

An Analysis of Class X English Textbook Used in Madhya Pradesh Secondary School Board High Schools

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Abstract

This paper presents a brief evaluation of the English Textbook used in Class X in Madhya Pradesh State Board High Schools.

Keywords: English Textbook, Class X, Madhya Pradesh State Board High Schools.

Introduction

English Language is the *lingua franca* and a skill that is most essential in today's technological world.

It is widely known that students studying English following the State syllabus and hailing from the rural areas have limited ability of comprehension and expression in English. These students further go on to study professional courses in Science and Humanities. However, when they join the undergraduate program, they face the uphill task of relearning the English language. More often than not, they have to unlearn the erroneous use of structures and then relearn their correct use. The process of unlearning the erroneous use structures that are wrong becomes an uphill task for the students.

This got me thinking and I started asking the students about the difficulties they encountered. Often they replied me either in Hindi or a mixed blend of English and Hindi words "Ma'am, we started struggling in 5th and 6th Classes, and gradually the subject English took on proportions of a monster that we dread and continue to grapple with on an everyday basis."

In this paper I present a brief analysis of the English Textbook that is currently used in Class X in the MPSC Board (Madhya Pradesh, Secondary School) schools.

Structure of the Textbook

The textbook has been published by the NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi), compiled by eminent scholars of English Language Teaching as a Foreign Language (EFL). The first edition of this Class X textbook in English was published in 2007. The current edition was published in 2021 and it is used presently in

the current X classes in Madhya Pradesh Secondary School Board schools in the State of Madhya Pradesh.

The textbook begins with a very useful and insightful Foreword written in 2006 by the Director of National Council of Educational Research and Training. The Director's Foreword begins with the statement: "The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005, recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school", and so the textbook tries to avoid "bookish learning" which "causes a gap between the school, home and community." The textbooks "also attempt to discourage rote learning." The Director recommends that we should "perceive and treat children as participants in learning, not as receivers of a fixed body of knowledge."

One may raise a question as to whether the Class X English textbook under discussion links the students to their life outside the school. Teaching and learning a language as a Foreign Language usually must make extra-effort in creating such links. One strategy that may offer stronger links is to include the themes/topics/essential vocabulary and expressions from the students' outside world into the choice of topics, forms of presentation, etc. of the textbook lessons. Indianization of English textbook contents and conversations, etc. is an important strategy.

The next item *To the Teacher* has only two full pages, but the contents are very useful to the teachers, provided the teachers read this part carefully, discuss it with their colleagues and the schools organize discussions and seminars to understand and follow the contents and methods in day to day work. Very highly commended section, indeed. My conversation with some teachers of a high school under the Madhya Pradesh Secondary School Board high schools revealed the necessity to insist on the teachers to read this section and also conduct group discussions/seminars, etc. to elaborate on the points raised and for identifying practical classroom strategies for rural high schools in particular.

The textbook contains 11 lessons running to a total of 162 pages. Each lesson's primary text is intermixed with questions, exercises, etc. After every lesson's prose text, one or two poems follow the prose text. Thus, poems become an integral part of Class X and the textbook.

1. A Letter to God by G.L. FUENTES

Followed by two poems:

Dust of Snow ROBERT FROST

Fire and Ice ROBERT FROST

2. Nelson Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom by NELSON ROLIHLEHLA MANDELA

Followed by a poem:

A Tiger in the Zoo by LESLIE NORRIS

3. Two Stories about Flying

I. His First Flight LIAM O' FLAHERTY

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- II. Black Aeroplane FREDERICK FORSYTH
 Followed by two poems:
 How to Tell Wild Animals CAROLYN WELLS
 The Ball Poem JOHN BERRYMAN
 4. From the Diary of Anne Frank ANNE FRANK
 Followed by a poem: Amanda! ROBIN KLEIN
 5. The Hundred Dresses–I ELEANOR ESTES
 6. The Hundred Dresses–II ELEANOR ESTES
 Followed by a poem:
 Animals WALT WHITMAN
 7. Glimpses of India:
 I. A Baker from Goa LUCIO RODRIGUES
 II. Coorg LOKESH ABROL
 III. Tea from Assam ARUP KUMAR DATTA
 Followed by a poem: The Trees ADRIENNE RICH
 8. Mijbil the Otter GAVIN MAXWELL
 Followed by a poem: Fog CARL SANDBURG
 9. Madam Rides the Bus VALLIKKANNAN
 Followed by a poem: The Tale of Custard the Dragon OGDEN NASH
 10. The Sermon at Benares
 Followed by a poem: For Anne Gregory WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS
 11. The Proposal ANTON CHEKOV

As already pointed out, the contents of the textbook are interspersed with prose and poetry. Out of the 11 lessons only 3 are from Indian authors and the rest are American and European authors such as G.L. Fuentes, Robert Frost, Leslie Norris, Anne Frank, Eleanor Estes, Gavin Maxwell, etc.

The text of the lesson begins with a brief introduction about the lesson and a related activity and introductory questions that the teacher might ask the students while introducing the topic and the lesson. Some of the texts of the lessons are very long, and this could discourage students as well as the teachers!

Difficult words and their meanings have been given at the side of the page for ease of understanding.

At the end of the lesson, questions related to the text that is being read are asked.

Exercise on language learning activity is given, wherein the grammatical concepts such as clauses, phrases are introduced with exercises for practice. Introduction to writing and enrichment of styles such as use of metaphors and similes are given in the textbook. Activities

for the development of primary language skills such as listening and speaking are also enumerated at the end of the lesson.

Fortunately, there are two lessons presenting stories in Indian context. So, the students may be at ease to read and enjoy these texts, with minimal support from their teachers. There is also a lesson that presents the narrative of Gautama Buddha's Sermon at Benares. This will certainly attract all students including rural students to read it several times.

However, the question that comes to our mind is whether our students as well as their teachers are able to follow the majority of the texts and poems. These highly standard English materials are written by leading authors. These are intended mostly for those for whom English is the mother tongue/first language. If the learning of the Standard Language is routed through contents that may be familiar and relevant to the context and culture of the learners, students can be motivated to read the texts more readily in my opinion.

The lessons are intermixed with exercises to help students to master all the four language skills. The structures of the English language are presented in a graded fashion to enable students to master their skills. The strength and the usefulness of the textbook lie in these exercises. Once again, how these exercises are presented to the students and how many exercises students are able to complete during the course may also be considered. The time allotted for the course may or may not be adequate enough to cover all the exercises. Then it becomes necessary for the group of teachers to choose most important items for the students to complete their exercises. It would be better and very useful if we also have some model question papers as part of the textbook.

The textbook has a dedicated write up on learning outcomes that highlights the skills that a student of English has to be proficient at the end of the course, like listening and understanding announcements, instructions, read aloud texts, etc.

The textbook has a page dedicated to the learning outcomes at the end of the course.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The learner —

- listens to announcements, instructions, read-aloud texts, audio, videos for information, gist and details; responds by answering questions accordingly.
- listens to and discusses literary / nonliterary inputs in varied contexts to infer, interpret, and appreciate.
- speaks with coherence and cohesion while participating in interactive tasks.
- uses language appropriate to purposes and perspectives.
- talks on key contemporary issues like social justice, environment, gender, etc., in speech and writing.
- participates in bilingual or multilingual discourses on various themes.
- reads, comprehends, and responds to complex texts independently.
- reads stories and literary texts, both fiction and non-fiction, with understanding for pleasure and enjoyment and discusses about these.
- appreciates nuances and shades of literary meanings, talks about literary devices like onomatopoeic sounds, symbols, metaphors, alliterations, comparisons, allusions and the poet's or the writer's point of view.
- collects evidences and discusses in groups for reading autobiographies, history and science based literary texts.
- writes paragraphs, narratives, etc., by planning revising, editing, rewriting, and finalising.
- writes reports of functions in school, family, and community activities.
- writes personal, official and business letters, articles, debates, paragraphs based on visual or verbal clues, textual inputs, etc.
- evaluates content presented in print and in different genres/formats and presents content using symbols, graphs, diagrams, etc.
- analyses and appreciates a point of view or cultural experience as reflected in the text; presents orally or in writing.
- draws references from books, newspapers, internet, etc., and interprets using analytical skills.
- speaks or writes on variety of themes.
- consults or refers to dictionary, periodicals, and books for academic and other purposes; and uses them in speech and writing.
- provides facts and background knowledge in areas such as science and social science and presents view points based on those facts.

Some Additional Observations

The textbook at first glance seems to cater to the holistic development of language skills in students. However, the reality is woefully different. Discussion with students studying in 10th standard, in a Govt. aided school (name of the school is withheld by the present author), and a Public School which is a CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) School), Bhopal (again the name of the school is withheld by the present author), and with the teachers who teach English in the schools showed that in almost all the cases, the teacher was unable to complete all the activities given at the end of the lessons. The most neglected part of the activity was vocabulary enhancement, speaking and listening activities, which were almost ignored by the language teacher.

A short test to assess the language skills of the students after having passed 12th standard and studying Engineering in the first year, glaringly pointed out the lapses in the teaching-learning outcomes in the students. An illustration of the questions asked during the assessment is as follows.

Choose the correct answer:

A person who can't see is (a. deaf, b. blind, c. dumb)

Students studying in the 10th class answered it as deaf while students studying in the engineering courses answered either dumb or blind.

Fill in the blanks with appropriate articles

He is ... honest man (a, an)

Most of the students filled it with **a**.

Introduce yourself. ... Students from urban areas were able to give a rudimentary introduction of themselves. Students from the rural areas were woefully unable to introduce themselves in English.

Describe the given picture (A picture of Taj Mahal was given).

Based on the assessment of the answer scripts and personal discussions with the teachers and students, the students were graded on a 5-point scale, viz., poor, fair, good, very good, and excellent, wherein --

1. Poor – The student has difficulty in completing tasks with listening comprehension. The student speaks in syntactic forms that is a direct translation from Hindi. Spellings, grammar and punctuation are erratic.

2- Fair -The student can solve easy level listening comprehension passages. Can speak a bit of English. Spellings, grammar and punctuation are erratic, e.g., substitution of *their* for *there*.

3- Good – Students can solve listening comprehension. Can speak well. Spelling, grammar, and punctuation rules are followed albeit erratically. The student is able to recognise that she/he has made a mistake in spelling and syntax but does not have the knowledge to correct it.

4- Very Good - The student has acquired functional knowledge of language in all the domains and is able to perform satisfactorily. However, a distinct lack of knowledge in vocabulary is observed.

5- Excellent- The student has acquired functional knowledge of language in all the domains and is able to perform satisfactorily. There is no observable irregularity in speaking and writing.

An analysis of total students (urban and rural areas) graded according to the 5-point scale is given in the following table.

	Rural and Urban				
Rating Scale	1	2	3	4	5
Language Skill					
Listening	100	49	65	76	10
Speaking	193	94	35	43	35
Reading	140	150	46	29	35
Writing	140	150	46	29	35
Grammar	100	80	38	70	32

Students who are from the urban milieu and are studying in the English Medium school were to a certain extent able to answer the questions. However, students from rural areas were unable to solve the paper due to lack of vocabulary. The lacuna in receptive and expressive vocabulary is so poor that the students were unable to name fruits, vegetables, emotions and other words associated with day-to-day conversation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Textbooks are portals of language learning and use. The students from the urban areas are able to use language in reception and expression. However, students from the Government school were unable to complete the grammatical tasks as well as speak in English.

Students from rural areas performed consistently in the poor and fair sections. Completing tasks related to the lesson was a challenge. Most of the students memorised the answers and reproduced them in the exam without understanding the crux or the meaning of the lesson. Their vocabulary was also inadequate.

My recommendation is that the students should be provided with an exhaustive list of vocabulary that is both general and lesson specific with meanings in the vernacular to help the students understand the lesson. The students should also be provided with a list of everyday dialogues pertaining to different contexts to help the student converse in English.

Reference

First Flight, Textbook in English for Class X (2022-23). Madhya Pradesh Rajya Shiksha Kendra, Bhopal.
