

A Critical Analysis of the Grade 3 English Textbook in Bangladesh: Strengths and Weaknesses

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A B S T R A C T

An English textbook plays a crucial role in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Bangladesh. This is a qualitative content analysis study whose aim is to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the grade 3 English textbook in Bangladesh. The textbook is a key instructional material that is analysed in six separate dimensions of strengths and weaknesses based on the theories proposed by Hutchinson, Waters, Cunningsworth, and McGrath. Many investigations have been carried out concerning the teaching and learning of the English language at the primary level. However, existing literature has not sufficiently explored whether the shortcomings stem from the textbooks themselves. Thus, this study is significant in such a context as it aims to address the gap in this area in the literature through a critical analysis of the nature and quality of the textbooks. The findings show that the English textbook contains some strengths, such as communicative teaching strategies, integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, active learning activities, attractive design and visual appeal, real-life contents, and integration of moral and social values. Similarly, the weaknesses are vocabulary-related issues, insufficient grammatical explanation, a shortage of writing practice, a lack of pronunciation guides, insufficient critical thinking activities, and traditional evaluation systems. It concludes that the implications of this article's findings help to achieve the general objectives of the national curriculum and Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Keywords: *Textbook, Grade 3, Strengths, Weaknesses, Bangladesh*

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental need for people (Zendeli, 2017). Primary education is the initial step in delivering formal education globally, including in Bangladesh (Al Zaman et al., 2024). As an international language, English is important to all nations worldwide (Rao, 2019; Melitz, 2016). People use English most commonly in the world (Ilyosovna, 2020). Teaching the English language is very important at the primary level because it is the main medium of communication globally (Cahyati & Madya, 2019). The English language is used in every sector in the world (Balla, 2016). The demand of the English language is increasing day by day in gaining knowledge, education, technology, and research (Durai & Soundararajan, 2009; Putra, 2020). (Akther, 2022) stated that students who are familiar with the English language from the primary level can get a better chance in their future higher education and professional life. Therefore, English education should be encouraged from the primary education level so that students can enable in international competition.

The objective of English for Today at the primary level is to develop students' fundamental skills in Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing through a communicative and learner-centered approach. It promotes meaningful learning through real-life activities, decreases language anxiety, and enhances learners' communicative competence and confidence (National Curriculum & Textbook Board, 2026). English has become the dominant global language in the present world (Crystal, 2003). Native speakers acquire their language naturally from birth within their environment without learning in school or by studying

grammar books. However, for second-language learners, who are more reliant on textbooks and formal teaching to learn the language, this text focuses on the use of textbooks in learning English, their characteristics, and issues (Nnadi-Eruchalu, 2012; Richards, 2001; Vanha, 2017). In the age of globalization, English has become the global lingua franca, and it has long been regarded as a key factor for job success in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government has introduced English for Today (EFT) textbooks for students from primary to higher secondary level based on the communicative approach (Rahman, 2018; Marlina & Xu, 2018; Farooqui, 2014).

From a national curriculum perspective, with the forces of globalization on the rise, English is considered an essential channel for cross-border communication, advanced studies, digitalization, and professional sectors. The system of English language education has been introduced in the national curriculum from the primary level so that learners can be equipped with the basic language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, from an early stage. Such foundational competence will play a major role in establishing a strong foundation for their academic and professional career in the future. In this sense, the English for Today (EFT) series acts as a tool of the national curriculum, since it aims at teaching functional English through communicative means. This series not only provides exam-based knowledge but also enables learners to actually behave in effective English in today's life. But its successful implementation greatly depends on the qualities of the teachers, the atmosphere of the classroom, and the right method of implementation. Thus, the quality of education and the development of human resources in Bangladesh can be improved by providing better teaching in the English language and by using the textbooks correctly at the primary level (NCTB, 2026; Ministry of Education, 2010).

A textbook is the primary instructional material in teaching-learning process, especially at the elementary level (Gak, 2011; Mithans & Grmek, 2020). Sufficient instructional materials, especially textbooks, are the prime contributors of learners' attendance, motivation, and quality in education (Kyule et al., 2025). In this regard, the Education Policy (2010) highlights the importance of the primary level, stating the need for expansion, coverage, and access to ensure that no child is denied the right to education on account of social and economic condition, religion, ethnicity, or gender identity. A textbook is equally a great asset for instructors and learners (Son & Diletti, 2017; Gak, 2011). Textbooks seem to influence teaching practices by transmitting pedagogical messages to teachers and by offering supportive or unsupportive curricular settings for the implementation of diverse teaching styles. This means that textbook authors, curriculum reformers, as well as school teachers and administrators need to be aware of the role of textbooks in teachers' teaching practices (Fan & Kaeley, 2000).

The textbooks are developed based on the national curriculum and education policy so that students can gradually secure knowledge. When teachers teach their lessons, they take the help of textbooks, and students can get a better understanding of the subject when they read them (Ball & Feiman-Nemser, 1988). Textbooks are also an integral part of class work, homework and self-study. Thus, the role of the textbook is very crucial in realizing the aims of primary education, which are to promote and ensure quality education (Fan & Kaeley, 2000; Richards, 2001). Grade three is a middle and important stage in primary education in Bangladesh (MoE, 2010). At this stage, eight-year-old students come to school with a curious mind to gain knowledge.

Primary education is free and compulsory in Bangladesh (Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972). English for Today is a mandatory language subject for elementary learners. Although primary education is free and compulsory, the quality English learning materials plays a crucial role in determining students' success in their later academic and professional life. Hence, good teaching aids and effective classroom practices are the two vital aspects to enhance English learning for manpower development in Bangladesh. English is a critical enabler of communication, higher education, technology, and employment in the global era. Under the national curriculum in Bangladesh, English is taught from the primary

level to enable learners to learn the basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (NCTB, 2026; Salahuddin et al., 2013).

Therefore, textbook should be child-friendly, illustrated, engaging, joyful, and activity-based to achieve the goal of the national curriculum and Sustainable Development Goal 4. Consequently, textbook analysis is the greatest demand of the time (Bahar & Zaman, 2013). Quality and standard textbooks increase the interaction of students, which is helpful for learners' mental health (Sun et al., 2009). Although students in advanced education index countries are less dependent on textbooks, the majority of students in developing countries like Bangladesh are dependent on textbook material (Lepik et al., 2015). The present study evaluates the grade 3 English textbook, which is designed by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), in Bangladesh. The purpose of this study is to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook and propose some suggestions for enhancement. Such a study is important for teachers, textbook writers, curriculum planners, and policy makers for the future development of primary education.

Research indicates that many investigations have been carried out concerning the teaching and learning of the English language at the primary level. It was found that the quality is generally quite low in rural and urban Bangladesh. A lot of studies explore the underlying issues behind these problems, such as a lack of teachers' content knowledge, a lack of adequate training, English phobia of teachers and parents, etc. However, existing literature has not sufficiently explored the specific strengths and weaknesses of textbooks themselves. Thus, this study is significant in such a context as it aims to address the gap in this area in the literature through a critical analysis of the nature and quality of the textbooks (Bui et al., 2025; Rahman, 2018).

METHOD

Content analysis is a strong, systematic, replicable method for investigating trends and patterns in documents that focuses on using multiple forms of data by organizing them into relevant categories for easier analysis and understanding (Stemler, 2000; Harwood & Garry, 2003). This study utilized a qualitative content analysis method to critically review the grade 3 English textbook, which was widely used in government primary schools across the country and was officially prepared by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) of Bangladesh. The rationale for selecting and analyzing the grade 3 English for Today textbook is that it holds a mid-level position within the scale of primary education. As it is situated between grade 1 and grade 2 on one side and grade 4 and grade 5 on the other, an analysis of the textbook can provide a more comprehensive and representative understanding of the overall strengths and limitations of English language teaching at the primary level. The methodology was developed to identify the strengths, weaknesses, quality, characteristics, and limitations of the textbook for improvement in relation to language learning needs at the primary level. It scientifically examined the textbook's content, the instructor's role, instructional methods, students' activities, illustrations, alignment, colors, lesson design, and values, etc. The textbook was the main source of data, and it was collected from the NCTB, Ministry of Education, and Bangladesh. The textbook was selected using purposive sampling because the class 3 English textbook is a middle-level instructional material of primary education that can reflect the overall scenario of primary English teaching and learning. In this stage, students move beyond the very beginning level and start developing more structured skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The analytical process was organized into a series of transparent stages. Initially, the textbook was read to get an overall idea of how the content, the language, the illustrations, and the types of activities were organized. Following this, lessons were investigated in greater detail according to the evaluation criteria selected, focusing on tasks, language input, skills integration, visual design, and options for interaction and creativity in relation to individual lesson. The study organized relevant examples into buckets of strengths and weaknesses, and identified common themes across lessons and units. This method provides insight into the

pros and cons of the textbook, but is only limited to the content analysis of one book. It is also limited on not investigating how teachers actually use the textbook in rural and urban classrooms.

This study did not involve human participants as it was based solely on the analysis of a publicly available textbook, and there were no issues of consent, privacy, or confidentiality. As this was done purely for academic purposes and all ideas were cited from earlier work, academic integrity was strictly maintained. In order to make the analysis systematic, the researcher created an analytical framework from the review of related literature to textbook evaluation, English language teaching, child-friendly pedagogy, and primary curriculum development. Several important dimensions through which the textbook was examined included as follows.

The theoretical framework of this research is created based on the theories proposed by Hutchinson, Waters, Cunningsworth, and McGrath. Through a combined and critical analysis of these theories, six dimensions have been developed to evaluate the strengths and another six dimensions to identify the weaknesses. This systematic approach makes the analytical process more structured and coherent, thereby facilitating the attainment of reliable, scientifically sound, and meaningful findings.

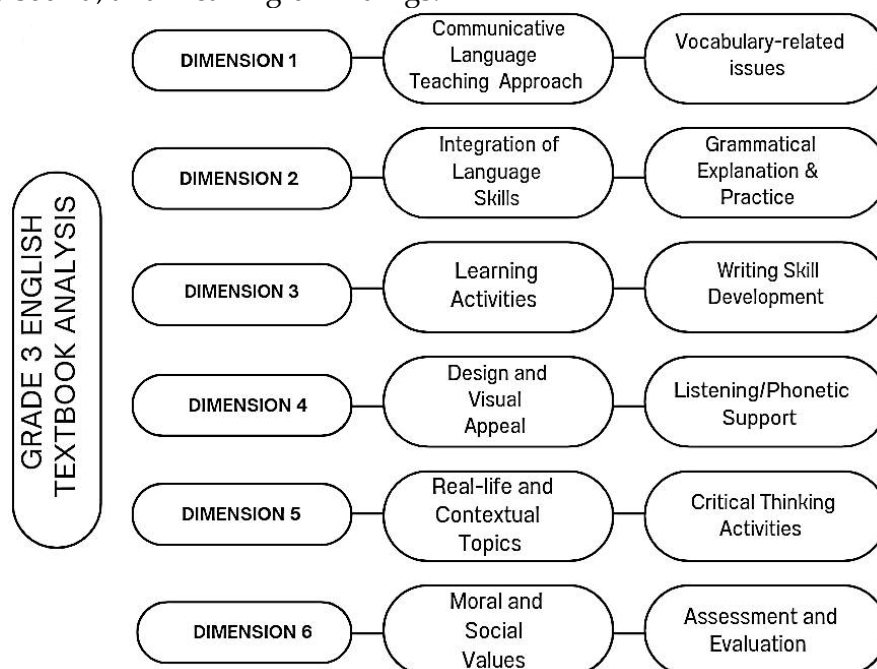


Figure 1. Flow Chart of the Analytical Frame

The chart shows the analytical framework of the English Textbook for grade 3. The framework is divided into six separate dimensions, each focusing on a specific aspect of textbook evaluation. For each dimension, the second-column elements are treated as indicators of the textbook's strengths, whereas the third-column elements are treated as indicators of its weaknesses or limitations. Using this structure allows the researcher to build a systematic and even-handed evaluation that reflects both the strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, this chart provides a simple methodological basis for the evaluation of the textbook.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Analyzing all contents, lessons, and units of the grade 3 English textbook, this study found some strengths and weaknesses of the textbook. These findings highlight multiple key strengths of the grade 3 English textbook that, in many ways, support early language learning. Specifically, the practical conversations, question-answer sections, pair and group work, rhymes and songs in the book, reflect a communicative language teaching approach and can make the learning process livelier for young learners. Further, the textbook incorporates the four basic language skills-listening, speaking, reading, and writing to help learners become well-rounded practitioners of the language. In addition, the learning exercises vary and are

engaging, such as games, role play, matching, picture discussion, and dialogues. This improves conceptual interest due to bright, colorful pictures and child-friendly illustrations. These real-life scenarios and moral lessons also add social relevance and importance to the content children digest.

The analysis also indicates a number of weaknesses that can prevent the textbook from being effective. The use of vocabulary is narrow and repetitive, with minimal contextualization, substitutions, or academic words. Instruction on grammar is too short, too little focus and practice, particularly on tense. Because most tasks are memory-based, the potential for writing is also limited, with few opportunities for creative or extended writing. Further still, the book does not provide sufficient listening or phonetic support since there is no audio or pronunciation. Questions are mainly closed ended, and problem-solving tasks to develop critical thinking are rare. More so, assessment methods are quite restricted, and the unclear learning outcomes lower the overall instructional clarity. The major findings are presented concisely in the following table.

Table 1. Core Area, Strengths, and Weaknesses of the Grade 3 English Textbook

Core Area	Strengths	Core Area	Weaknesses
Communicative Language Teaching Approach	-Practical conversation -Question-answer -Pair and group activities -Rhymes and songs	Vocabulary-related Issues	-Common and repetitive words -Lack of synonyms and contextualization -Insufficient variety in words -Shortage of academic words
Integration of Language Skills	-Listening -Speaking -Reading and -Writing	Grammatical Explanation & Practice	-Short grammar instruction -Scarcity of clear grammar explanation and practice -Shortage of past and future tense -Repetition of similar sentences
Learning Activities	-Frequent group work -Pair work -Question-answer sessions -Fill in the blanks -Matching exercises -Dialogues -Games -Picture discussions -Role play method -Rearrange Letters	Writing Skill Development	-Memory-based writing work -Limited creative writing practice -Insufficient focus on spelling and grammar in writing -Weak emphasis on writing vocabulary -Limited paragraph and story writing tasks
Design and Visual Appeal	-Colourful pictures -Child-friendly design -Attractive illustrations -Visual aids	Listening & Phonetic Support	-Lack of audio records -Absence of pronunciation guides -Refused practice sessions
Real-life and Contextual Topics	-Respecting teachers -Greeting others -Self-introduction -Number counting -Bathing, -Cooking, -Washing clothes -Brushing teeth, and -Water conservation -Functional vocabulary	Critical Thinking Activities	-Shortage of open-ended questions -Teacher-centric instruction -Insufficient real-life problem-solving -Limited peer discussions on ideas -Focus on surface-level contents -Absence of learning outcomes -Use of animated pictures
Moral and Social Values	-Respecting elders -Speaking politely -Saving water -Stopping pollution -Cooperation and -Responsibility	Assessment and Evaluation	-Limited formative assessment tools -Inadequate feedback mechanism -Absence of inclusive assessment strategies -Shortage of varied assessment methods -Limited ways to evaluate student progress beyond comprehension questions.

Strengths*Communicative Language Teaching Approach*

The results indicate that the CLT practices of the textbook are manifested through the facilitation of the use of English in some interactions. It has functional communication tasks, question-answer, pair and group activities, rhymes, and songs, and allows young learners to learn how to use the English language in context. In general, the book promotes an active and oral involvement of students at a basic level (pp. 1, 4, 7, 9, 22, 98).

Integration of Language Skills

The textbook shows a balance of four skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Our classroom tasks and exercises expose learners to all skills. This way, it helps the students in learning a balanced form of English. However, the integration is still largely simple in nature, quickly applying skills while we still do not train in detail skills (pp. 13, 19, 23, 24, 25, 31, 32, 50, 70, 78).

Learning Activities

Evidence shows that textbooks consist of many types of classroom activities, including group work, pair work, question-answer sessions, fill-in-the-blanks, matching, dialogues, games, picture discussions, role play, and rearranging letters. It is to make the young learners interested and interactive with the learning. But much of what is done involves rote practice and controlled rather than creative or independent use of language (pp. 2, 4, 9, 10, 14, 15, 18, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 40, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 56, 59, 63, 69, 70, 71, 75, 77, 79, 88).

Design and Visual Appeal

The study found the textbook to be visually appealing and child-friendly. It includes bright images, guides, illustrations, and other visual aids to help students learn better and to make students feel interested. This symbolizes the minor role of design in the textbook, making it engaging for primary-level learners and an alternative visual explanation to support the comprehension of concepts (pp. 4, 7, 12, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 30, 35, 39, 45).

Real-life and Contextual Topics

This book includes a wide variety of common use situations and meaningful discussions on useful topics that would include greetings, introductions of themselves, numbers, common daily routines (bathing, cooking, washing of clothes, brushing teeths), and environmental awareness, such as water conservation. These topics allow students to relate English to their lives and encourage practical language use in everyday contexts (pp. 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 26, 29, 31, 32, 46, 59, 60, 62, 72, 79, 83, 96, 98, 101, 104, 108, 118).

Moral and Social Values

Results indicate that the textbook strongly contains moral and social values. It encourages respect for elders and teachers, communication, cooperation, and responsibility, as well as the proper and disciplined nature of protecting the environment, reducing pollution, and conserving resources. In this lessons, these values are embedded to help shape character alongside language acquisition (pp. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 72, 76, 97, 103, 104, 105).

Weaknesses*Vocabulary-related Issues*

Based on the findings, this research displayed little vocabulary richness in the textbook. Use of the same common words, little to no synonyms, and repetition of phrases. Missing contextualization limits students' ability to grasp how words operate across contexts. In addition, not having exposure to an academic and broad range of vocabulary holds back learners from developing their vocabulary from an early age (pp. 1, 7, 17, 43, 62, 104, 64, 65, 84, 118).

Grammatical Explanation and Practice

The grammar instruction in the textbook is very weak. The explanations can be imprecise, and the leaf to practice is quite unstructured. There are not enough grammatical markers for things like past and future. Also, constant repetition of similar sentence forms restricts the learners from diverse grammar exposure (pp. 61, 71, 48-61, 1-46, 91, 61, 108, 113, 120, 121, 67, 69, 70).

Writing Skill Development

The results show that writing tasks are highly controlled and based on memory. The approach does not give learners much scope for creative expression, such as when writing paragraphs or stories. Moreover, writing tasks do not provide enough focus with respect to spelling, grammatical correctness, and vocabulary usage. Consequently, the growth of independent writing is poor (pp. 78, 41, 62, 69, 55, 73, 78).

Listening and Phonetic Support

The study shows that there is no listening and pronunciation guide in the textbook. No audio materials to provide real listening input. It also lacks pronunciation guides, and it does not have solutions for these practice exercises. This hinders the learners from mastering the skills of listening and speaking in the target language (pp. 1-130).

Critical Thinking Activities

This analysis indicates that there are few opportunities to engage learners in higher-order levels of thinking. Problems are almost entirely closed-ended & devoid of problem-solving. Teaching is teacher-centric, reflecting a lack of space for peer-to-peer discussion or sharing of ideas. The content often appears to be designed for superficial learning, and explicit learning outcomes are not always stated (pp. 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 34, 36, 38, 17, 21, 22, 26, 29, 65, 68, 72, 76, 40).

Assessment and Evaluation

Textbook assessment practices were limited and traditional according to the findings. There are inadequate formative assessment tools and feedback mechanisms. There are no alternate assessments, and the evaluation methods are not very creative. The majority of assessments consist of low-level comprehension questions, which are ineffective in measuring student progress (pp. 6, 7, 8, 97).

CONCLUSIONS

The study's purpose is to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the grade 3 English textbook in Bangladesh. The study indicates some strengths that are communicative in nature, child-friendly illustrations, real-life topics, and moral values, etc., which are helpful to easily engage young learners. Nevertheless, the weaknesses are vocabulary issues, grammar explanation, creative writing practice, listening support, and critical thinking exercises. It includes weak learning materials, inaccurate pronunciation guidelines, and a lack of variety in assessment methods, making it very ineffective. NCTB must do something practical to improve the textbooks in the upcoming years. Content should be made more heterogeneous, avoiding repeated words. Words should be very simple, clear, and relevant; difficult words should have Bengali meanings. Instead of considering writing tasks as tests of analytical skills, writing tasks should be more creative, and more emphasis should be given to writing skills. There should be less teaching, more learning, and more student participation. Learning activities should relate to real-world issues and solutions, where teacher feedback opportunities can come into play. The textual content needs to be inclusive, along with good pictures, or things need to be attractive in a meaningful way. This method provides insight into the pros and cons of the textbook, but is limited to the content analysis of one book and does not investigate how teachers actually use the textbook in rural and urban classrooms.

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