

Analysing Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness of English Textbooks in Government Schools of Assam

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Abstract

This study examines the extent to which the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) developed middle-stage English textbooks in government schools of Assam are linguistically and culturally responsive for diverse learners. A directed content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was employed to evaluate four components across the three textbooks—reading activities, prose texts, poetry texts, and teacher guidelines. Unit-wise analysis of the components was conducted using a researcher-developed codebook informed by culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy and differentiated instruction. Findings reveal consistently low to very low levels of linguistic and cultural responsiveness across all components. In the absence of such responsive textbooks, overcoming the traditional curricular limitations becomes a major challenge for the teachers, who must therefore deploy innovative strategies to effectively accommodate and engage learners from different linguistic backgrounds.

Keywords: Culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (CLRP), differentiated instruction, linguistic responsiveness, textbook analysis

Introduction

Linguistic diversity is a defining feature of Indian classrooms, particularly in states like Assam where learners come from various language groups. For instance, learners of schools in tea-garden areas mostly speak languages like Sadri, Mundari, Mising, Nepali, Odia, etc.

which are significantly different from the school language, Assamese (Sarma, 2011). In such contexts, where learners have to navigate between their home languages, school language and English, teaching English—a second language or a third language or maybe a fourth language for the learners—requires thoughtful consideration of linguistic and incorporation of linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the learners. Since classroom teaching is still mostly guided by textbook contents, having linguistically and culturally responsive elements in textbooks is likely to lead to an inclusive pedagogy.

In the Indian context, linguistic and cultural inclusivity is advocated by National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) (Ministry of Education, 2023) encouraging multilingual education that values and uses learners' home languages as a resource for learning. Therefore, it is important to find out how textbooks align with these principles, especially while developing key literacy skills. According to Baker (2011) and Nault (2006), it is crucial for ELT textbooks to include cultural elements and they should be effortlessly incorporated into the four key language skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing. Analysing school textbooks helps determine to what extent instructional materials operationalise such inclusive principles advocated by the national policies. In Assam, the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) develops textbooks for the state government schools in alignment with these national objectives. This study aims to explore to what extent the SCERT English textbooks ensure linguistic and cultural responsiveness for the linguistically diverse learners of government schools in Assam.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Studies on English textbooks in India consistently highlight tensions between curricular expectations and classroom realities. Research in a South Indian state shows that state-prescribed English textbooks prioritise traditional instruction over learner autonomy and communicative competence (Anjaneyulu, 2014). Comparative analyses of NCERT English textbooks indicate some movement towards communicative approaches and inclusivity, yet teacher-centred orientations and conventional task types continue to dominate (Anand & Kuruvilla, 2025). In Assam, evaluations of higher secondary English textbooks point to mixed perceptions of adequacy and a need for closer alignment with

curricular goals (Syam, 2012). However, no studies have systematically examined linguistic and cultural responsiveness in SCERT English textbooks for the middle stage in Assam. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the extent to which these textbooks reflect principles of cultural and linguistic inclusivity. This study is informed by theoretical understandings in three areas—Multilingual realities in classrooms, Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy (CLRP), and Differentiated Instruction (DI).

Translanguaging theory positions multilingual meaning-making as both natural and pedagogically valuable (Garcia & Wei, 2014). In India, the neglect of children's linguistic resources has been identified as contributing to a massive educational disadvantage (Mohanty, 2013). Materials that assume monolingual learners risk marginalising significant sections of the classroom (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Textbooks thus play a critical role in either legitimising or silencing linguistic diversity. When they prioritise dominant languages and cultures, they normalise linguistic homogeneity (Garcia, 2009); however, when they integrate multiple voices, they support identity affirmation and inclusion (UNESCO, 2017).

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy (CLRP) emphasises the recognition and integration of students' cultural and linguistic identities into teaching practices, aiming to foster equitable learning outcomes. It validates and affirms students' cultural experiences, while simultaneously fostering their social and academic proficiencies (Hollie, 2012). Going beyond surface-level recognition of diversity, it forges meaningful connections between the learners' personal lives and academic content. Developed and implemented in response to the challenges faced by the students of linguistically diverse classrooms (Banks & Banks, 2015), CLRP has two key concepts—Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Linguistically Responsive Teaching (LRT). Gay (2010) defines CRT as using the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. Within this pedagogy, LRT aims to assist teachers to understand and apply the second language learning principles to teaching diverse English language learners (Zhang-Wu, 2017).

Differentiated Instruction (DI) complements CLRP by advocating varied approaches to content, process, and assessment to address

learners' differing readiness, linguistic backgrounds, and preferences (Roy et al., 2013; Tomlinson, 2014). In multilingual contexts, DI aligns with responsive pedagogy through scaffolded support and multiple entry points to learning (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Although implementation remains challenging and uneven globally (Schleicher, 2016), evidence indicates that when effectively applied, DI can enhance learning outcomes (Deunk et al., 2018).

Research Objectives

Keeping in view the diverse learner profile in Indian schools, especially in Assam, and the National Education Policy's (NEP) (Ministry of Education, 2020) emphasis on advocating multilingual education for children, in order to support their socio-emotional development, the current study primarily addresses the following research aims:

To examine the extent to which reading activities in the selected English textbooks are responsive towards linguistically diverse learners;

To analyse the extent to which prose and poetry texts reflect culturally and linguistically responsive features;

To evaluate the extent to which teacher guidelines support culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a directed content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) as the analytic categories and indicators were derived a priori drawing on the frameworks and principles of CLRP and DI for examining the selected textbooks for cultural and linguistic responsiveness. Rather than generating categories inductively, the analysis aimed to assess the presence, absence, and degree of existing linguistic and cultural features within textbook content. The corpus comprised three SCERT English textbooks prescribed for middle-stage learners of government schools of Assam. The textbooks analysed were *Sunbeam English Reader-1* for Grade VI (SCERT, 2019), *Sunbeam English Reader-II* for Grade VII (SCERT, 2019), and *Sunbeam English Reader-III* for Grade VIII (SCERT, 2019). For analysis, the textbooks were divided into four components - reading activities, poetry texts, prose texts and teacher guidelines, and each unit- Reading Activity (RA), Poetry (PO),

Prose (PRO) and Teacher Guidelines (TG) served as independent units of analysis.

Codebook Development and Coding

The three textbooks were coded in the following manner: *Sunbeam English Reader I* as Textbook A, *Sunbeam English Reader II* as Textbook B and *Sunbeam English Reader III* as Textbook C. Moreover, a structured codebook was developed with separate codes for each component. Each code included a concise definition, unit of analysis, a four-point ordinal scale (0–3) and explicit exclusion criteria, wherever necessary. Scale anchors were designed to capture increasing degrees of linguistic and cultural responsiveness, from absence (0) to explicit and sustained integration (3). Neutral or universal content was treated as analytically distinct from both culturally responsive and culturally exclusionary content. When a code was not logically applicable to a given unit type, it was marked as not applicable (NA) rather than scored as 0. Table 1 presents the coding categories and associated indicators.

Data Aggregation and Reporting Procedures

Following unit-level coding, scores were aggregated at the section level (reading activities, poetry, prose, and teacher guidelines) for each textbook. Since sections differed in the number of units, percentage scores rather than raw totals were used, with NA values excluded to ensure accuracy. For Reading Activities, only percentage-based aggregation is presented due to the large number of activities (n=125), to maintain clarity. In contrast, prose texts, poetry texts, and teacher guidelines contained fewer, self-contained units and were therefore analysed individually using the internal codebook anchors. Unit-wise tables retain textual specificity, while aggregated percentage scores provide an overall picture of responsiveness across sections. The score interpretation table is presented below:

Table 2: *Score Interpretation Table*

<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
0-25%	Very low inclusivity
26-50%	Low inclusivity
51-75%	Moderate inclusivity
76-100%	High inclusivity

Findings

Analysis of Reading Activities

The analysis of reading activities (see Table 3) across the three textbooks indicates consistently very low linguistic responsiveness. No tasks required learners to engage bilingually or multilingually (A1 = 0%) or demonstrate comprehension in their home languages (A2 = 0%). Peer collaboration structured around linguistic diversity was also absent (A3 = 0%). Although multimodal support appeared slightly more frequently (A4 = 20.80%), it still fell within the very low band, indicating occasional rather than systematic use. No explicit bilingual reading aids, such as mother-tongue support tools or bilingual dictionaries, were provided (A5 = 0%). While some activities referred to dictionary use,

Table 1: Coding Categories and Associated Indicators

Section	Code	Indicators
A: Reading Activities	A1	Bi/Multilingual Reading Activities
	A2	Bi/Multilingual Comprehension Responses
	A3	Peer Collaboration Across Linguistic Groups
	A4	Multimodal Reading Support
	A5	Use of Bi/Multilingual Reading Aids
B: Poetry Texts	P1	Multilingual Community Context
	P2	Regional Cultural Embedding
	P3	Vocabulary Support in Poems
	P4	Cultural Sensitivity
C: Prose Texts	PR1	Identifiable Cultural Group Representation
	PR2	Authentic Bi/Multilingual Interaction
	PR3	Opportunities to Retell in Home-Language
	PR4	Valuation of Language & Cultural Diversity
D: Teacher Guidelines	T1	Positive Attitude Towards Linguistic Diversity
	T2	Multilingual Support Strategies
	T3	Translanguaging Guidance
	T4	Home or Familiar Language Scaffolding
	T5	Inclusive Classroom Environment
	T6	Differentiated Instruction

the textbooks did not clarify whether this implied bilingual or English-only resources, and the latter appears more likely. Overall, the reading activities reflect a predominantly English-only orientation, with minimal acknowledgement of learners' multilingual realities or linguistic needs, as summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: *Percentage Scores and Inclusivity Levels for Reading Activities*

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Maximum Possible Score</i>	<i>Obtained Score</i>	<i>% of Maximum Score</i>	<i>Inclusivity Level</i>
A1—Bi/Multilingual Reading Activities	375	0	0.00%	Very low
A2—Bi/Multilingual Comprehension Responses	375	0	0.00%	Very low
A3—Peer Collaboration Across Linguistic Groups	78*	0	0.00%	Very low
A4—Multimodal Reading Support	375	78	20.80%	Very low
A5—Use of Bi/Multilingual Reading Aids	300*	0	0.00%	Very low

*NA-coded units were excluded from maximum score calculation

Analysis of Poetry Texts

The analysis of poetry texts across the three textbooks indicates an overall low level of cultural and linguistic responsiveness, with limited acknowledgement of multilingual realities or regionally grounded experiences. As shown in Table 4, poems in Textbooks A and B scored 0 for multilingual community context (P1) and regional cultural embedding (P2), reflecting an almost complete absence of references to learners' sociolinguistic backgrounds. These poems largely focused on universal themes such as nature and general human experiences, with no vocabulary scaffolding (P3), implicitly assuming uniform linguistic familiarity. In contrast, Textbook C shows slightly stronger performance, with one poem (PO6) scoring 2 across P1-P3 for situating meaning within familiar contexts and offering brief explanations of culture-specific terms such as *Koka* (*grandfather*), *Gogona* (*a musical instrument*) and *Pitha-laroo* (*regional festive snacks*). However, such support remains isolated rather than systematic.

Table 4: *Distribution of Unit-wise Scores for Poetry Texts Indicators*

<i>Poetry texts</i>					
<i>Textbook</i>	<i>Unit ID</i>	<i>P1</i>	<i>P2</i>	<i>P3</i>	<i>P4</i>
A	PO1	0	0	0	1
	PO2	0	0	0	1
	PO3	0	0	0	1
	PO4	0	0	0	1
B	PO5	0	0	0	1
C	PO6	2	2	2	1
	PO7	0	0	1	1
	PO8	0	0	0	1
	PO9	0	0	0	1
	PO10	0	0	0	1

The percentage summary in Table 5 reinforces these findings. Indicators P1 and P2 (6.67% each) show very low multilingual contextualisation or regional cultural embedding, while P3 (10%) indicates minimal vocabulary or scaffolding support for diverse learners. Collectively, the poetry section functions largely as culturally and linguistically neutral rather than actively inclusive. However, P4 (33.33%) reflects a comparatively stronger pattern, suggesting that while the poems generally avoid cultural stereotypes or deficit framings, they stop short of enabling meaningful linguistic inclusion.

Table 5: *Percentage Scores and Inclusivity Levels for Poetry Texts Indicators*

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Maximum Possible Score</i>	<i>Obtained Score</i>	<i>% of Maximum Score</i>	<i>Inclusivity Level</i>
P1—Multilingual Community Context	30	2	6.67%	Very Low
P2—Regional Cultural Embedding	30	2	6.67%	Very Low
P3—Vocabulary Support in Poems	30	3	10.00%	Very Low
P4—Cultural Sensitivity	30	10	33.33%	Low

Analysis of Prose Texts

As shown in Table 6, cultural and linguistic representation (PR1) appears intermittently across the prose texts in all the three textbooks, with a few

units in each textbook showing partial to meaningful representation. One such instance includes unit PRO12, where the text is about a regionally famous festival (Uruka, the festive eve of Assam's *Magh Bihu*), which is an identifiable cultural feature to the learners of the region.

Table 6: *Distribution of Unit-wise Scores for Prose Texts Indicators*

<i>Textbook</i>	<i>Unit ID</i>	<i>PR1</i>	<i>PR2</i>	<i>PR3</i>	<i>PR4</i>
A	PRO1	0	0	NA	1
	PRO2	0	NA	NA	1
	PRO3	0	0	NA	0
	PRO4	0	NA	0	0
	PRO5	1	NA	NA	1
	PRO6	0	0	NA	0
	PRO7	0	NA	NA	0
	PRO8	0	0	0	0
	PRO9	0	NA	NA	0
	PRO10	0	0	0	0
B	PRO11	1	NA	NA	0
	PRO12	3	1	NA	0
	PRO13	0	NA	NA	0
	PRO14	1	0	NA	0
	PRO15	0	0	0	0
	PRO16	3	0	0	0
	PRO17	1	0	NA	0
	PRO18	0	NA	NA	0
	PRO19	1	0	NA	0
C	PRO20	3	1	NA	1
	PRO21	2	0	NA	0
	PRO22	2	0	NA	1
	PRO23	1	1	0	0
	PRO24	0	NA	NA	0
	PRO25	0	NA	0	0
	PRO26	1	1	NA	0
	PRO27	2	NA	NA	0

Authentic multilingual interaction which included code-switching and

code-mixing (PR2) was also extremely limited, appearing only in a few texts (PRO12, PRO20, PRO23 and PRO26). Examples of such dialogues are:

- “Are you scared, *Baidew*?” (PRO20)
- “Ok, *Naren Kai!*” (PRO20)
- “The Panchayat raises a little money from taxes on vehicles, river *ghats*, *bazaars* and *beels*, etc.” (PRO23)

Many entries were marked “NA” for PR2 and PR3 because these indicators applied only to prose texts containing dialogue or activities requiring learner responses. Opportunities for learners to retell or respond in their home languages (PR3) were generally not conceptually applicable and, where relevant, were absent. Explicit valuing of linguistic and cultural diversity (PR4) was also largely missing, with only a few texts reflecting neutral acknowledgement.

Table 7: *Percentage Scores and Inclusivity Levels for Prose Texts Indicators*

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Maximum Possible Score</i>	<i>Ob-tained Score</i>	<i>% of Maximum Score</i>	<i>Inclusi-vity Level</i>
PR1—Cultural/Linguistic Representation	81	22	27.16%	Low
PR2—Authentic Multilingual Interaction	48*	4	8.33%	Very Low
PR3—Opportunities to Retell in Home Language	24*	0	0.00%	Very Low
PR4—Valuation of Language & Cultural Diversity	81	5	6.17%	Very Low

*NA-coded units were excluded from maximum score calculation

To provide clarity, unit scores were converted into percentage values, presented in Table 7, excluding NA cases to avoid penalising texts for inapplicable features. The results indicate low cultural and linguistic representation (PR1 = 27.16%) and very low responsiveness for authentic multilingual interaction (PR2 = 8.33%), multilingual retelling opportunities (PR3 = 0%), and explicit valuation of linguistic diversity (PR4 = 6.17%). Overall, while isolated cultural references appear, systematic attention to multilingual realities is largely absent.

Analysis of Teacher Guidelines

The unit-wise analysis of teacher guidelines, illustrated in Table 8, reveals minimal opportunities for leveraging learners' linguistic diversity across the three textbooks. Textbook A shows a complete absence of guidance, with all units scoring 0 across indicators (T1-T6), indicating no support for culturally or linguistically responsive teaching. Textbook B provides limited responsiveness in two units (TG9 and TG10), suggesting strategies such as offering mother-tongue equivalents for idioms or selected lexical items. However, these are isolated recommendations

Table 8: *Distribution of Unit-wise Scores for Teacher Guidelines Indicators*

<i>Textbook</i>	<i>Unit ID</i>	<i>T1</i>	<i>T2</i>	<i>T3</i>	<i>T4</i>	<i>T5</i>	<i>T6</i>
A	TG1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG2	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG3	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG4	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG5	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG6	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG7	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG8	0	0	0	0	0	0
B	TG9	0	2	2	2	0	0
	TG10	1	2	2	1	0	0
	TG11	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG12	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG13	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG14	0	0	0	0	0	0
C	TG15	0	0	2	2	0	0
	TG16	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG17	0	0	0	0	0	1
	TG18	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG19	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG20	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG21	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TG22	0	0	0	0	0	0

rather than part of a systematic approach, as all other units scored 0. Textbook C shows a similar pattern, with occasional acknowledgment of linguistic support in a few units (e.g., TG15, TG17) but generally no reference to multilingual learners.

To provide an overall picture, unit scores were converted into percentage values, as presented in Table 9. All indicators fall within the “very low” responsiveness band, including orientation to linguistic diversity (1.52%), multilingual support (6.06%), translanguaging guidance (9.09%), familiar-language scaffolding (7.58%), inclusive classroom environment (0%), and differentiated instruction (1.52%). These results reinforce earlier findings, indicating minimal and fragmented guidance for linguistically responsive pedagogy across the textbooks.

Table 9: *Percentage Scores and Inclusivity Levels for Teacher Guidelines Indicators*

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Maximum Possible Score</i>	<i>Obtained Score</i>	<i>% of Maximum Score</i>	<i>Inclusivity Level</i>
T1—Positive Attitude Toward Linguistic Diversity	66	1	1.52%	Very Low
T2—Multilingual Support Strategies	66	4	6.06%	Very Low
T3—Translanguaging Guidance	66	6	9.09%	Very Low
T4—Home or Familiar Language Scaffolding	66	5	7.58%	Very Low
T5—Inclusive Classroom Environment	66	0	0.00%	Very Low
T6—Differentiated Instruction	66	1	1.52%	Very Low

Classrooms as Spaces for Pedagogical Innovation

The findings indicate that the selected textbooks show consistently low to very low levels of linguistic and cultural responsiveness across reading activities, prose texts, poetry texts, and teacher guidelines. Overall, they reflect a largely English-only orientation, with limited acknowledgement of learners’ multilingual repertoires or socio-linguistic contexts. This suggests that textbook design continues to follow traditional monolingual assumptions, despite the inherently multilingual nature of Indian classrooms. Such patterns echo earlier research highlighting the persistence of conventional, English-dominant pedagogies in school

materials (Mohanty, 2019), despite growing pedagogical recognition that multilingualism can support comprehension, participation and learner identity (Cummins, 2000; García & Wei, 2014).

However, these findings may also be viewed as signalling important spaces for pedagogical innovation rather than simply as a limitation. The gap between textbook design and learners' lived linguistic realities highlights opportunities for teachers to reinterpret, extend, and creatively adapt textbook content. This is particularly relevant in the present policy frameworks. Both NEP 2020 and NCFSE 2023 explicitly position multilingualism as a cognitive resource and advocate for classroom practices that value linguistic diversity, contextualised learning, and learner-centred approaches. The fact that textbooks have not yet fully embodied these principles underscores the continuing importance of teacher agency.

The findings not only reveal what textbooks do not yet provide, but also foreground the innovative potential of classroom practice. Teachers may still draw on learners' languages for comprehension, enable bi/multilingual meaning-making, create collaborative multilingual interactions, and contextualise texts culturally, even when textbooks remain structurally traditional and explicit instructions are not provided. For instance, comprehension questions and reading responses can be meaningfully expanded to allow learners to discuss, summarise, or negotiate meaning in their home language before responding in English. Similarly, peer collaboration activities can be informally structured to encourage learners from the same language group to interact and support each other through explanation, negotiation and shared interpretation.

Therefore, while the textbooks themselves do not sufficiently embed linguistic and cultural responsiveness, they do not entirely foreclose its possibility. Much depends on how teachers interpret, extend, and humanise textbook content in multilingual classrooms. Thus, the findings not only highlight limitations of material design but also draw attention to the central role of teacher agency, professional skills, and institutional support in realising linguistically responsive pedagogy in practice.

Conclusion

Overall, the study reinforces the view that while Indian classrooms are inherently multilingual and the National Policy clearly endorses

linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogy, textbook design has not yet fully caught up with this shift. The findings suggest that the present materials continue to reflect conventional, English dominant orientations, offering limited scaffolding for learners' diverse linguistic realities. At the same time, this gap highlights a productive space for innovation, where teacher mediation becomes central in reimagining how English can be taught in culturally grounded and linguistically supportive ways. There is an urgent need for comprehensive textbook revision which will help support teachers in navigating multilingual classrooms. Reorienting these materials to include explicit multilingual scaffolding will directly empower teachers. Without this necessary support, teachers are forced to navigate the multilingual complexities of classrooms on their own, severely limiting their capacity to execute innovative and inclusive pedagogy.

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