

## **An Evaluation of English Textbook of Grade VII in the Light of Competency Based Curriculum in Bangladesh**

**Mohammed Anwar Ullah**

Senior Teacher (English), Government Laboratory High School, Mymensingh, Bangladesh

**Farjana Khanum**

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Trishal, Mymensingh  
Bangladesh

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**ABSTRACT:** *In Bangladesh, English textbook is the only material used widely for teaching English language. The textbook of class seven is designed based on the new curriculum following the experiential learning cycle, a theory of Kolb. The aims of this study are to justify the purposes of English textbook, to evaluate how the competencies are presented in the textbook and to check whether the experiential learning cycle is followed. Therefore, the study evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of this book regarding the presentation of four competencies as well as the presentation of four skills. Moreover, the research examines whether or not the units complete experiential learning cycle sequentially. The textbook provides enough opportunity for learners' engagement. As the curriculum believes in learners' autonomy and democratic practices, the book emphasizes group and pair work. However, there is very little scope for individual task. Based on the textbook analysis it is found that among 16 units, 7 units do not complete experiential learning cycle. During the evaluation the study also finds some other syntactic and semantic issues in the book. Beside these, the new curriculum is excellently organized. As it is designed following the new curriculum, it will have great impact on the teaching-learning system. Some recommendations are also made for improving the textbook for class seven.*

**KEYWORDS:** Competency based curriculum, experiential learning, competency, English textbook

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## INTRODUCTION

To cope up with the ever-changing world, the educational system of Bangladesh has brought some major changes in curriculum design and teaching methodology. With the advancement of technology and especially, for the advancement of artificial intelligence lifestyle has got changed. The world has become a global village where people are no longer confined within the national border of their country. They need to maintain international communication even staying at home. As English is the only means of communication among the people of different languages of the world, it is necessary to have good command over English. To make the young learners of the country competent while pursuing higher studies and to make skilled manpower, English plays a vital role. Keeping these in mind, National Curriculum and Textbook Board of Bangladesh has prepared new textbooks for primary and secondary level learners. After 2012, this revision comes based on the needs of the learners. Research and technical exercises have been done under NCTB during the years 2017-2019 to analyse the current situation. Consequently, in 2020, NCTB designs competency based curriculum. English textbook for class seven is also designed based on competencies following pedagogical approach, experiential learning.

Evaluating teaching material is very important professional activity for all EFL teachers. In Bangladesh, teaching materials are produced by NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board) guided by Ministry of Education with a very little scope for the teachers to evaluate. However, the English language teaching researchers do this under different evaluation criteria. McDonough (2003) has developed materials evaluation criteria in relation to usability, generalizability, adaptability and flexibility. McDonough and Shaw (2003) suggested a model with three principles of evaluation, external evaluation, internal evaluation and overall evaluation. According to them, external evaluation offers a brief overview of the materials from the outside (cover, introduction, table of contents) which is then followed by a closer and more detailed internal evaluation.

Again, Tomlinson (2018: 52) states “Materials evaluation is a procedure that involves attempting to predict or measure the value of the effects of language-learning materials on their users”

Deuri (2012) opines that English textbook should be based on the environment of the student. It should cover regular vocabulary graded properly and the style should be based on the principle of easy to complex. Also the textbook should have enough number of exercises. Moreover, Rohmah (2018) mentions that the activities and tasks should be organized in such a way that they cover four major language skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing.

This new English curriculum is competency based. The pedagogical approach is built on the basis of experiential learning focusing on the assessing the process of learning. It promotes local values, cultural diversity and questions stereotypes of the society. Moreover, it promotes low-cost teaching-learning materials and facilitates learners' autonomy and independent learning.

In the textbook, the competencies are presented through contents and the students need to acquire some knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in order to achieve those competencies. As the English Textbook of class seven is designed on the basis of competency based curriculum, it is important to put focus on the theoretical aspects for the same. This educational trend came from United States and the initial idea was adopted from generative grammar by Chomsky who said in 1965, "...fundamental difference between the competence or knowledge of language and the application or actual use of language" (Chomsky, 1968, p. 172).

The purpose of competency based curriculum is to get complex outcomes of a learning process (i.e. knowledge, skills and attitudes and values to be achieved by learners) rather than mainly focusing on what learners are expected to learn about in terms of traditionally-defined subject content. In principle, such a curriculum is learner-centered and adaptive to the changing needs of students, teachers and society. Thus, the purposes of this textbook is to know in which areas students can use English (e.g. in real-life situations and creative writing) and also to know how students can orient themselves with local values as well as democratic skills through the process of learning English.

Also, while going through the learning process, the learners will achieve basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, observing, and feeling) of English language. They will be able to appreciate the beauty of literature, express themselves creatively and artistically using different media. Moreover, they will be able to communicate effectively using basic skills of the English language for academic purposes, specific professional purposes and in day to day life communication purposes. Again, they will be able to exert creative and critical insights; to appreciate English literary text which will make them able to express themselves aesthetically. Finally, they will be able to uphold democratic practice in communication at the individual, social, national and global contexts. (NCTB)

### **Subject conceptualization**

Since English is viewed as a foreign language in Bangladesh, the K-12 curriculum of English needs to maintain a balance of focus between real-life application and a good understanding of the contexts in which the language learners are going to use English. The subject is conceptualized in the National Curriculum Framework. According to the subject conceptualization, effective communication primarily relies on some core knowledge and skills

of language. Core knowledge is Linguistic norm (basic grammar items) and core skills are interpretability, and clarity of expression. Effective communication also depends on cultural understanding, cultural awareness and democratic attitude. These three components lead to intercultural competence (ICC). Through ICC, the core knowledge and skills are mediated for the applications in three major areas- real-life application, sense of identity, and creative expression.

Real-life application covers the practice of English in everyday communication, for academic purposes, as well as for other specific purposes. As language is a medium of exchanging ideas, thoughts and emotions, learners need to internalize aesthetic value for creative expression as well as to appreciate the beauty of literature. Apart from real-life application and creative expression, another field of application is unveiled with the language users' capability to demonstrate a sense of identity in their practice. Learners' sense of identity equips them with the ability to participate in logical arguments, and ensure democratic practice in communication using their preferred linguistic norms.

### **Pedagogical approach**

For pedagogical approach, the new curriculum follows Kolb's Experiential Learning theory that allows both flexible teaching-learning method and innovative teaching. According to Kolb (1984), "Learning is a process, in which knowledge is created through transformation of experience." His theories present a way of constructing and alternation in the course of study, and provide concrete understanding of how a class or a whole course of study can be taught in order to have better learning by the students. Experiential learning cycle includes four steps, namely concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

As the name suggests, concrete experience will bring out students' experiences that demonstrate their prior knowledge and/or skills, values, and attitudes required to achieve a particular competency.

In reflective observation, the students will be encouraged to use critical thinking, analytical observations to unpack their experiences they shared initially. As they will feel that they have already hold some knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, it will motivate the learners and make them confident about the competency they are about to achieve.

In abstract conceptualization, the textbook will help the students relate their known knowledge and/or skills, values, and attitudes with the theory that is needed to achieve competence. The tasks and activities of the book will play a vital role here. So, the book will provide enough

opportunities to be (i) critical and/or creative thinkers; as well as to be (ii) interactive and expressive.

Finally, in the active experimentation phase, the book will assume that students will continue to practice in real life what they have learned in this process to achieve the particular competency. Therefore, each of the unit of the textbook of class seven is supposed to maintain this learning cycle.

### **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To evaluate how the competencies are presented in the textbook
- ii. To check whether the experiential learning cycle is followed
- iii. To justify the purposes of English textbook of class seven

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research based evaluation of the English textbook of class seven is designed on the basis of the model provided by McDonough and Shaw in 2003. However, based on the requirements of the textbook, only internal evaluation is covered. The basic evaluation framework is designed through the competencies set by the NCTB. The competencies are presented through the units of the textbook. In the discussion, other criteria of the model like sequencing and grading, amount of task and activities, presentation of the skills, amount of authentic materials, role of teachers and learners, etc. will be discussed. Moreover, the curriculum claims that it supports experiential learning as its pedagogical approach. So, the research will evaluate the presentation of the four steps of the learning cycle like, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Overall, the research will evaluate the usability, generalizability, adaptability and flexibility of the English textbook of class seven.

**Unit based distribution of the competencies in the English textbook for class seven**

List of competencies	Focus of the competency	Units	Percentage
1. Ability to repair communication breakdown relating to the contexts	Strategies to minimize communication failure	6, 15	12.5%
2. Ability to recognize and transform different sentence structures	Transformation of sentence structures	2, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12 & 14	43.75%
3. Ability to practice democratic norms by relevant social practices	Maintaining a democratic atmosphere in communication	1, 10	12.5%
4. Ability to connect emotionally with a literary text and express personal feelings about it	Articulation of feelings and preferences	3, 5, 9, 13 & 16	31.25%

The English textbook of class seven is divided in sixteen units. Each unit is designed in such a way that the learners will achieve a particular competency at the end of the unit. Also, each unit should complete the learning cycle sequentially. The table shows that of the 16 units, two units cover competency one. Thus, 12.5% of the entire textbook covers competency one. With seven units 43.75% of the textbook covers competency two. Like competency one, competency three also covers 12.5% of the textbook. However, the table shows that competency four covers five units and the percentage becomes 31.25%.

**Competency One: Ability to repair communication breakdown relating to the contexts.**

Unit 6 has enough reading content and has opportunities to get meaning from the context. Also, reading skill is presented through conversation that can also develop the speaking skill of the learners. The textbook provides enough images to get meaning from the context. The title of the unit is ‘A Good Reader’ that will make the learners aware of the repairing communication breakdown through different reading strategies. The subject matters of the texts are environment issues, animals, saving mobile phone from water, robots, chocolates that are very relevant to the age and interest of the learners. This unit maintains the experimental learning cycle. However, for unit 15, writing skill is presented through several writing items. The title of the unit is ‘Write to make aware’ which will aware learners of formal and informal writings. It seems that the unit does not maintain the learning cycle. In reflective observation, there is no example. It straightly takes to the abstract conceptualization. Again, the unit only teaches the rules of writing letters deductively.

Regarding competency one it seems that, unit 15 tries to show some ways of communication but it does not show any attempt to repair communication breakdown. There is no example of communication breakdown that it intends to repair.

### **Competency 2: Ability to recognise and transform different sentence structures**

In English Textbook for grade VII unit 2, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12 and 14 are prepared and presented to help the learners acquire competency 2. Unit 2 “Playing with the Words” is excellently structured following the experiential learning cycle. Here it provides sufficient notes on the grammar item ‘Affixation’ with ample examples, scope for drilling and exercise. Finally, the unit also provides learners with the opportunity to experiment their developed skill on the topic. Unit 4 ‘The frog and the Ox’ is a recapitulation of unit 7 of the English Textbook for grade VI that talks about ‘Adjectives’ and gradually it takes the learners to the concepts of degrees of adjectives. No doubt, the process of recapitulation is commendable for effective learning. But, in 4.2 there is a discrete reading text without any title or speaker mentioned in the instruction. The text includes a few underlined adjectives in positive or superlative degrees but there is no adjective in comparative form. In 4.3 the reading text ‘The Frog and the Ox’ is reproduced from an authentic material but with change of the gender of the frog. In 4.8, the rules for forming comparative and superlative degrees rule-3: misses the exception. Adjective ending in ‘y’ preceded by a vowel the ‘y’ remains unchanged. Only adding –er or est is enough for forming comparative and superlative degrees (Gray – Grayer – grayest).

Unit 7 “Using Verbs Easily” does not follow the learning cycle properly. At the beginning it tries to give the learners an idea simply about verb through an image. But, instead of providing reading text to help students find out different types of verbs and think about their functions, it jumps directly to the Note on principal verbs, auxiliary verbs, static verbs and action verbs in a deductive way. In activity 7.3 the learners are asked to sort out the verbs provided in the clues whether they are action verbs or state verbs. However, most of the verbs in the clues are action verbs. There is only one state verb and it is ‘be’ verb. Hence, the learners might have a misconception of the state verbs. They might take ‘be’ as the only state verb. To conceptualise the auxiliary verbs, the book provides only a few discrete examples without any contextual use. The discussion on verbs ends with an exercise on the use of auxiliary verbs. After that it proceeds to talk about adverb.

In Unit -8, the textbook talks about prepositions and their uses. The beginning of the presentation of the topic is very fine but at the middle of the learning cycle it picks another topic ‘Conjunction’ and the presentation abruptly turned to a deductive approach because here the presentation starts with notes on conjunction. Before going through concrete experience and reflective observation the learners are exposed directly to grammar rules for conceptualization. So,

the steps of experiential learning cycle are not followed properly. In activity 8.11 which is meant for active experimentation for both the topics ‘Preposition and Conjunction’, the textbook says in the instruction ‘In the table below’ but actually there is an image below the instruction. Here, the learners are asked to poster drawing their reading rooms decorating with items chosen from the image. After that they will describe the reading room using prepositions and conjunctions. To demonstrate the starting of the description an irrelevant sentence “There is a very beautiful river beside my reading room -----” is presented.

The unit – 11 of the Textbook for grade VII is excellently presented following the steps of the learning cycle exactly. Here different types of sentences based on their functions are introduced with ample contextual uses, activities, examples and notes on the topic. But, at the beginning of the unit in a conversation between a student and a teacher a cultural issue arises. Here, the student greets the teacher saying “Assalamualikum” but the teacher does say “Walikum salam” in his reply.

In ‘Subha’s Promise’, unit – 12 of the textbook, while talking about Past Perfect Tense deductive approach of teaching-learning is applied. There is little scope for reflective observation of the learners. The book directly tends to introduce the topic through providing notes on grammar rules. Also, in the active experimentation section (12.13) there are issues related to syntax and semantics of the described situations for the learners to write on. Especially, the situations ‘a’ and ‘d’ are not clear. Here, in ‘a’ the sentence part (of what have you done there) is not structurally correct. And, in ‘d’ the focus is on the train journey made from Dhaka to Rajshahi on the last vacation but learners are asked to write on the vacation. Otherwise, the unit is nicely presented for the learners to achieve the competency.

Unit – 14 of the textbook is perfectly arranged with proper texts, images and illustrations. There are lots of activities to conceptualise the topic and the situations are also nicely presented for active experimentation but the unit is missing the first step of the experiential learning cycle.

### **Competency 3: Ability to practice democratic norms by relevant social practices**

Unit 1 and 10 of the English textbook of class seven are designed to help learners to achieve competency 3. Here, unit 1 completes the experiential learning cycle properly. The learners have enough opportunity to be exposed to a democratic environment through the text and activities. Through acting out the conversation provided in 1.3, the learners have the opportunity to use culturally appropriate and socially acceptable norms and gestures. Similarly, unit 10 is also excellently organized to serve the purpose that is i.e. helping learners achieve competency 3. The texts, images and the tasks and activities are well organized. Learning cycle is also followed properly.



#### **Competency 4: Ability to connect emotionally with a literary text and express personal feelings about it**

The English textbook of class 7 uses 5 units to expose learners with different literary pieces through which they can achieve competency 4. The units are 3, 5, 9, 13 and 16.

In unit 3, the textbook maintains learning cycle properly. It introduces the learners with two different genres of literatures, i.e. short story and poem. The subject matter of the story is also very relevant to the age and level of the learners. However, it has some grammar issues that may make the learners confused. Through the unit a specific aspect of literature is taught, that is theme. The poem offers the opportunity to develop speaking and listening skill too.

Unit 5 is designed to teach the learners three characteristics of a literary piece- characters, point of view and central theme. The unit uses a story and an essay. In the note, the book presents the types of the characters of a story, namely, protagonist and antagonist. In the existing story of the book does not contain antagonist. Also, while talking about antagonist it provides an example from another story unknown to the learners. To give the example of the central theme of a story, the textbook mentions an unknown story instead of referring to the stories the learners already have read. Moreover, in 5.3 the story 'My Birthday Surprise' has a female protagonist, Alifa but in the image it is seen that the protagonist is a male. Otherwise, the unit follows the learning cycle.

In unit 9, biographies of some renowned female characters both from home and abroad are presented to help the learners be acquainted with the writing biography. It does not follow the sequence of learning cycle properly. After extracting the concrete experience, the text jumps to the abstract conceptualization through giving notes on writing narrative text. In the biography of 'Jahanara Imam' the narrator does not mention her husband's name in the introduction. But the extracted quotation from the diary of Jahanara Imam mentions the name 'Sharif'. Also, there are some grammar issues in this text. At the end of the text, the phrase 'war humanitarian criminal of 1971' does not convey the meaning of 'war anti humanitarian criminal of 1971'.

Unit 13 tends to help the learners achieve competency 4 connecting emotionally with a literary text and express personal feelings about it. This unit does not maintain experiential learning cycle because there is no scope for extracting concrete experience. Selected texts are also suitable for the learners' level. In the same way, unit 16 focuses on competency 4. It gives the learners ideas about the characteristics of another literary genre, play. Also through the acting out of the dialogues, it provides the students with the opportunity to be fluent in speaking English. Through question-answering activities after presenting each play seen, the unit paves the ways

for the learners to be connected emotionally with the literary texts and express their personal feelings.

### **Overall evaluation**

From the evaluation and analysis it is found that the English textbook lacks authenticity in terms of selecting authentic materials; e.g. story, poem, news clips, etc. According to competency 2 as mentioned in the Teachers' Guide, the learners will achieve the ability to recognize and transform different sentence structures. To achieve this competency they will be exposed to different authentic materials so that they can identify different patterns and sentence structures. But the units, 2, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, and 14 do not have authentic items mentioned above.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

The study seeks for close internal evaluation of the textbook of class seven in Bangladesh. The idea of competency based curriculum and experiential learning methodology are no doubt excellent and effective way for English language teaching in Bangladesh. Overall organisation of the book is excellent. The intentions of the authors are very nicely revealed through the content and presentation of the competencies. The textbook focuses on the process of learning in a way that after completing the book, the learners will be competent in English. The contents are real life based and four skills are integrated. However, there are some chapters that contain grammatical errors and do not complete experiential learning cycle sequentially. Also, the simulated contents used in some units seem poor in writing. There are some units that are not enough for the learners to be competent in writing. Again, there is very little scope for the development of listening skill. These may make learners got confused and they may lose interest to study the textbook. Consequently, they may look for other alternative sources like notes and guide books to achieve the competencies. To minimize this gap, the units that contain grammatical errors and where experiential learning is not followed properly should be revised. There should be enough authentic texts especially the units that cover competency 2.

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