

# National Curriculum Framework and its Implications for the Indian School ESL Curriculum



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## **ABSTRACT**

*This paper attempts to make a survey of the principles of the National Curriculum Framework 2005 and attempts to evaluate Karnataka State Reader (Grade VI-IX) on the basis of the principles enshrined in the NCF. It tries to highlight the principles incorporated in the Reader and those that need to be added.*

## **Introduction**

India aims at discovering effective ways of educating its children. Various debates have been held at the national and the international levels to impart education to everybody regardless of their social, cultural and economic context. "A universal urge to build a society of humane, committed, participative and productive citizens has accelerated these efforts" (NCF 2005, *Preface*).

The present curriculum encompasses some of the major concerns reiterated by the NEP (National Educational Policy). The important issues have been concerned primarily with language education, medium of instruction, formation of a common school structure, the relevance of social cohesion, secularism and national integration, in the entire educational process. The other core components included were Continuous

Comprehensive Evaluation, the elements of freedom and flexibility, and vocational education.

The other concerns include 'healthy, enjoyable and stress-free Early Childhood Care' and education, sustenance and nurturing of talent, and reduction of the curriculum load. For languages, it aims at integration of environmental education, involvement of teachers in planning, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum, and development of the curriculum materials.

The review of National Curriculum Framework, 2000 was initiated with the intention to tackle problems of curriculum load on children. The Ministry of Human Resource Development - 1990s, in its report, *Learning without Burden*, stated that unless and until we treat children as mere receivers of knowledge, undervaluing their potential

to create and construct knowledge by their own experience, learning can never be joyful.

### **Principles of NCF – An Overview**

#### ***Adequate data input***

Pertaining to textbooks, both teachers and learners need to have control over textbooks. Curriculum freedom cannot exist in the presence of a single prescribed text (NCF 2005). All schools should have a package of learning materials instead of a single textbook, and the textbook should be a part of the package. Besides, there should be provision for modification at the school and at the cluster level, and also for providing supplementary materials. In some States, one text is ‘covered’ in a single day. Language is a dynamic ‘text’, which means that, learners need to be exposed to new language samples every day rather than to a single text repeatedly.

Regardless of which level the language is to be introduced, the aim should be to ‘build familiarity with the language in meaningful situations.’ “There is at least one characteristic that is common to every *successful* language-learning experience we have ever known, and that is, the learner is exposed one way or another to an adequate amount of the data of the language to be learned” (Rutherford 1987, p.18). A single textbook is not enough for the ‘adequate data input’. Thus, besides *mastery* over the prescribed textbook, learners should be given exposure to adequate, *regular* and meaningful language. To encourage reading and extensive reading, learner-chosen texts

like cartoons, paragraphs, jokes, articles, and books, can be shared in class (Kumaradas 1993).

#### ***Humanistic***

The content in the textbooks should be related to the challenges and career at different stages. It should encourage knowledge that helps the child to self-discover his/her own interests. This should be done by giving project work and alternative evaluation systems like open book exams. The duty of the teacher is only to sow the seed of the subject among the learners and not stuff the whole plant in them. We should aim towards making them life-long learners. The curriculum should be humanistic in its approach and should tend towards pursuit of different ranges of human aptitudes. Education must be able to inculcate among our learners the values of *peace, humaneness and tolerance* in a multi-cultural society (NCF 2005, p.13).

#### ***Culture***

In addition to this, curriculum also aims at infusing among learners the sentiments of India’s rich cultural heritage, philosophical, cultural and sociological tradition, and its contribution to the world civilization at large. The curriculum further aims at inculcating the spirit of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ among young learners so that their self esteem as Indian is enhanced. This will also enable them to learn, respect and accept other cultures of the world. It also gives them courage to meet the challenges imposed by the pressure of globalization.

India being a multicultural society, the curriculum should address the cultural pluralism and instil among the younger generation the insight to re-interpret or review the past, juxtaposing the new perspective and priorities of the changing, modern context.

### ***Knowledge***

At present, too much emphasis is given on the 'outcome': presenting information on fragmentary bits instead of interrelating them; conducting activities and finally eliciting information to check how much of it has to be memorized. We should view learners as constructors of knowledge instead of being mere reproducers of knowledge. Knowledge includes problem solving and understanding. Contemporary subjects should be included; selection of knowledge should also be well planned.

Added to this, the curriculum should produce citizens who are aware of their rights and responsibilities enshrined in the constitution. Above all, the main goal of education is not only to cultivate a culture of peace among individuals but also to stop them from being mere onlookers of conflict.

### ***The Learner and the Context***

It is in interaction with the environment that a child constructs knowledge and derives meaning. Hence, it is imperative to contextualize education, base the learning in the child's context, and make permeable relationship between the learner, nature and the social environment, as knowledge is to be used to connect with the world. Unless

learners are able to relate their individual standpoint to the context given in the textbook and to their experience in society, knowledge becomes mere information.

Everyday the child comes to the world with new experience. Only when the living environment is brought into discussion/ reflection inside the class, do they become alive to matters concerning the environment and nurture a concern for it. Projects and activities that involve groups should be encouraged so that learners learn to take responsibility, learn group work and social values. Protection of the environment, concern for peace, and readiness towards social changes should be the core components of quality education.

### ***Bilingualism and Multilingualism***

The main national vision of English teaching in India has been to encourage multilingualism so that it enriches all languages in India, placing English along with other Indian languages, strengthening the teaching of English through children's other language in regional medium schools, and reducing the hegemony of English and propagation of other Indian languages in English medium schools.

At the primary level, Classes I-III, English can occur in congruence with the first language(s) so as to 'create awareness of the world around the child' (Das 2005). A few ways in which bilingualism can be practised is by introduction of parallel texts/same stories in different languages. For example, the National Book Trust (NBT) has many stories written in English and other Indian

languages. The Promise Foundation has Big Books in four Indian languages and English. Production of bilingual learner's dictionaries at various levels can be initiated. The other bilingual practice could be done by providing instruction in English and production is accepted in the mother tongue or in the language the learner is familiar with.

### ***Language across the Curriculum***

Language education should not be confined to the language classroom alone. Through other subjects learners learn various terminologies. Teachers of other subjects may ask learners to gather information in English. The policy of *language across the curriculum* would genuinely promote multilingualism in our curriculum. Including language across the curriculum, especially at the primary level, would contribute to language learning; exclusive teaching of English could be initiated at the high school level.

### **Karnataka English State Textbooks, 2013**

The Preface of all the textbooks (V-X) reads thus: "The textbooks were designed according to the principles of NCF-2005 since June 2010. The textbook has incorporated Constructivist Approach, Spiral Approach and Integrated Approach. Besides focusing only on LSRW skills, competencies, fundamental grammar, text and exercise, the textbook gives importance to appreciating beauty, inculcating values and developing personality. It aims at enabling learners to be healthy and productive members of society. The textbook includes various group and pair

activities, assignments and project works. The focus of the textbook is more on developing learners' communicative skills than preparing them for exams."

### **Content Analysis (2012- 2013-2014)**

#### ***Inclusion of principles of NCF in Karnataka State Textbooks***

In class VI textbook, the poem *Kindness to Animals*, Anonymous, focuses on listening to the poem followed by exercises to understand and appreciate it. For example, a question says, *Complete the following sentences with the help of the poem* (VI Reader, p.57). The other question is: *Sit in groups. Ask two or three interesting questions on each of the following birds and animals.* (VI Reader, p. 58). Next is a question on writing. Students are supposed to develop a paragraph describing a picture (VI Reader, pp. 60-61). The Reader does follow an integrative approach and focuses on communicative skills, which is an important aspect of NCF.

Inclusion of poems, like *Awareness* by Sylvia Stults (VII Reader, p. 33), *No Men are Foreign* by James Kirkup (VIII Reader, p. 40), and *The Wonderful Words* by Mary O' Neill (IX Reader, p. 77), shows inclusion of one of the principles of NCF, i.e. appreciation of beauty.

The other principle of NCF is that the curriculum should replicate indigenous cultural, philosophical and sociological traditions. The inclusion of stories like *Ekalavya* (VII Reader, p. 38), *A Day in the Ashram Pool* (VIII Reader, p. 1) Enchanted

*Pool* (IX Reader, p. 1) (an excerpt from *The Mahabharata*), and a few poems like *Coromandel Fishers*, by Sarojini Naidu, (VIII Reader, p. 73), Upagupta (IX Reader, p. 19), reflects indigenous traditions and culture.

Other principles of NCF, i.e. inclusion of environmental awareness, inculcation of values, and concern for peace and readiness towards social changes, are seen in lessons like *Kindness to Animals* (VI Reader, p. 55), *Avoid Plastics* (VII Reader, p. 22), *Justice above Self* by Munshi Premchand (IX Reader, p. 82), *Wealth and Values* (VII Reader, p. 119), and *What I Want for You and Every Child-A Letter from Obama to his Daughters* (VI Reader, p. 145).

#### **A few more NCF principles that could be added to the Karnataka State textbook**

Rutherford says that learners should be exposed to an adequate amount of data. Therefore, NCF suggests that instead of single textbooks, learners should be exposed to new language samples every day. So, instead of lengthy stories like *To My Countrymen* by Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam (IX Reader), which runs into 5 pages (pp. 130-134) and with difficult vocabulary like *perpetuate*, *disposed to*, *multifaceted*, *insurgency*, and *hypothesis*, a few short texts of 1-2 pages with just a few new words could be introduced.

Besides this, NCF states that texts chosen by learners could be used for extensive reading, so instead of prescribing a set of supplementary texts which consists of prose and poems like *Aruna Asaf Ali-The Great Patriot* (IX Reader, p. 149), *Lal Bahadur*

*Shastri*, a biographical sketch (VIII Reader, p. 1), and *A Birthday Present: Nehru to his Daughter* (VI Reader, p. 144), cartoons, paragraphs, jokes, articles, books on themes like movies, sports, child prodigy, children's literature (*Swami and Friends*, *Harry Potter Series*, *Hardy Boys Series*), inspiring autobiographies/biographies of children or childhood memories/hardships of adults, could be included.

NCF refers to making children aware of responsibilities but it also mentions making them aware of their rights. Lessons like *The Noble Bishop* (IX Reader, p. 95) about honesty, *Dignity of Labour* (VI Reader, p. 1) about hard work, *Ekalavya* (VII Reader, p. 38) about respect to teachers, and *The Will of Sacrifice* (IX Reader, p. 112) about patriotism, will make them responsible citizens but perhaps ignorant. There are numerous cases of child abuse, child molestation, child marriage, etc. If children are made aware of their rights and are encouraged to speak against such abuses, they will not be silent victims of such practices.

NCF mentions that, due to conflict of identities, particularly in case of minorities, there is a great need to be sensitive to their languages and cultures in the interest of national and global peace and harmony. Pingali Sailaja (2013) says that mere change of names from Robert to Ram would not solve the problem. Due to frequent use of Sanskrit names, Indians are viewed more as Hindus. The danger is that, if we neglect some contexts and cultures, a part of India is removed. Instead of including excerpts



only from the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, e.g. *Story of Dharmavyadha* (Supplementary Reader VIII), *The Enchanted Pool* (IX Reader, p. 1), and *Ekalavya* (VII Reader, p. 38), epics or folk lore of different religious and linguistic sects could be included.

Another principle of NCF is to encourage Bilingualism and Multilingualism. This could be done by including parallel texts/same stories in different languages, bilingual or multilingual glossaries in the textbook.

Propagating 'Language across the Curriculum', NCF says that teachers of other subjects like Science, History, and Geography should ask learners to search for related texts in English. English teachers, in turn, could also ask learners to find texts related to the theme of the lesson either in their mother tongue or in any other language they know. In this way, the principle of multilingualism could also be indirectly realized.

NCF mentions that textbooks need to be related to the challenges and career at different stages. Most of our learners are not aware of challenges and career opportunities. When they finish their 10th standard, they find difficulties in choosing their streams as they are not aware of varied opportunities available in different fields. Inclusion of such lessons as core or supplementary texts would make education relevant and beneficial.

### **Conclusion**

Textbooks in class are the only source

through which learners, especially in government schools, see the world beyond the boundaries of their homes. It is the medium through which they build the confidence to face the world; they understand their own life and that of others; they understand values and responsibilities. Thus care and attention should be taken while designing textbooks.

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