

Addressing Teachers on the issues of new textbooks in English Language

An experience through video conference

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Abstract

This paper presents a brief report of a interactive session during videoconferencing programme organised for assessing and addressing teachers' understanding about new textbooks of English Language developed by NCERT for Classes I to XII on the basis of National Curriculum Framework-2005. The inputs received from a group of about 6070 English teachers through their direct interaction with experts on NCF-2005, new syllabi and textbooks is valuable towards undertaking exercise on continual improvement of textbooks and development of related educational materials for qualitative improvement of education in the country. All the reflections, views, observations, suggestions and also questions/queries on different aspects of curriculum, framework, syllabi, textbooks made by the language teachers teaching English from Classes I to XII are analysed by the subject experts and interpretations were made. These are available with the NCERT for the use of teachers who are teaching English from Classes I to XII and have not attended the video conferencing on the use of new textbooks developed by NCERT.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi is an apex organisation in the country which is concerned with curriculum development and production of teaching learning material for school level education. In line with the provisions of National Policy on Education, NPE 1986 concerning

periodic review of implementation of various parameters of new policy, the NCERT has come out with a National Curriculum Framework (NCF-2005). The significant distinguishing features of NCF-2005 includes:

- The objectives of student learning and development are derived from the values enshrined in the

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Constitution and contemporary concern for strengthening unity and national identity in a multicultural context and enabling the nation to face the future challenges.

- It is recognised that knowledge is constructed by the child, which implies curricula, syllabi and textbooks should enable the teacher in organising classroom experiences in consonance with child's nature and environment and thus providing opportunity to all children to learn. The teaching should aim at enhancing childrens' natural desire and strategy to learn. The knowledge needs to be distinguished from information and teaching needs to be seen as professional activity, not as coaching for memorisation as transmission of facts.
- Emphasis on systemic reforms through availability of minimum infrastructure and material facilities for improved teacher performances, Strengthening the Panchayati Raj Institutions and encouraging community participation for enhancing accountability and ensuring quality education to all, Shift from content based testing to problem solving and competency based assessment, Locally planned, flexible school calendars and time tables and promotion of teaching as a profession by recasting Teacher Education Programme to reflect professionalism in the process of training and teaching. In all the four areas of school curriculum i.e.

language, mathematics, science and social science significant changes are recommended with a view to alleviate the stress with which children are coping today. The NCF-2005 recommends softening of subject boundaries so that children can get a taste of integrated knowledge and the joy of understanding.

- Connecting knowledge to the life outside the school and enriching curriculum by making it less textbooks centred. The guiding principles of curriculum development being curriculum to be an inclusive space-the space that extends beyond conventional curricular realm of textbooks, shift of learning away from rote method, curriculum for overall development of child, making examinations more flexible and integrated with class room life and nurturing an overriding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country.

On the basis of NCF-2005 syllabi have been prepared and the textual material has been developed in a phased manner. The textbooks for Classes I to XII in all subjects have been developed and published during 2006, 2007 and 2008.

While the syllabi and textbooks were under preparation / publication it was realized that the training of teachers covering various aspects of NCF-2005, syllabi and the textbooks in different subject areas is extremely important as they are key to transact the new curriculum through the new textbooks

in line with the thinking embodied in the NCF-2005. In order to provide vast coverage to include large number of teachers for their orientation /training and also the feasibility of interaction of teachers with experts it was considered beneficial to utilise the facility of EDUSAT for the organisation of orientation/training Programme through videoconferencing. In view of the above orientation programme for the teachers of Kendriya Vidyalaya Sanghathan, Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti and CBSE affiliated independent schools on the use of new textbooks developed by the NCERT for Classes I to XII standard through videoconferencing were organised as per schedule given below.

Methodology

The videoconferencing extended over 88 days, followed by three sessions on each day and in each of the sessions the following activities were undertaken:

- (i) Presentation by Experts/Resource Persons: (30 minutes)

- (ii) Group work by the teachers on the theme of the previous session at learning centers: (30 minutes);
(iii) Live interaction of teachers with Experts/Textbook writers: (60 minutes).

In one day programme 90 minutes were devoted to the presentations by the experts; 90 minutes to group work at the learning centers and 180 minutes were devoted on Live interaction of teachers with experts/resource persons.

During the videoconferencing the Experts' Presentations were made on (i) Textbooks with respect to the Salient features of New Textbooks (*Content, style, exercises and Illustrations etc.*); Reflection of NCF-2005 in Text books; Interconnection /continuum across subjects and levels (classes) of education and Guidelines for using Textbooks ; (ii). Teaching Strategies for selected topics in the subject areas and (III). Evaluation- with focus on-

Nature of students Activities/ Exercises with examples; Evaluation

Schedule of Video Conferencing

Phase/Year	Dates	Classes	Subjects
PHASE I 2006-07	July 6 to August 20, 2006	I,III,VI, IX,XI	I and III (Hindi, Eng., Maths., EVS) VI and IX (Hindi, English., Maths., Social Science Urdu, Sanskrit) XI (Hindi, English., Maths., Biology., Physics, Chemistry History., Geography, Economic, Business Study and Accountancy)
PHASE II 2007-08	July 9 to 21 August 2007	I,IV,X, and XII	II and IV I (Hindi, English Maths., EVS) VII and X (Hindi, English, Maths., Social Science, Urdu, Sanskrit) XII (Hindi, English., Maths., Biology., Physics., Chemistry, History Geography, Economic, Business Study and Accountancy)
PHASE III 2008-09	July 16 to August 2 2008	V and VIII	V-(Hindi, Eng., Maths., EVS) V VIII (Hindi, Eng., Maths., Sci., Soc.Sci. Urdu, Sanskrit)

strategies to be adopted by the teachers; internal evaluation and Model Question Papers.

This was the first time, when the teachers from different parts of the country interacted directly with the textbook writers/ developers, experts in different subject areas and the policy planners concerned with curriculum, syllabi and the textbooks. During these sessions (180 minutes) the participant teachers have put forward their, views, observations, suggestions, reflections and also questions/queries on different aspects of curriculum framework, syllabi, textbooks and practical aspects related to transaction of the curriculum to satisfy their curiosity and clarify their concepts. The experts' panelists have provided answers to their questions/queries within the time available to them.

The proceedings of the videoconferencing while being telecasted were also recorded on Beta Tapes. The recorded tapes containing the live interaction of participants with the experts were replayed and the material was converted into textual form. This material is being used for developing more programmes on issues related to teacher training.

During the video conferencing 6070 language teachers who were teaching

English to Classes I to XII in KV, NVs and CBSE affiliated independent schools have participated in these interactive sessions. Class wise details are given below:

Teachers from different parts of the country interacted with the expert panelists who were involved in process of development and writing of the text books of English at various levels. The questions and queries asked by the teachers were belongs to different aspects of teaching of English at school level, which were further grouped in to different categories and presented in the Table 2.

The use of videoconferencing has been a pioneering effort enabling the orientation of a large number of teachers collectively across the length and breadth of the country with economy of time and financial expenditure and ensuring maximisation of availability and utilisation of scarce resource- the resource person i. e. experts and textbook writers. The inputs received from the group of about 6070 English teachers through their direct interaction with experts on NCF-2005, new syllabi and textbooks is valuable towards undertaking exercise on continual improvement of textbooks and development of related educational materials for qualitative improvement of

Table 1 : Class-wise Number of Teachers, Teaching English and Total Number of Questions Asked by the Teachers during Interactive Sessions of videoconferencing

<i>Class</i>	<i>I&III</i>	<i>II& IV</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>VI</i>	<i>VII</i>	<i>VIII</i>	<i>IX</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>XI</i>	<i>XII</i>	<i>Total</i>
No. of Trs	373	572	570	603	815	813	612	798	379	535	6070
No. of Qs Asked	66	47	33	97	120	48	69	125	140	55	800

Table 2 : Different Types of Questions asked by the English Teachers during Interactive Sessions of videoconferencing Class wise

Class/ Categories	Number of Questions related to										Total
	Syllabus Curriculum	Textbook Content	Evaluation	Teaching Methodology	Non- Availability	Infrastructure and other Support	Time Manage- ment				
I and III	9	26	7	19	2	1	2			66	
II and IV	-	24	06	13	02	-	02			47	
V	4	13	7	9	-	-	-			33	
VI	3	15	27	37	12	0	3			97	
VII	17	32	09	53	07	01	01			120	
VIII	7	23	12	06	-	-	-			48	
IX	4	11	10	33	8	0	3			69	
X	17	18	32	32	15	07	04			125	
XI	19	23	33	47	17	0	1			140	
XII	07	19	07	21	00	00	01			55	
Total	87	204	150	270	63	09	17			800	
%	10.8	25.5	18.5	33.7	7.8	1.12	2.11				

education in the country. All the reflections, views, observations, suggestions and also questions/queries on different aspects of curriculum framework, syllabi, textbooks made by the language teachers teaching English from Classes I to XII were analysed and answered by the subject experts. The interpretations based on analysis of interactions between teachers and resource persons are given in subsequent paragraphs which may be utilised by the teachers who are teaching English from Classes I to XII and who have not attended the video conferencing on the use of new textbooks developed by NCERT.

During the live interactive sessions the group of teachers in English subjects at different levels have expressed their views, observations and feedback about the NCF-2005, syllabi, new textbooks and the organisation of the programme and also put forward their questions/queries to satisfy their doubts and curiosities. The analysis of the questions and queries indicate that in general, the participant teachers have appreciated the content and their presentations in the new textbooks. In general, questions/queries of teachers are related to concepts, illustrations, examples, exercises etc. given in these books and their critical analysis in the light of new syllabi and NCF-2005. Similarly, the important suggestions given by the teachers are related to continuum of concepts and elaboration at different levels; interdisciplinary linkages need for increased synergy between NCERT and the examining bodies like CBSE, ICSE, State boards, inclusion of practical examination/viva/voce in languages.

Curriculum, Syllabus and Text book

The questions and apprehensions of the teachers from Primary to Sr. Secondary stages, during video conferencing session are valid and worth appreciation. It shows their concern for their students and towards their responsibility in the class room. However, if we merge all the queries on syllabus and study them thoroughly we will find that there is lack of directionality, understanding and vision on the part of the teachers. The teacher is absolutely correct when she/he talks about the urban and rural divide and diversity existing in many situations in India. The text books should address these issues. The children should feel proud owners of a text book; it is possible if the child finds something which relates to his/her life experiences and something interesting to read. What is relevant and understandable for an urban child may prove totally meaningless for a rural child. NCF-2005 has seriously taken cognizance of this problem. It recommends plurality of text books, suitable for children in both urban and rural areas. The principle of honoring the values of democracy will be answered if no child is left out from the purview of the syllabus recommends curriculum 2005.

It may be highlighted here that NCF 2005 suggests teaching of English through whole language approach. The emphasis is on teaching language in meaningful contexts and we all agree that something more than grammatical competence is involved in acquiring language competence; the term "communicative competence" was

introduced to signify this extra dimension. The attempt to achieve communicative competence assumes the availability of a grammatical competence to build on. There is no doubt about the fact that grammar is the back bone of a language. The knowledge about the structure of a language and its usage is essential. The fear of the teachers as reflected in their questions that grammar has been left out is unrealistic. NCF-2005 recommends that grammar should be contextualised. It should not be read and learnt in isolation. It should have a context, a basis from which it should emerge. And the learner should be able to understand the presence of grammatical items in a text. Now it is for the teachers to work out as well as create situations in the class room for contextualised, implicit grammar learning.

Another common problem which seems to run through Primary to Sr. Secondary stages as reflected in the observations made by the teachers is less representation of Indian writers in the textbooks and apprehensions of the teachers regarding use of multilingualism.

While answering these queries it is essential to bear in mind that NCF- 2005 is a national document which encompasses sociological, psychological and political factors prevailing in our country. Education is not a static concept; it is influenced by all the factors mentioned above. The vision of education remains the same but strategies to achieve that vision may change time to time that is why there is a need to bring about changes in the syllabus and text books. The teachers

may find it too sudden and quick but then they themselves know how drastically and swiftly the changes are taking place all around us. When we talk of relating school life with child's own life we have in mind syllabus, text books as a takeoff point for bringing this change in our class rooms. English is in India today a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. It is predicted that by 2010 one third of the world's people will be learning English. The opening up of the Indian economy in the 1990's has coincided with an explosion in the demand for English in our schools because English is perceived to open up opportunities. In this scenario the role of language teachers become very crucial; the teacher's English language proficiency and the exposure of pupils to English i.e. the availability of English in the environment for language acquisition are essential preconditions for English language teaching.

There are thrilling times for Indian writers writing in English. There are many young Indian writers whose works in English have achieved acclaim. Hence the representation of Indian writers in text books is taken care of. There are translated works, authentic writings as well as references to Indian writings in the text books. It is suggested that teacher should take those lessons as points which can further be expanded and explored. The concept of multilingualism is also given due place in curriculum. Multilingualism is an approach, mindset to deal with language related difficulties. It is a very humane concept which makes us realise the presence and

dignity of all languages. It should not be misunderstood with translation method. It is a way of bonding all the languages. The use of two languages in the class room can be done in such a way as to provide comprehensible input in the target language, using the first language to provide background information. It is for the teacher to decide the levels of language mixing and use of mother tongue in the class room. The teacher can also make use of bilingual dictionaries, parallel texts at primary level. This exercise will gradually enrich the language repertoire and will definitely help in broadening the outlook of the learners. A broad, humanitarian global approach will emerge among the learners by making flexible use of languages. The teacher's pages in the text book provide a kind of guideline to them. At all levels an effort has been made to avoid stories with a background which is alien to the child, but a few pieces set in a different background are also incorporated intentionally, so that the children have glimpses of different cultures. In this era of globalisation there is no harm in introducing them to the parts of world with which they have no interaction. Above all the basic human values are not missed in these pieces. They too represent the essence of humanity.

Evaluation

It is astonishing to look at the number of questions asked on evaluation by the teachers during live interaction through videoconferencing. It reflects the stress which teachers are undergoing along with the children. No wonder there are

suicides, break downs and many psychological problems which children undergo during the period of examination. We need to look into the issues which make the evaluation system so traumatic for children. Is there a gap between class room teaching and examination or the pattern of teaching is such that it implicitly induces stress for children. We need to understand that learning is not '*just in two minutes*' process. It is a long and a profound way of adapting familiar as well as unfamiliar things. If we speak in terms of pedagogy it involves certain methodologies also. The questions asked during videoconferencing as shown in data is a mirror of their concern for students but also of their confused state of mind. Perhaps they do not realise their own valuable role in breaking the barrier between class room teachings through syllabus based text books and examination/evaluation. In an ideal situation the class room transactions, including all interactions with children should smoothly flow into the boundary of examination. A recommendation in the NCF, an observation in the syllabus and lesson in the text book constitute a single whole. The "whole" is like an atom, comprising infinite energy, this energy is to be realised and experienced by the teacher as well as by the student. Now the whole process of breaking the atom may be very tenuous and hard.

The teacher on the one end is the most potential instrument as well as a facilitator of this process. Once the teacher realises his/her role, the battle is almost won against this so called "devilish character examination".

Besides this, there are many loopholes and discrepancies in the examination system particularly, in the case of language and literature course. If we have to judge the role of this, course we may find that language learning and language learning through literature has a very vast domain which goes beyond the class room and text book. Literature is a compilation of life's experiences. The rich fabric of these experiences has a special meaning for all the children irrespective of their class or level. Literature is a vehicle for attitude building and determining a value system for a child. It can not be assessed through formatted questions and certainly not through MCQs and short question answers. Hence a question paper setter should borne in mind the fact that literary piece will evoke different responses from different children. He/she should create a space for such responses in the question papers. Secondly short question answers may test child's information bank but would fail to check child's style of writing, her/her skill in developing an answer and use of language. Keeping in view the vast canvass of CBSE it has been decided that some changes will be there in the typology of questions. Other changes will follow. Continuous and comprehensive evaluation is the most efficient method of examination and assessment because unlike other disciplines language as a discipline is used most of the time and the teacher is the rightful person to assess the child's proficiency in language. Again speaking is another aspect of language spectrum which needs to be assessed. The suggestion of marking for oral work is widely accepted

and justified also. An effort in this direction needs to be worked. Some weightage should also be given to children who prove to be good readers and those who have shown inclination for linguistics. The condition of KV system which holds teachers accountable for their result has relevance but then teachers' problems and difficulties should also be addressed. A kind of genuine flexibility should be provided to them so that they can do action research, invent and innovate.

At the present stage the suggestion of teachers during video conferencing that there should be counselors in schools is most welcome. Any standard professional help will be very beneficial.

Text book content and methodology

As we are aware that English as a subject has been introduced in Class I in almost 27 states in India, in spite of the poor infrastructural facilities and appropriate academic skills among teachers. The first criteria of English language teaching at class one in schools is availability of proficient teachers and secondly the input rich print/material environment. Researches and surveys have found that both the criteria are lacking in majority of the schools. The child's proficiency in English at the primary stage is very poor because of the factors mentioned. At the primary level lots of attempts have to be made irrespective of different approaches (behavioral or constructive) for children to develop an understanding and interest in the language. We all know that languages are learned implicitly by comprehending and communicating messages, either through listening or reading for meaning. A task based

methodology is suggested here. Beginning with action rhymes, simple plays, or skits, theatre as a genuine class activity can promote the child's engagement with language and its performance.

One of the aims of the education is to make children independent learners. The learners who would find solutions of their difficulties either through their own experiences or with the help of other resources. The teacher as a guide should equip him/her to 'look within' for answers and familiarise with all available areas of finding answers to their problems. There is no glossary provided at Senior Secondary level. The idea is to let children infer meaning from the context and in case of difficulty, discuss it with the teacher or dictionary. "Notes" given at the end of lesson provide suitable tips for understanding the lesson. It is observed that most of the teachers have found the content of the book difficult. One reason we could attribute to this problem is their non-familiarity with the content. The book presents contemporary literature with which, we hope, the children can relate. The issues and themes dealt in the text books are relevant to our present times. And again we will say that one of the principles of NCF is to relate the school life with life outside the school.

There is a persisting teacher concern that grammar is necessary for "accuracy" (as against fluency) in language. This presupposes that the learner has had enough exposure to the language to produce it with sufficient system to allow the identification of current errors. We must try to understand that grammar is not a route

for developing primary or usable knowledge of language, but it can serve as a tool for increasing the language repertoire and for understanding the construction of text.

Recommendations

What emerges from the dialogue between Teachers and textbook development team is that textbook should be taken as a takeoff point. Personal life experiences of the teachers and students should be woven into the textbooks. Students should be taught to look into their textbook through a questioning eye aiming at building their knowledge. Here are a few recommendations which may be taken into consideration by the teachers.

1. Though textbooks are a major teaching resource in schools yet negotiated curriculum and source material other than textbooks, though not popular propositions should be encouraged.
2. Teacher's thoughtfully planning of what is to be taught in the class motivates teacher to depart from the script of the textbook.
3. There should be a linguistic and cognitive synthesis in all the classroom transactions and content of the language based activities should not promote memory based learning.
4. Memorisation of grammar rules, dates etc. need not be stressed.
5. Teachers should create space for local specific material. This will help in conserving area specific language inputs. And students will be able to develop linkage with

school life and life outside the school.

6. Text books for different stages should be developed in sequence. This will ensure appropriate and smooth transition of syllabi from one stage to another based on the cognitive development of the child.
7. States can make need based alterations/ adaptations in the textbooks developed by NCERT.
 - For primary stages mere hands on activities are recommended with the involvement of teachers with children.
 - The activities should generate print rich environment in the classroom. This will help in enhancing the skills of reading and writing among children.
 - For senior secondary stage teachers should encourage students to read literary texts related to the text given in their textbook.
 - Writing creatively should be encouraged from primary years to Senior Secondary stage for these teachers should develop the activities for young students. Senior students should also be encouraged for creative writing. Teacher should not depend upon text based activities.

The school curriculum is developed with a vision of inculcating academic richness and positive mental state among children. There are many factors which ensure this objective. However in this paper an effort has been made to clear the doubts of the teachers which were raised during teleconferencing, at the same time role of the textbooks, teachers and classroom transactions has been highlighted for translating the goals of NCF- 2005 into reality.

Through the conversation with teachers across the country, by video conferencing, a lot of problems and issues surfaced and some of them have been referred to their respective departments. After analysing the entire gamut of issues put forth by the teachers, one really appreciates the critical views of them on curriculum, syllabus, text books and teaching methodologies. But one who has been associated with the making of NCF-2005, feels let down and sad when there are no questions on current trends in English literature, when teachers do not ask the names of English journals which they should subscribe for their students. There are also negligible questions on the provision of infrastructural facilities. Their criticism has not saddened us in any way rather it is a stimulus for further action, we still are waiting for notes of positivism to ring.

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