaluation is an important activity for teachers. It makes them aware of the strengths and weakness of a prescribed text book. It helps them plan the teaching activities properly and develop extra materials wherever necessary depending on the needs of their students. In the present paper an analysis of the text 'Panorama' (2020) is presented. Some of the parameters suggested by Alan Cunningsworth in his 'Choosing Your Coursebook' (1995) are used in this analysis. It is observed that 'Panorama' is a good and useful textbook and it fruitfully caters to the needs of the learners.

1. Introduction

In most of the Universities and their affiliated colleges a centralized syllabus is followed. There are compulsory courses like the language courses for which text books are prescribed. The text books are a mix of literary components like essays, short stories, poetry and few topics of grammar and writing skills. The text book is helpful tool for the teacher as it provides a guideline about how to proceed through the syllabus of the subject. The teacher can properly plan the learning activities based on the text book. Many students don't have access to other materials related to their language subject, except the text book. Through a proper evaluation of the text book, the teacher becomes aware of its strengths and weaknesses. The teachers are also aware of the specific needs of their learners.

Based on the results of the evaluation and the needs of the learners the teacher can plan their teaching learning activities. The teacher can develop extra materials if needed to supplement

the learning activities. Thus text book evaluation is an important and first activity in an educational programme.

In this paper a sample evaluation of the text book *Panorama* (2020) is presented. It is the text book prescribed for the second year BA students of Savitribai Phule Pune University. It is prescribed for the subject of Compulsory English. A few aims of this course are to develop the communication skills of students, to reinforce and revise some areas of grammar, to develop the professional competence of the learners and to instill universal human values through literature. The evaluation of the text book is based on a few parameters mentioned by Alan Cunningsworth in his *Choosing Your Coursebook* (1995). The following research question is posed:

Research question - What are the significant features of the text book *Panorama*, and how far can it help students in achieving their learning goals?

The evaluation is not for faultfinding; rather it attempts to see how well the text book can be

used to develop the language competence of the students. Only selective parameters given by Cunningsworth are employed, in the evaluation process.

2. Literature review

Alan Cunningsworth in his above mentioned book has presented very fine ideas about the merits, and principles of course book evaluation. Some of his ideas are summarily presented in this section.

There are two kinds of evaluations of a course book, an impressionistic overview and an in-depth evaluation. The impressionistic overview means general observations about quality of visuals, layout, items included and their sequence while an in-depth evaluation means the study of how certain items relating to the learners needs are dealt with in the text book. In-depth evaluation will also enquire into the type of activities and skills included in the book, encouragement for learner participation, newly introduced items etc. Cunningsworth suggests that any material examination is based on the priorities of the teacher, characteristics of the particular students and the context of the learning situation. Both kinds of evaluations impressionistic and in-depth evaluation are attempted for the selected text book here.

For deep evaluation of any text book Cunningsworth has provided a general checklist. It has questions about aims and approaches, design and organization, language content, skills, topic, methodology etc. The questions in this checklist can be fruitfully applied in analysis of a course book. Cunningsworth further explains three types of evaluations. They are the pre-use evaluation, in-use evaluation and the post-use evaluation. The pre-use evaluation is an attempt to predict the future performance of the book, while the in-use evaluation means the kind of evaluation when the text book is in use. The post-use evaluation is an evaluation of the book over a period of time. The kind of evaluation attempted in this paper is the in-use evaluation, as this is the first academic year, when the text book *Panorama* is being used.

Cunningsworth explains the advantages of course book evaluation. The activity of course book evaluation is beneficial as it makes teacher aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the book. Maximum benefit can be derived from the strong areas, while extra efforts can be made to complement the weaker sections of the book. It provides teacher with insight into different kinds of published materials and their usefulness. A book can be evaluated to know its potential or to understand its suitability. Evaluation to know the worth of a book is the evaluation for its potential, while matching the course book with specific needs of learners is the evaluation for suitability. The text book *Panorama* will be evaluated here considering the specific needs of the students from rural areas; hence it will be an evaluation for suitability.

Cunningsworth then provides four guidelines for evaluation of a course book. In the first guideline he states that "*Coursebooks should correspond to learners' needs. They should match the aims and objectives of the language-learning programme*"(p.15)". The learner needs mentioned here refer to the language skills needed to be learnt by the learners like topics of grammar, communication skills etc. In the second guideline he explains that the course book should contain language items which can be actually used by students in their particular situations. For instance, if students need language competence to frame correct sentences, then the course book should have items like sentence types, types of conjunctions etc. According to the third guideline the course book should facilitate the learning process and it should not impose any learning method or style. The learners should be free to adopt the learning style which suits them or with which they are comfortable. The final and fourth guideline is that the course books are in a supportive role in the learning process.

Based on the insights provided by Cunningsworth, the text book *Panorama* will be analysed for its suitability for the learners from rural areas. Students from urban localities have comparatively more exposure to English language. There are many English medium schools, a variety of coaching classes, libraries and easily available

resources which help the students acquire language. In contrast most of the students from rural localities get less exposure to English language. There are very few English medium schools, very few public libraries and scarcity of reading materials in English. Grammar and oral communication skills are the weak areas for most rural learners. *Panorama* will be evaluated using the above insights of Cunningsworth and its suitability for students weaker in grammar and oral communication skills.

3. Analysis

There are seven subsections here. Each subsection discusses a specific aspect or entry in the book. Generalized observations about the entries are made.

3.1 Overview of the book

It is a small book with an attractive cover page. The title of the book *Panorama* is printed boldly with the subtitle as '*Values and Skill through Literature*'. It is clear from the subtitle that the book aims to teach values and language skills through literary pieces like essays, short stories and poems. The contents of the book are correctly and finely typed. In the interior are printed the publication information followed by the contents of the book. The contents of the book are divided according to two semesters for students of the SY class. In each semester there are five units of Prose, Poetry, Grammar, Vocabulary and Soft Skills. The book gives a good and beautiful impression to the readers.

3.2 Prose

There are two rich prose sections, one for each semester. In totality they include four short stories, one letter by Chief Seathl and the famous Chicago speech of Swami Vivekananda. The selection of the prose pieces is from diverse locations and cultures. Students are acquainted to the writings and values of writers like Rabindranath Tagore, H. H. Munro, Anton Chekhov, Somerset Maugham etc.

Every prose piece begins by a short block which contains the information of the author. It is

followed by brief summary about the prose piece which the students will learn. A few pre reading questions are asked in the beginning of the prose piece. These questions functions to activate the previous knowledge the students have on the topic and connect them to the lesson. They also prompt students to read the lesson carefully so as to find the answers to the questions. The new words that come in the lesson are highlighted in bold print. Their meanings are immediately given at the end of the page, so that the reading activity is not hampered. The lesson is followed by another block. In this block is contained a short summary of the lesson in a very simple language. In this way through the blocks, the pre reading questions and the word meanings, the reading activity is made meaningful for the learners.

The lesson is followed by a comprehension section. It has three sets of questions. The first question set whose answer is to be written in one sentence checks the understanding of the factual details of the lesson ex.

1. *How long has Foreman been working at his job? (Panorama, p.26)*

The answers for questions in set B have to be written in a more elaborate manner. They check the general understanding of the lesson. The questions in Set C are more thought provoking. For example the question:

2. *Which is the better approach to nature: that of the Native Americans or that of the white people? Why do you think so? (Panorama, p.7)*

This question demands an answer well thought of by the student. It is not directly available in the lesson. The activity of reading is emphasized. New words are taught and Comprehension is emphasized by means of the comprehension questions.

3.3 Poetry

The prose section is followed by the poetry section. In both the sections of the book a total of six poems are presented. It is not much representative as out of the six poems presented only one is by an Indian poet Sarojini Naidu and one

by the American poet Louisa May Alcott. The remaining poems are by British poets. The structure of presenting the poems is same like that of the prose section. A short block consisting of the author information is presented. It is followed by brief information about the poem to be learned. There are pre-reading questions. New words are highlighted in the poem and their meanings are given at the bottom of the page. In the end a summary of the poem is presented.

The comprehension section consists of three sets of questions. There are simple questions to be answered in single sentence. They check the understanding of the facts and literal information of the poem. There are medium level questions which are to be answered in thirty to forty words. They check the general understanding of the poems. In the third set the questions are to be answered in one hundred and fifty words. They demand a more deep understanding of the theme, content and language of the poem. They are mostly personal response type questions. For ex:

The poet summarises the central idea of the poem in an appropriate way in the title. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer. (Panorama, p.108)

3.4. Grammar

In the fourth chapter of his previously referred book Cunningsworth presents checklists for evaluation of grammatical and vocabulary items. They are used to evaluate the grammar and vocabulary topics of *Panorama*. The grammar topics included in *Panorama* are passive voice, direct and indirect speech, negative sentences, question tags, sentence types and degrees of comparison. They definitely correspond to the needs of the learners. Knowledge and practice in use of different sentence types, use of positive and negative sentences, reporting speech, framing questions etc are necessary for learners in their gaining overall communicative competence. Hence the grammar topics included in the text book are definitely useful.

The grammatical items are presented in small units so that the learners find it easy and

suitable for learning. They are not long and cumbersome. A balance is sought between form and meaning of the grammatical items. The concepts of grammar are explained and later on the understanding is strengthened by a number of examples. Sufficient numbers of exercises are given so that the understanding is strengthened. However, the answer keys for the exercises are not provided. The teacher can help the students here.

In case of the passive voice an inductive approach is followed in presenting the topic. While all other grammar topics like direct and indirect speech, sentence types, degree of comparison are presented by a deductive approach. In instances where one grammatical form has more than one meaning they are separately explained. For example in the case of Direct and Indirect Speech the change of verb in the past tense while converting a direct utterance to an indirect one is explained as:

1. When the verb in the sentence in direct speech is in present simple tense, it changes to the past simple tense. (Panorama, p.42)

2. When the verb in the sentence in direct speech is in present continuous tense, it changes to the past continuous tense. (Panorama, p.42)

In this manner the different aspects of the same grammatical items are vividly dealt with.

3.5 Vocabulary

The book *Panorama* lays emphasis on learning of adequate amount of vocabulary by the students. Every chapter and poem has new and important words highlighted in bold print. Their meanings are given at the bottom on the same page. It is evident that vocabulary learning is central to the course. In this manner around 183 new words are taught in the specific situational context given through the lessons and poems. A large number of words along with their meanings are taught. There are separate chapters on vocabulary which include topics like one word substitutes, idioms, collocations, commonly confused words etc. Principles of vocabulary learning are followed. The words taught in contexts of the lessons and poems, display the situational

relationships between words and their contexts. There is a topic on collocations which explains the associations between words. Word building exercises through addition of prefixes and suffixes are also included.

3.6 Soft skills

It is a new and welcome addition in the course book. These are the skills students require to perform efficiently in their professional and personal lives also. Topics like leadership skills, team work skills, time management etc., are included. It is a special advantage of this text book.

3.7 The four skills

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four skill of language learning. Many students are weaker in these skills. It should be said that though the reading comprehension passages, their understanding, grammar, vocabulary and soft skills are taken care of in the book, adequate exercises for practice of the four skills could have been provided. Here teachers can develop their own materials for practice of the four language skills. Role play activities based on the text can be provided. Teacher can bring audio tapes and even narrations from you tube channels can be used to give listening practice to students. Teacher can devise more personal response type questions. Students can then be asked to write answers for them as a part of writing practice.

Conclusion

The book Panorama is a good and useful textbook for the students. It provides adequate practice in reading comprehension, grammar, vocabulary etc. Most of the language learning principles are followed in including language items in the text book. It is a small book useful for teachers as well as students. Though adequate exercises on developing language skills could have been included, it is not a drawback of the book. Teachers can develop their own materials to give students practice in the four language skills. All in all it is a good and useful book.

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