

*Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) Project*

**WHAT HAPPENS TO THE TEXTBOOKS?**

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**The University of Pittsburgh**

*Report prepared by:*

**Beatrice Okyere**

**Anthony Mensah**

**Harrison Kugbey**

**Abigail Harris**



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# Background

In 1991, over 10 million dollars in US aid were allocated for the production and distribution of textbooks to children in primary schools throughout Ghana. This was to be carried out over a five year period. Although textbooks had been available in the schools in the 1960's and early 1970's, in the recent past, textbooks and other primary level educational materials were scarce and teachers were left to their own devices in their efforts to help children acquire basic literacy, numeracy, and English oral language proficiency. In 1990-91, base-year figures showed that only 10% of pupils in primary schools had the basic textbooks. The goal of the USAID money was to reverse this trend and put sufficient textbooks into the schools for every child to have a textbook. This report provides a glimpse into "What happens to the textbooks?"

## PHASE I

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The Centre for Research on Improving Quality of Primary Education in Ghana (CRIQPEG)\* [add footnote about CRIQPEG, UCC, IEQ, USAID] set out in 1993 to investigate sources and uses of instructional materials in primary classrooms in Ghana. Following classroom observations and interviews with teachers, headteachers, and Circuit Supervisors, researchers concluded that most of the classrooms did not have sufficient textbooks. However, even when textbooks had been supplied on a one textbook to two pupils ratio, it was rare for them to be in the hands of children. The tendency was for them to be locked in cupboards while teachers continued their practice of writing on the chalkboard and asking children to read chorally from the board and then copy the words into their exercise books.

One finding from Phase I had an almost immediate impact. Teachers had reported that they avoided using the textbooks because they feared that some books would be spoiled or lost and that they would be made to pay for these losses. When this information was shared with policy makers in the Ghana Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service, they took action. Within months, announcements were made and circulars distributed to school officials. The notices stated that teachers would not be made to pay if textbooks were consumed through normal use. Further, if a pupil was responsible for the loss or excessive spoilage of textbooks, the child's parents were to be held responsible.

## PHASE II

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The language medium of the textbooks is English, the official language of Ghana. For children to use the textbooks effectively and to advance in school, they need to become literate. In 1994, CRIQPEG shifted its research objectives to focus on English language learning. Since that time, researchers have

been working with educators, parents, and pupils from 14 rural and urban schools in the Central and Western regions. In 1994, all of these schools received textbooks with most reaching the target 1:1 ratio. Since that time, textbook supplies were replenished periodically.

Now, two years later, CRIQPEG has pursued the question: “What happened to the textbooks?” Through interviews in 1995 and 1996 with Circuit Supervisors, headteachers, teachers, parents, and pupils in these 14 schools, observations of classrooms, assessment of individual pupil performance, and a recent inventory of the condition of available textbooks, researchers have traced the path of the textbooks after the headteacher signs for the books. For some books, the path ends in the headteacher’s cupboard, but fortunately, most books find their way into the classroom and some continue on to the pupils’ homes. What follows is the story that researchers constructed as they followed the path of the textbook.

## **From the Headteacher..**

### STRATEGIES FOR KEEPING TRACK

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In order to keep track of the textbooks, most headteachers indicated that they instruct the teachers to keep an inventory in which each book is assigned a number. If a child is given the book to use, the teacher is instructed to record the child’s name and the assigned textbook number in the inventory book. It is the teacher’s responsibility to check books out to pupils, to inspect the textbooks regularly, and to track down lost books. If there is no teacher or the teacher is out for an extended period, the books are not distributed. Also, some new teachers do not give the textbooks to children to take home possibly because they do not want to incur the displeasure of the headteachers. One new teacher stated: “The books are kept in the cupboard in the school which is locked and opened only when we want to use the books. Pupils are not assigned books and they are not allowed to take the books home. I did not come to meet the tradition of pupils taking books home and I may be held responsible for lost books.”

The role of the headteacher seems key to textbook usage and care. When headteachers provided clear and specific guidelines for teachers about assigning, inspecting, and using textbooks (e.g., keep up-to-date inventory book, inspect daily at the beginning of the lesson, cover the books to protect them and to allow the child’s name to be clearly printed on the cover, etc.), the teachers echoed these guidelines in their individual interviews. They were able to provide examples of how the guidelines were implemented in their classrooms. Conversely, when headteachers were vague about the guidelines (e.g., Headteacher: “Well, I encourage teachers to take care of the textbooks...give textbooks to only those whom we believe will take care of them...inspection of books is random.”), teachers in the

school tended to be more casual and less systematic about textbook usage. Textbooks were less likely to be distributed to pupils and inspection of textbooks was more irregular.

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## PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

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Every person interviewed said that books are collected at the end of the year and stored by school personnel, typically in locked cupboards in the headteacher's office. All said that this was for purposes of safekeeping and because the books needed to be reassigned to the new class the following school year. Several of those interviewed expressed concern that the school may not be resupplied with textbooks. Others commented that the books need to last and the children may not take good care of the books. One teacher mentioned what happened in her school where at the end of a particular year children were allowed to take the books home, "When children were asked to bring the books back at the beginning of the next academic year, most of them could not do so. The textbooks were all lost." It seems that teachers have incorporated textbooks into their instruction and they want to take precautions so as not to be without them.

Similarly, surplus books are set aside for future use in the event that the school is not resupplied the following year. In most instances, it is the new books that are set aside. Older, used books continue in circulation until they are unusable and even then they may be kept for accounting purposes or in the event that they are needed. When an inventory of available books was taken in the 14 schools, about 10% of the available textbooks were rated by the researchers as "badly damaged/unusable". Nonetheless, many of these were still in use.

## **Into the classroom...**

Interviews as well as classroom observations confirm that the textbook is slowly finding its way into usage by children during daily lessons. When CRIQPEG researchers began their observations in 1993 and 1994, the modal lesson was teacher directed with only the teacher using the textbook. Children's exposure to print was limited exclusively to letters, words, and sentences written on the chalkboard and then copied into exercise books.

Since that time there has been a change in the 14 schools, particularly in the 7 schools that participated in collaborative efforts with CRIQPEG to improve instructional practices. Classroom observations conducted in 1995 indicated that there was tremendous variability in textbook usage with some children using a textbook not at all and some children using it for most of their English lessons. While the chalkboard was still a prominently used instructional tool, in many classrooms, particularly the intervention classrooms, the use of textbooks by pupils was equally prominent as part of the lessons.

Recent interviews support a changing attitude by teachers. In describing their own lessons, teachers talked about using the pictures in the text to help children learn new vocabulary and practice oral and written language by describing the pictures. They talked about allowing children who finished their work early to read ahead. As they described how they plan and execute their lessons, it was clear that textbook usage was integral to the lesson. Repeatedly, teachers' advise to other teachers was to let children use the textbooks for exercises and rely less on writing the exercises on the chalkboard (e.g., "Set all exercises from the textbook...Write sparingly on the chalkboard--pupils should use the text!").

Pupils views on the using the textbook in the classroom were very positive. Uniformly they said how helpful the textbooks were to their learning. When asked about their reactions to having to share textbooks, responses were mixed. Some pupils reported that it was useful because pupils could compare and discuss points together. Also, they felt that, "partners could help with pronunciation." Other pupils resented sharing because they felt it "encourages interference," "disrupts concentration," and "pupils cannot read at their own pace." One stated, "One cannot read the textbook as and when he likes because the partner may be using it when the other needs it."

## **Into the homes...**

Not all teachers had the good fortune to have sufficient textbooks for all pupils to have their own. It seemed that a crucial factor in the path of the textbook was whether books were plentiful or in short supply.

### **WHEN BOOKS ARE PLENTIFUL...**

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Books are more likely to be assigned to specific pupils for their use in the classroom and at home if they are plentiful and they are sufficient in number for each child to have one. It was typical for teachers to say, "There are enough books, so each child has been assigned a book." or "There are not sufficient of this book so I keep them locked in the cupboard."

When there are sufficient textbooks for each child to have one, it is rare for teachers to ask pupils to share. Sharing of textbooks is viewed as something that is done when the number available is not enough.

### **WHEN THE NUMBER OF BOOKS FALLS SHORT OF THE NUMBER OF PUPILS...**

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Not surprisingly, when textbooks are in short supply, teachers are more cautious and selective about the distribution of textbooks, particularly when it means allowing textbooks to leave the school and the

supervision of the teacher. Often teachers opt not to assign the available books to specific children but to keep the books in the school cupboards, bringing them out only when required for use with a particular lesson. Otherwise, teachers must devise strategies and criteria for distribution. For example, one teacher commented that, "Pupils staying far away from the school are granted special concession: they are each given the book to take home, while those within the immediate vicinity of the school are paired [and must share the book.]"

When supply is limited, textbooks tend to go to the higher achieving pupils. Several teachers commented that they assign the books only to the better readers. A few other teachers reported that pupils in the class are put into pairs or groups and one child who is a better reader is designated as the leader of the group. It is this child, the better reader, who is responsible for the safe keeping and safe handling of the book. Still other teachers commented that all children were assigned a book, except those who do not have the skills to benefit from their use.

Two of the schools in which the supply of textbooks was less than the number enrolled were schools that operated on shifts. Teachers in these schools have a special dilemma. When children are not allowed to take the books home, teachers may be able to "borrow" the books from the other shift resulting in extra books available for classroom use. In one case, this meant the difference between 1 book for every 4-5 pupils versus 1 book for every 2 pupils. As a consequence, textbooks were less likely to be sent home with the children.

#### HOW THE TEXTBOOKS ARE USED AT HOME

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In the first half of 1995, textbook ratios in most of the participating schools were at their highest, primarily due to the combined supplies of the GES and CRIQPEG. During this period, over 220 pupils and 220 parents were interviewed to learn more about factors in the home affecting language learning. Most of the children interviewed indicated that they took their textbooks home everyday, even those who reported that they did not read at home. This is likely due to the pattern that when books are assigned to individual pupils, the teacher no longer collects them each day hence the child must be responsible for the book's safe storage.

Most pupils reported that they read the textbooks several times a week. These claims were corroborated by parents who said that children were most likely to use the books when they had homework or assignments to do. It was common for parents to acknowledge that they were illiterate so they did not know how exactly the pupils were using the books but they did see their ward read them and write from them. Some children reported that reading at home was not always possible--that chores and other home responsibilities kept them from having time to use the books at home. Others said that factors in the home such as disturbance by younger siblings and lack of adequate lighting prevented them from using the books.

With regard to homework, 98% of the children indicated that they were given English homework by their teachers. Although most felt that the homework helped them to learn, about 2/3 of the pupils interviewed said that they encountered difficulties with comprehension. Many indicated that there was no one in the home who could help them.

## **What Happens When Books Are Lost Along the Way?**

### **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?**

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Responsibility for the textbooks is shared by all those who come into contact with them: the Circuit Supervisor holds the Headteacher accountable, the Headteacher holds the teacher and the parent responsible, and the teacher holds the child and the child's parents responsible. The GES policy calls for parents to pay three times the official cost of the textbook when their ward is responsible for the loss or destruction of a textbook. As this amount is not sufficient to purchase a replacement, most schools reported that they ask parents to actually replace the book. In a few schools, teachers asked parents to guarantee for the books before they assigned a book to the child (Teacher: "I invite parents to guarantee the safety and care of the books before giving them out."). Some parents who were fearful of having to pay were unwilling to assume responsibility for the books or they returned the books to the school personally to avoid the risk of a penalty. Finally, teachers use some discretion in assigning books. One said, "If a person is a habitual absentee, the book is taken away and kept in the office." Another said, "Those who do not have the skills are exempted from the supply."

In reality, no one who was interviewed indicated that money or replacement books had actually been collected from parents. One headteacher candidly stated, "I call on parents to frighten them that they should pay for the cost but I do not collect any money from them. I may cane the child for losing the book or ask them to weed a portion of the school field." Several others indicated that their efforts to warn the children and parents about caring for the books had paid off and none of the books had been lost or destroyed.

### **HOW MANY GET LOST?**

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During the last two years, CRIQPEG has kept an inventory of how many English books were supplied to each of the 14 schools. Estimates of how many books were missing/lost were computed by comparing total received (total available before 1994 + total received since) to total remaining (actual count of available books). The total received is likely an underestimate since books supplied by the government directly (rather than through CRIQPEG) were self reported by schools. Based on these

figures, it seems that about 30% of the total received are no longer in the schools' inventories. [A table of the results by class level is provided in the appendix.]

## Responses to the Textbooks

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### CARE OF THE BOOKS

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Teachers appreciate the books and want them to last. Many teachers in the interviews talked about the care of the books and emphasized how important it was to teach children how to handle the books so they would last. Several teachers emphasized this point when asked what advice they would give other teachers. Many of the schools have taken special effort to cover the books with brown paper or newspaper. Spines of some of the books have been reinforced with tape. Some teachers provided advice for mending the books. Apparently, word has gotten around that a locally available starch can be used to stiffen the cover and to rebind books that have come apart. In one school, the headteacher said that he advised teachers to mend the books with starch and several teachers reported that every two weeks the books are inspected and during Crafts class books are mended with starch so that "loose pages are fixed properly."

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### DURABILITY

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While teachers appreciate the usefulness and importance of the textbooks supplied to their schools, they expressed concern over the quality of the binding and the materials used in making the covers. They felt that the materials were not sufficiently durable to withstand the consequences of frequent handling particularly in the lower level classes with the younger children who may not show the necessary restraint in their handling of the books. Consequently, they worried that the life span of the books would be less than had been calculated by those responsible for monitoring and resupplying the books. To forestall this, the majority of the teachers interviewed suggested that future copies of the books be made more durable--perhaps hardbound with, if possible, water resistant covers.

The teachers' concerns about the durability of the books was born out by the recent survey of the condition of available books. Approximately 25% of the available English books (about 10-20% of the received books) are in poor condition or are so badly damaged as to be rated unusable. Also, it is likely that some of the badly worn books were discarded and are part of the 30% missing/lost figure mentioned earlier.

## INTEREST LEVEL

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Teachers were pleased with the relevance of most of the units in the English texts. They felt that the real life, everyday situations drawn from Ghanaian culture make pupils enthusiastic about reading and engendered more silent reading among the pupils. In addition, they observed that passages under some of the units rely on stories that pupils are familiar with and that this facilitates their comprehension.

Teachers felt that most of the textbooks coincided with the Ghana syllabi. Only the Social Studies textbooks were thought by some teachers to be unrelated to what the teachers are expected to cover. In fact, two teachers said that they used relevant units from the English textbooks when teaching some topics in Social Studies and Ghana Cultural Studies.

# Level of Difficulty

## TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

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While many who were interviewed stated that the level of difficulty of the texts was appropriate for the class level, several qualified this perception by saying, “But the children here [in this school] are slower or less prepared.” Others who were interviewed, particularly teachers from rural schools, felt the vocabulary was too difficult and that concepts outside of the children’s experience (e.g., electricity) should be put off until the children have mastered topics relevant to their daily experience. A frequent complaint was that the passages were too long.

Teachers who expressed that the level of difficulty of the texts is appropriate and that their pupils could cope with the materials tended to come from schools that participated in the CRIQPEG interventions. Perhaps this was because an important component of the intervention was devoted to helping teachers adapt instruction to meet the needs of fast and slow learners. As part of the training teachers were helped to prepare children for new passages and to adapt longer passages to lengths the pupils can handle.

## COVERAGE

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The pace with which teachers progress through units in the textbooks is related to the difficulty of the units in relation to the children’s preparedness as well as the teacher’s efficiency in teaching. Teachers were interviewed in the middle of the third and final school term. They were asked what English unit they were covering. All of the English textbooks contain 30 units.

Very few teachers complete more than half of the English textbook before the end of the school year. Teachers from over a third of the classes were still on units 4-8. The average for classes in rural schools was unit 9. Classes from schools participating in the CRIQPEG intensive interventions were, on average, about 2 units further in the books than classes from the non-intensive schools.

Urban schools were the exception. The average for classes from the urban schools was unit 18, and, in one urban school, the teachers are likely to complete the textbooks by the end of the term. In fact, the level 6 teacher exclaimed, "I'm wondering what materials to use as the class is likely to finish the last five units before the long break."

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## ASSESSMENT RESULTS

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Pupils in each of the participating schools were individually assessed to determine how well they could read and comprehend passages taken from the English textbooks. Results from the rural schools corroborate the teachers concerns that the passages are too difficult for most of the children. In the lower class levels only about 1/4 of the pupils were able to read the passages at an instructional level-- for the rest of the pupils, the passages were beyond their reach and likely to create frustration and defeat. In the upper primary levels, about half of the pupils in rural schools were able to read the passages at an instructional level, however, their comprehension of what they read was still quite low.

Pupils in the urban schools present a different picture. For at least 85% of the pupils, the passages are close enough to an instructional level to be appropriate for classroom use. Reading comprehension is still an area of relative weakness but with proper training (e.g., building vocabulary before attempting new passages) the teachers in urban schools should be able to use the textbooks effectively.

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## RESOLVING THE DIFFERENCES

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There seems to be a double standard: one for what the teacher thinks children in a particular class level should be able to do (perhaps left from when education was more elitist) and another for what most children can actually do. The textbooks seem most aligned with teachers' perceptions of what the children should be able to accomplish. For this reason, many teachers, particularly those in rural areas, spend extended instructional time on the first units, never reaching much of the text. They express a need for workbooks or more exercises associated with the text, more illustrations and other instructional aids to help teachers teach new vocabulary. A few teachers have obtained textbooks from lower level classes for use by low performing pupils and one teacher commented that there should be a second text for each class for those who are still at a basic level.

The issue of lack of coverage suggests that some teachers have made a compromise: they have slowed instruction to try to bring mastery to more pupils. They spend long periods of time on one unit in the

hope that prolonged repetition will allow more pupils to have the skills and confidence to successfully complete the unit. This instructional strategy is detrimental to the fast learners and an inefficient way of handling the slower or less prepared learners. Further, it means that most pupils start each new year without having completed or even covered almost half of the units from the previous years.

## **Suggestions for Improving Instruction**

### **STREAMLINE THE INSPECTION PROCESS.**

Teachers who have greater coverage of the texts seem to have developed some strategies for using instructional time more effectively. One commented that she inspects textbooks as she circulates in the classroom while the children are working on an exercise from the text. Several commented that the textbooks are covered in brown paper or newspaper and the child's name is written clearly on the cover, thus simplifying the inspection process.

### **HAVE THE CHILD WORK FROM THE TEXTBOOK.**

When asked what advice they would give other teachers about using the textbook, several teachers suggested that teachers have the children use the textbooks for reading and exercises rather than spend time with the teacher transferring it to the chalk board and the children transferring it to their books. In this way the teacher can spend time helping the children who need it.

### **ASSESS CHILDREN'S SKILLS ON THE AVAILABLE MATERIALS AND ADAPT INSTRUCTION AND ASSIGNMENTS TO THE NEEDS OF THE LEARNERS.**

For example, while the readers are working independently or in small groups on exercises from the textbook, teachers can work with slower learners on vocabulary and beginning reading skills. Slower learners who may not be able to do the exercises in the text can nonetheless use a paragraph from the textbook to identify all the words with the letter "a" and to group these words into lists based on how the "a" is pronounced.

### **GROUP CHILDREN DURING CLASS EXERCISES AND ASK BETTER READERS TO HELP BEGINNING READERS.**

In every classroom, even those in urban schools, there were children for whom the available text was too difficult. For some exercises, better readers can be asked to help beginning readers. This strategy reinforces the skills of the better readers and helps pupils who might otherwise be idle because the work is too difficult for them to perform independently.

### ASSIGN WORK FROM THE TEXTBOOK TO BE DONE AT HOME.

Allowing the textbook to go home with children is an important first step. Children need extended opportunities to be exposed to print, to examine pictures, to think about what they see and read. This step however is not without costs: valuable instructional time is lost to inspecting and tracking textbooks. When children fail to bring the books back to school each day, there are fewer books available in the classroom. Valuable instructional time is lost when children are sent home to retrieve books. However, some teachers seem to have gone beyond the first step and have begun asking pupils to complete homework assignments that involve the text. It was these teachers who commented that the children need the books over the weekends and breaks in order for them to do the home work that has been assigned. This linking of home and school use of the books is key to maximizing learning.

## **Implications for Policy Makers**

### SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IS IMPORTANT IN TEXTBOOK USAGE AND CARE.

Headteachers play a crucial role in encouraging new and experienced teachers to break with tradition and utilize the textbooks fully by incorporating them into lessons and homework assignments. Also, the messages that headteachers communicate to teachers about keeping track of textbooks and textbook care are heeded by their teachers.

### TEACHERS, PUPILS AND PARENTS APPRECIATE THE TEXTBOOKS AND HAVE COME TO VALUE THEM AS PART OF THE LEARNING PROCESS.

### REGULAR RESUPPLY OF TEXTBOOKS WILL BE CRUCIAL TO THEIR CONTINUED USE BY PUPILS.

When textbooks are available on a 1:1 basis, they make it into the hands and homes of the children. When textbooks are less plentiful, teachers are more restrictive in their use and selective in their distribution.

### WHEN TEXTBOOKS ARE USED EFFECTIVELY (HANDLED REGULARLY IN THE CLASSROOM AND AT HOME AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF INSTRUCTION), THEY ARE LIKELY TO WEAR OUT SOONER AND MORE WILL BE LOST IN THE DAY TO DAY JOURNEY FROM HOME TO SCHOOL AND BACK.

Thus, a high incidence of textbook consumption is not necessarily a negative indicator--it may reflect a high intensity of textbook use. Conversely a low incidence of textbook consumption is not necessarily a positive indicator, rather it may be indicative of books that are used on a more restrictive or rationed basis.

TEACHER TRAINING THAT FOCUSES ON STRATEGIES FOR HELPING ALL PUPILS TO BE SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS WILL BE ESSENTIAL FOR BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN MANY PUPILS' SKILLS AND AVAILABLE MATERIALS. TEACHERS CAN BE TAUGHT TO ASSESS AND MONITOR PUPIL SKILLS IN RELATION TO AVAILABLE MATERIALS.

REMEDIAL MATERIALS ARE NEEDED FOR THE SUBSTANTIAL PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS WHO LACK THE SKILLS TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS ON THE AVAILABLE TEXTS.

MORE INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS FOR BUILDING VOCABULARY AND COMPREHENSION ARE NEEDED.

Some teachers suggested that more illustrations in the future texts would provide a basis for class discussion and vocabulary building. This would be useful for those teachers who are less confident in their own vocabulary as well.

THE CULTURAL RELEVANCE OF THE TEXTBOOKS IS APPRECIATED AND HAS GREATLY ENHANCED PUPIL INTEREST AND COMPREHENSION.

SOME TEACHERS DON'T DISTRIBUTE (TENDS TO BE WHEN BOOKS ARE IN SHORT SUPPLY), SOME TEACHERS ASSIGN BOOKS AND USE INSTRUCTIONAL TIME TO CHECK EVERYDAY--CHILDREN WHO DO NOT BRING THE TEXT TO SCHOOL ARE SENT HOME TO RETRIEVE IT.

When children are allowed to take books home, in class instructional time is devoted to keeping track and some children are denied instructional time as they have to retrieve the books. Also, when children do not bring books or books are lost, groups of children must share the remaining texts.

**For each class level, percent of received English books by current status**

Level	# Books Received	Percent of Received Books by Current Status					
		New	Good	Useable	Poor	Unusable	Missing
3	1037	29	16	17	5	8	27
4	892	28	11	17	10	8	26
5	957	19	22	15	7	4	33
6	585	15	20	16	13	6	31

# Books Received = # books available in 1994 + books received since 1994 (CRIQPEG and GES)