

Textbook Review – Class III to VIII

The Following analysis looks at the English text books of Classes III to VIII of SCERT, Chhattisgarh.

The aims of English Language teaching – (Inputs from NCF-05)

- To develop basic proficiency to interact with confidence in ‘real life’ situations.
- To use language for constructing knowledge.
- To engage in conversations, debates, questions, discussions, to articulate new thoughts and present them and explain the concepts.
- To develop appreciation towards other languages.
- To relate language with the culture.
- To understand the grammatical details of language.
- To enjoy the literature.
- To compose poems, write or recreate stories, enact dramas.

Approaches to Language Learning: (NCF-05)

Current researches in the English Language teaching focus on whole language approach, task based approach, thematic approach; none of these approaches are exclusive of each other but are complementary.

The current analysis of the text books is done to study –

- A. The extent to which the aims of Language teaching are addressed through the content.
- B. Approaches used for teaching-learning of Language in the text books.
- C. Space for children’s thoughts/ creation / questions.
- D. Interconnectedness with the other subjects/ Languages / the outside world.
- E. Issues of Inclusion
- F. Assessment
- G. Accuracy of the content
- H. relevancy of the content

Detailed analysis is given below:

Positive aspects across the textbooks of classes III to VIII:

There are several exercises and content material that show a shift from traditional approaches. For example there is a lot of authentic material like notices, newspaper clippings and posters. One can also see the efforts in connecting with the local culture, for example lessons on Masai Home and local food. A wide variety of genres is represented in the textbooks. Integration of Arts and English is interesting. Pictures are attractive. The exercises interestingly include a number of picture clues and cross word puzzles.

Class III, IV and V:

- A. The extent to which the aims of Language teaching are addressed through the content.

The approach being followed is the traditional, skills oriented (LSRW) approach which treats different language abilities as skills that are mastered through practice targeting one skill at a time. Consequently, there is an abundance of drill based exercises in the textbook and there is hardly any exposure for the child to English language as a whole, in its authentic form, the way it is used in the real life situations.

Thus, the very first aim of language teaching to develop the basic proficiency is not addressed.

- B. Approaches used for teaching-learning of Language in the text books.

- Teaching tips meant for teachers given on many pages of the book are purely instructive and stressed on oral drill, e.g. p.137, 160, 163, 172...
- The Very first poem in Class III (English), has the following lines –
 - ‘If you don’t know it....
 -
 - I’ll teach you ABC.’
- This gives the clear indication to children that their teacher is a ‘knower’ and she/he would ‘teach’ them. The teacher does the action of ‘teaching’ and children will be receivers.
- The English section begins with nouns – pictures with words; moves to simple sentences with ‘be’ forms and then simple sentences with actions words. NCF-05, recommend task based approach and whole language approach – both these approaches seem to have little space in the content. The short sentences/ words and pictures without much context and/ or meaningful situations are monotonous and do not provide comprehensible input. Content can be selected which has an element of fun/ laughter in it and caters to the interest, and concerns of the child’s world.
- The idea of group work/ collaboration with different stake-holders is missing. There is ample scope for this. For example, in Class V, the lesson on calendar can be done by asking children to make the calendar of the month in small groups. They can write the names of the children with their birthdays in that month. This activity can be extended to include the birthdays of parents, bhojanmatas, teachers and peons. For class III, only a months’ calendar or a week’s calendar can be made in innovative ways. This will also create awareness that there are

other people in school and we all contribute to each-others' efforts and create sensitivity about the roles of other people in their lives.

- In class IV, on pg. 145 word recognition exercise has the same words in both the columns which does not involve any cognitive challenge.

C. Space for children's thoughts/ creation / questions:

Based on the discussion in the other points it is evident that there is very little space for this.

D. Interconnectedness with the other subjects/ Languages / the outside world:

Content of the three languages - Hindi, English and Sanskrit is given in the same textbook. This adds to the weight of the book. If this is done for integration of languages, this doesn't help. Integration means opportunities for meaningful dialogue on a topic from different perspectives.

E. Issues of inclusion:

- Lesson 3, (Page 162) 'Who is who' shows stereotypical examples. This shows gender bias towards a certain profession. Doctor, postman, typist and Lawyer are males whereas a nurse and a teacher are shown as females. In class IV, the surnames Sharma, Mishra, names like Mona, Bala are repeated very often. What message does that give? Who will be able to relate with these surnames? Why don't we have names like Mandavi, Netam, Kurre, Kunjam, Narbhayram, etc?
- The content on p.178, (class IV) 'Act out these good manners' looks completely out of place given the context of the rural and the tribal children who are being taught the so called manners of city people while their traditional ways of life, customs and cultural mores have not been given any space in the book meant for them.

F. Assessment:

- The concept of assessment is that of 'at the end of' some lessons. There are exercises in every lesson which are mainly for reinforcement. It would be good to think of different ways of reinforcement. For example, what do we want to reinforce? Certain words? Then there can be more content like a picture story, short meaningful rhyme which have similar words and one or two new words. In this way, new words can be introduced as well as words that are learnt before are reinforced. Please note that in this point we have talked of words, but the exposure is of complete sentences and meaningful situations.
- Several exercises have been given to test/ practice a single competency – it would be more meaningful and a great learning if variety of tasks with new stories, rhymes but with similar words is introduced.

G. Accuracy of the content presented:

- Class V, page 196, exercise -encircle the words beginning with a, e, i, o, u – What is the purpose of this activity? We understand that even if the word ‘uniform’ begins with the letter ‘u’, we don’t use ‘an’ in front of it. Needs to look into the approach we take for such exercise.

H. Relevance of the content – Difficulty level

- Class V, ‘Let’s have fun’ – Page 141, is an example of meaningful interesting text. As compared to Class IV, this one has less sentences – this seems to be of class III level.
- If we compare the poem ‘Pretending’ of class VI with that of class V poem ‘At the zoo’, we find that there is a clear difference in difficulty level. At the zoo is more difficult as compared with ‘Pretending’.

Class VI, VII and VIII:

A. The extent to which the aims of Language teaching are addressed through the content.

- One of the aims of language teaching is to help children to construct knowledge. Integration of themes will lead to construction of knowledge. The text books have every possibility of integrating concepts by using a theme based organization. E.g. In Class VII the poem Our Little River has the same theme as Unfriendly Nature. These texts on beauty of nature and earthquakes can be brought together under one theme to show two different perspectives of the same theme leading to more possibilities of dialogue.
- There are very few, in fact only one exercise which focuses on free oral expression. (Class VI). Rest of them revolve around comprehension of the lesson, grammar, vocabulary and writing. There is very little scope for self- oral expression. This needs to be built in. We often observe that children are hesitant to use English. The reason might be that there are very few activities which require children to express themselves. Excessive focus on ‘guided writing’ needs to be shifted to ‘speaking’ or free expression of thought in written form.
- In the Preface section of class VII, VI textbooks, it is mentioned, ‘.....the book is an attempt to provide good and authentic material in English language with focus on learning the language for use in real life situations’.
 - But, if we look at the content of the book, real life situations are not created where children use the language.
 - The use of authentic material would have been more meaningful if a wider range of authentic material from the child’s context were used – wrappers,

pouches, medicine boxes, covers, notices, pamphlets and other similar material which abounds even in rural areas.

B. Approaches used for teaching-learning of Language in the text books.

- In the text books, the approach to English language teaching is a discrete skills approach. The organization of the three text books reveal the following assumptions –
 - Language is looked at from the view point of skills which need to be separately practiced for mastery.
 - There is a belief that listening and speaking come before reading and writing.
 - There is an assumption that ample guided practice will lead to free expression
 - There is very little evidence of awareness of cognitive development of reading and writing – that cognitive skills like prediction, inference will lead to comprehension

This is corroborated by the following

- The texts are not organized into themes. Each text is a separate entity. The texts are followed by separate exercises on Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary, Grammar, Listening passages with exercises; speaking and writing exercises follow separately.
- Therefore there are no writing or grammar exercises in each of the texts before the 8th or 10th lesson. This limits the possibility of ample spaces for emergent literacy efforts of children in various genres of writing.
- There are no opportunities for free expression. The exercises under Speaking Skill are pseudo exercises as the children are not speaking anything. They are repeating an already given dialogue substituting a word here and there. Pseudo production is one way to lead to production. But a child of class VI has a lot to say hence need to give opportunity for free expression on a chosen theme. Too much of repetition leads to rote memorization of pre-cooked dialogues where the child's world, her identity, her words do not find a space.

Vocabulary

- The exercises based on the texts are heavily vocabulary based. There is a large amount of vocabulary that the child has to master, almost 15 new words per lesson. Unless this vocabulary relates to a particular theme it may just be rote learnt and not assimilated. We have observed the exercises based on the texts provide practice in separate skills. This problem is further compounded by the fact that each exercise is based on a different idea or context. It would have been better both in terms of conceptual clarity and textual organization to have the

exercises on one theme. Every word is a concept and unless there is a well-defined context, assimilation of words in all their nuances would not be possible.

- Crowding a book with too many exercises without organization and integration into themes may not lead to comprehensible input.
- The Textbooks follow traditional approach where lesson begins without a pre reading activity like advance organizers or introductory activities to link the lesson with their day to day life; opportunities for them to first get ready for the topic are missing. A pre reading task which allows for previewing the text based on the title or pictures in the text would lead to arousing the interest of the learner and cognitive readiness. While -reading questions or tasks like predicting what would happen next or having a class room discussion on completing the story, or predicting the next action would lead to enhanced comprehension and meaning making.
- NCF-05 and a lot of research inform us about the importance of input rich environment. In these textbooks, there are hardly any activities, projects and tasks that can help the teacher and students to develop a print rich environment. For example – In class VII, lesson 3, is about ‘hand Care’. The exercise for children could be to observe similar posters, slogans, advertisements on teeth care, body care, hair care etc. Similarly there is Chapter 9 on Have a cup of nice tea – the project could be to collect and bring the covers of as many different brands of tea as possible. Teacher can use the labels on these covers as sight words.

Presentation of Grammatical Concepts

- In the text books grammar is treated as a separate skill. Grammar is not integrated with other skills. There is a lack of awareness that every word, phrase, sentence the child speaks, reads, listens to or writes gives the child valuable information about the structure of the language.
- In all three text books VI, VII and VIII grammar exercises begin around the middle of the school session around lesson 8. They consist of picture prompts to write/ combine sentences.
- In Class VI there is a table where the child has to fill in the present tense, past tense and past participle of regular verbs. E.g. creep, crept, crept. How would a child understand why she has to fill in the same word twice? And if she has to fill in different word e.g speak, spoke, spoken; she would wonder why she has to fill in a different word. There is no space where a child learns a concept through an exercise.

- On page 38 of the class VI text book there is an exercise on reported speech. The procedural aspects of reported speech have been mentioned. (E.g. remove the inverted commas etc.) In this exercise the child can mechanically follow the steps or checklist given to change from direct to reported speech. It does not focus on building an understanding on why we have two forms of speech. Are there two forms of speech in every language? Where are they used? How do they function in real life? A communicative or task based exercise would better represent reality.

C. Space for children’s thoughts/ creations / questions:

- There is very little scope for children to create their own stories and poems. There are opportunities – for example the lesson Mr Sun goes for a holiday (class VI), can be recreated by thinking on ‘Mr Moon goes for a holiday’, Mummy/ Papa goes for a holiday etc.
- Exercises are repetitive, need to include activities which brings laughter/ enjoyment/ deep engagement.
- Opportunities for thinking and creating/ recreating are very few. The focus on copy writing and accuracy of writing guided texts makes it difficult to think freely.
- There are several creative activities in the books but all of them end in either writing or collecting and storing.
- In class VIII, Page 6, there is the instruction – ‘B. Speak five sentences about your friend’. Why 5? Could we tell children to speak as many sentences as they can about their friend or simply, allowing them to share about their friends? The opportunities to speak without any riders will lead to free self-expressions.

D. Interconnectedness with the other subjects/ Languages / the outside world:

- In class VI, the story of ‘the hare and the moon’ is a fable which tells why there is a black patch on the moon. Along with this the scientific fact about it also could be introduced. This will help in connecting with Science as well as children will know both sides of the story. Students can be asked to get similar fables / folk tales from their neighbourhood –these can be shared and then scientific aspects can be explored collectively or variations among these stories across communities can be explored. Integration with other subjects seems missing even when there is ample space for the same.
- In the text book there is no opportunity to refer other books in the library; For learning a language, reading and listening to more and more stories, poems, watching simple dramas, plays, listening to news items help. But there is hardly any mention of it in the books.
- In the textbook varieties of activities are included, but exercises which make the teacher and the children go beyond the books for developing language competence is rare.

E. Language and culture

- In the class VII book the culture and context of the child is not represented. Class VII the text book begins with a poem Hobble Bobble which talks about telephones, fans, radio, video, trains and bicycles. The same poem could have used bullock carts, sickles along with the modern gadgetry and means of communication.

Peace

- In chapter 13 (Class VI), the wise man put his leg and tripped the Pandit. This is like teaching children how to trip others. This clashes with the idea of 'peace'. This particular act can be replaced by something which is peaceful.
- There is a very strange exercise (pg 73) Class VI which involves talking about putting a rotten tomato, dead cockroach, matchful of ants in your friend's pocket. It is a speaking exercise and a child is supposed to say 'I put a dead cockroach (or a match full of ants) in my friend's pocket!'

Gender

- Gender stratification is openly and subtly affirmed through the text books through occupations, names in the text book. In class VI page 91, Kusum washes her house and Ravi collects wood and milks cows.
- In class VIII, Page no. 4, females are shown making tea and washing utensils. This reinforces roles based on gender.

F. Assessment

- Surprisingly, 'How' questions are very less in class VI English Text book. Most of the questions are what/why/ who kind.

G. Accuracy of the content presented

In one of the exercises there is a typo / error in the prompts given under the exercises. E.g. In class VII in the lesson 'Grandchildren by surprise' Activity B-Make a list of your class mates who are afraid of the following animals. Talk to each other the prompt.

Example : Are you afraid of? Yes, I'm/ No, I aren't. Here if you are saying I aren't it is wrong usage while Aren't I is correct.

H. Relevance of the content – Difficulty level

- From V to class VI, there is a relatively big leap in terms of the length of the chapter and the difficulty level. Example – Chapter 13 (Class VI) – how would one explain the meaning of the word 'philosophy' to children?