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Cultural Rootedness and Sustainability in English Language Teaching:  
Exploring the linkage with curriculum and textbooks in the Context of National Education Policy, 2020

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#### **Abstract**

*The National Education Policy, 2020, and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2023, emphasize the significance of nurturing learners who are rooted in India's cultural ethos while being committed to sustainable living and global well-being. The growing concern for sustainability has prompted the education system to rethink the purpose and practice of language teaching. In line with this, English language teaching in India is being considered not just a tool for communication but also as a medium to cultivate ecological consciousness, cultural rootedness, and sustainable living. The paper tries to explore how curriculum and textbooks of English as a language subject foster sustainability awareness at the middle school level. The paper will also build understanding of the integration of folk culture, local narratives, and environmental themes in English language textbooks and classroom practices, and how these various elements help connect global environmental issues with local experiences. The findings aim to provide actionable insights for policymakers, curriculum developers, and educators about constructive pedagogical strategies that align language education with the goals of sustainable development and cultural preservation as envisaged in NEP 2020 and NCFSE 2023.*

**Key-words:** *Value Education; Cultural Rootedness; Sustainability; NEP, 2020; English Textbook etc*

#### **Introduction**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasises developing 'among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian....and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen.' India is also implementing policies and provisions to achieve its sustainable development goals, which can be accomplished by sensitizing students and teachers to environmental concerns and sustainability in schools through in-class and out-of-class activities. In tune with the recommendation of NEP, the 2023 National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 has also stressed the need for environmental awareness among students. NCFSE, 2023, has recommended that "In the Indian context, an awareness of, and sensitivity to, India's local/traditional approaches towards respecting and conserving nature and the environment, and some of the major practices that resulted

from these approaches, must be harnessed, and included in any holistic development of ESD."

Worldwide Language education, particularly English Language Teaching (ELT), which was conventionally perceived as a tool for communication and globalisation, is now progressively acknowledged as a platform for fostering the value of ecological consciousness, developing 21st-century skills, and sustainable living (Cates, 2013; Stibbe, 2015).

In India, researchers have also taken an interest in researching the importance of English language Teaching (ELT) for promoting sustainable practices, primarily through cultural rootedness in pedagogical considerations. They have highlighted that the integration of environmental topics in the lessons of the English language provides scope to the students to connect both global concerns with realities in the local context, such as waste management, deforestation, and water issues. (Sinha & Jain, 2021; Ghosh, 2020). Towards making

environmental education more robust and meaningful, the use of folk literature, local narratives, and community issues is very beneficial when it comes to pedagogical considerations (Nair, 2019). Regarding language strategies in ELT classrooms in India, Kumar (2022) notes that bilingual strategies, incorporating both English and the local language, are particularly effective in enhancing clarity, sensitization, and communication about environmental issues. About pedagogical considerations in the ELT classroom, a study by Kumar and Srikanta (2021) reveals that the storytelling technique has a significant influence in engaging students with environmental concerns, while simultaneously enhancing language proficiency and developing students' environmental empathy.

Recently, new textbooks have also been developed for the school level in line with the recommendations of the NEP 2020, NCF-FS 2022, and NCF-SE 2023, which emphasize the value of cultural rootedness and sustainability. In this context, the paper aims to study how curriculum, content, and pedagogical practices in English Language teaching enable the fostering of awareness of cultural rootedness and sustainability at the middle school level.

### Literature Review

Around the world, there is growing concern for attaining Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, at both national and international levels, efforts are made in every sector to promote environmental awareness and sustainability. (UNESCO, 2020). English Language Teaching has enormous potential to instill qualities in future generations that can address global concerns, particularly ecological problems. It embraces a border perspective, not only integrating the environmental issues but also social and economic concerns in language learning. ELT sensitizes learners to think beyond their immediate communities, helping them understand the importance of interconnectedness and address global challenges (Yu et al, 2024) and contribute to sustainability for a better world (Toppo & Rahman, 2021).

Various innovative approaches, such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Project-Based Learning, and Task-based Learning, have been in practice around the world for inculcating the value of sustainability in ELT (Pellizzoni & Biagini, 2020). These are considered very effective frameworks in the field of ELT. It has a larger potential to promote experiential learning by linking content related to the environment with language competencies.

Internationally, the CLIL approach in ELT classes focuses on thematic learning related to energy conservation, climate change, disaster, and the protection of the environment. Ali (2019) points out that through CLIL, learners get the scope to read realistic environmental texts, do reflection in writing, and get the opportunity for discussion on global and local ecological concerns, which helps them to acquire disciplinary knowledge and linguistic competence. TBL and PBL approaches are also found to be very useful in engaging learners in everyday life communication, such as helping to write petitions about local environmental problems, conducting surveys on sustainable living, or organizing campaigns related to environmental protection in the English language (Nazarenko, 2020).

Akharraz (2021) discussed that the PBL approach is mainly aimed at raising awareness among learners about the environment. Through various activities, learners are sensitized to the need for the interdependence of living organisms and also gain an understanding of sustainable living, which helps them develop a personal connection with nature. Brass et al. (2023) highlighted that through the PBL approach, learners become acquainted with the value of collaboration, develop effective interpersonal communication, and decision-making skills. The skills of self-reflection and self-assessment are also developed as they work in groups, collaborate, and supervise and assess their work.

Worldwide, these approaches seemed to be very much outcome-oriented and promote the value of teamwork, motivation to engage with environmental concerns, and overall, ecological empathy proactively. Learners can enhance their language competency while also acquiring valuable life skills that will advantage them in the long run to excel as better humans and empower them to address ecological challenges through effective communication in a world that is vastly interconnected (Baran et al., 2021; Yusuf, 2022).

In the Indian context, such pedagogical concerns and integration are still evolving, and there is a possibility of promising outcomes. A study by Ghosh (2020) highlights that the project-based method used in English lessons on "Green School Weeks" motivated learners to use English in authentic contexts while focusing on environmental actions, such as poster making and slogan writing related to cleanliness drives. Nair (2019) also discussed storytelling as a culturally resonant method for developing environmental awareness and the importance of sustainable development in rural schools.

However, there are still significant challenges that persist in the Indian education system. Despite continuous reform in the education system, challenges persist, including an exam-oriented structure, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate teacher capacity building, which hinder the adoption of experiential or participatory pedagogy (Sinha & Jain, 2021). As teachers have limited knowledge, even lack of exposure with regard to ESD frameworks, they are more dependent on textbook-based instructions that addresses environment related topics superficially.

Around the world, technology is proactively used as a pedagogy enabler not only to reach a large spectrum of learners, particularly in educating sustainability, but also to promote effective communication with regard to environmental concerns vigorously (McDougald, 2018). Innovative methods such as digital storytelling and projects related to video production also enhance critical reflection (Ali, 2019). In India, technology has gradually entered classroom teaching in delivering environmental issues through English language teaching, as short films and interactive quizzes are used by teachers in classrooms (Ghosh, 2020). National Education Policy, 2020 has also emphasized the use of technology in English Language Teaching, and NCERT's digital initiatives also support the NEP's vision of reaching a large gamut of learners through technology. However, there are larger challenges as the digital divide remains between schools in urban and rural areas, and also teachers get rare or limited digital training in delivering the instructions (Kumar, 2023).

### Methodology

In this study a qualitative descript design is adopted towards exploring environmental concerns in the English textbook published by NCERT. Both content analysis and ecocritical textual analysis is used towards examining the English textbook for class 6-8. The theme that are used for analysis of chapters are: (i) the nature of environmental concerns (ii) the aspect of human–nature relationships; and (iii) the ethical characteristics of sustainability within the texts.

As a part of sampling procedure, the prose, poetry and supplementary readings in these three textbooks are taken as the universe of analysis. Words, sentences and narrations in the three new textbooks are units of analysis in this paper. The paper intends to examine how the Value of cultural rootedness and sustainability are integrated into the English curriculum at the middle stage. Hence, the attempt was made to identify the chapters, which have the components of cultural rootedness and sustainability. It was found that the chapters: *Hamara Bharat – Incredible India!* (Class 6), *Neem Baba* (Class 6), *Spices That Heal Us* (Class 6), *The Cherry Tree* (Class 8), *Waiting for the Rain* (Class 8), and *Harvest Hymn* (Class 8)

A coding categories are also developed and based on literature related to environmental education and ecocriticism, a coding framework is suggested (Glottfelty, 1996;Krippendorff, 2018). Categories are : (i)Nature as livelihood/resource, (ii) Environmental degradation and crisis, (iii) Conservation and sustainability practices and (iv) Indigenous ecological knowledge. Based on these coding categories, content analysis is undertaken and distribution of environmental themes are identified across texts. Towards comparing patterns in various textbooks across grades, thematic clustering is used in the study.

After identification of themes, analysis of texts is done critically through an ecocritical lens to examine agency attributed to nature, representation of environmental ethics, and contemporary ecological issues. Focus has been provided on the aspect of language use, narrative voice, and ethical positioning of themes and characters in relation to the environment. We looked thoroughly into the selected chapters from class 6 and 8. The study examines text and pedagogies and learning activities used.

## Results and Discussions

The new textbook of English ‘Poorvi’ has been introduced by National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) for Classes 6, 7, and 8. It is well aligned with the vision of National Education Policy 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework 2023. These textbooks reflect a significant curricular transformation which was the need of the time. The introduction of new policy demanded for this transformation and these books reflect the elements rooted in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and sustainability, which has been highlighted by NEP 2020. The texts and sentences in the book ‘Poorvi’ is analysed as on the view of: (i) the nature of environmental concerns (ii) the aspect of human–nature relationships; and (iii) the ethical characteristics of sustainability within the texts.

The focus of the study is to demonstrate that the English language can also be used as a vehicle for cultural affirmation and ecological consciousness. The paper argues that sustainability in these textbooks is not presented as abstract environmental discourse but is embedded within our cultural narratives.

In India, historically, English language education has relied heavily on Western literary contexts. It often tends to distance learners from their lived experiences. The new *Poorvi* textbooks represent a deliberate shift toward culturally responsive and environmentally conscious pedagogy. The emphasis of the policy on “rootedness in Indian ethos” and “environmental awareness” is deliberately translated into selection of the text, its thematic organization, and designing of the activities.

### Class 6 English Textbook ‘Poorvi’

In the English Textbook of ‘Poorvi Class 6’ English textbook, Chapter 1: Hamara Bharat – Incredible India! (Class 6), diversity of India has been deeply emphasised through the lines mentioned below: “India is a land of many languages, festivals, and traditions.” “From the mountains in the north to the seas in the south, every region has its own story.” The chapter introduces students to India’s geographical and cultural diversity. It provides a glimpse across different Indian states, traditions, clothing styles, food habits, and festivals. It is depicted as a source of pride rather than difference or distinction.

The English language describes Indian diversity along with a decolonial shift. It does not import foreign narratives, but enables learners to articulate their own cultural landscape in English. Cultural rootedness here is not nostalgic but inclusive and fosters national integration.

Similarly, Chapter ‘Neem Baba (Unit: Nurturing Nature), also portay both sustainability through revealing human-nature connection and also imply the cultural rootedness of India. In this chapter, the neem tree is personified as a protector and healer. The story describes how villagers gather under its shade and use its leaves for medicinal purposes when the reader goes through the lines in the chapter-

“*The neem tree stood tall in the courtyard, offering shade and healing.*” Grandmother would say, “*Neem is our village doctor.*”

This chapter integrates sustainability through indigenous ecological knowledge. The neem tree is perceived as a cultural as well as an ecological symbol. Environmental conservation is presented as embedded in traditional life. The relationship between humans, plants, and community has been clearly depicted. It denotes sustainability.

The chapter ‘*Spices That Heal Us*’ also explores traditional home remedies. It tells us about the medicinal value of various spices available in our kitchen. The lines “Turmeric, ginger, and pepper are found in every kitchen” and “These spices do more than add flavour; they help us stay healthy” emphasises not only their value-added presence in the Indian society and culture in terms of their use in day-to-day life but also cultural life of Indians across the regions.

Ayurvedic and household practices have been validated. It also acknowledges traditional Indian knowledge systems. Sustainable living practices rooted in biodiversity and natural resources denotes sustainability. The chapter is very much loud in saying to the readers that English as a subject is more of a language of indigenous wisdom rather than cultural displacement.

### Cultural and Environmental Continuity in Class 7

In class 7 English textbook *Poorvi*, the integration of value of cultural rootedness and sustainability can be seen in the chapter “*North, South, East, West*”, the narrative of India’s diverse regions are described in detail to the students. The chapter not only have description of geographical spaces; it also provides a rich cultural narrative of India where tradition, livelihood and ecological spirit and consciousness are very much mingled, showing the real cultural melting of India. For example, when the readers go through the line “*In the North, the snow-covered mountains shine under the bright sun, and people wrap themselves in warm woollens.*” “*In the South, temples stand tall, and coconut trees sway in the sea breeze.*” there is wide scope of discovering geographical locations and also exploring everyday life practices. These descriptions imply culture which include art, Artecrafts food, dress style and belief system, also evolve in relation to environmental factors. The use of the term ‘Warm Woollens’ and ‘*snow-covered mountains*’ depict the interrelationship between culture-ecology relationship. Similarly, the depiction of text ‘*Temple Stand tall*’ and ‘*coconut trees sway in the sea breeze*’ linking southern states indicate that cultural practices of India are historically coexisted with nature since time immemorial and spiritual architecture are very much aligned with coastal ecology. By depicting the religious and architectural image of states of diverse locations such as south, north, east and west, the chapter not only provide vivid picture of our heritage but also nurture the respect of regional diversity.

The text in the chapter also familiarises the reader an obvious sustainability dimension where it is mentioned as:

*“In the West, deserts stretch far and wide, teaching people to value every drop of water.”*

*In this text, there is clear articulation of environmental awareness. When the reader will emphasise on the phrase “Every drop of water”, sense of ecological ethics and resource consciousness get clearly reflected.* The space of desert also signifies not as an emptiness rather as a teacher of conserving water.

Similarly, when the readers are given the scope to go through the line, “*In the East, rivers flow through green fields, and festivals fill the air with music and colour*”, they are exposed to sense cultural celebrations along with ecological richness. The text ‘Rivers’ and ‘green field’ imply agriculture-based livelihood and ecological balance and on the other hand, ‘festival’ signify celebration by the community. This also indicates that festivals are way of life and are very much related with agriculture reflecting that nature and culture are interlinked and sustaining.

Overall, the chapter presents India not as geographical territory but as a ecologically and culturally unified space. Each region of the country is poised as a dignified place and equally emphasised, signifying unity in diversity. Through depiction of cultural symbols such as temples, clothing, festivals, agriculture, and everyday practices, students are taught the value of cultural rootedness. Students were given exposure to the value of Sustainability by incorporation of texts such as importance of waters through rivers and deserts, environmental conditions, and natures’ voice. In this way, *Poorvi* in class 7, has the potent towards shaping culturally grounded and environmentally responsible

learners, with an aim of achieving broader goals of national integration and sustainable living.

### **Sustainability in Class 8 *Poorvi***

The chapter on *Cherry Tree* (Unit: Environment) fosters ecological patience and responsibility. Sustainability is represented as nurturing rather than exploitation. When the reader goes through the line “The little tree struggled through winter and heat.” “He watered it every day and watched it grow”, the narrative traces the slow growth of a cherry tree planted by a child. It depicts care, patience, and resilience.

Here, the tree is represented as a metaphor for sustainable growth. Unlike rapid industrial growth, the tree grows organically with care.

Similarly, in the chapter ‘*Waiting for the Rain*’, the text “The earth was cracked and dry”, “All eyes turned to the sky, waiting for clouds”, the text portrays the anxiety of farmers awaiting monsoon rainfall. This chapter introduces climate vulnerability. Environmental dependence is not abstract but emotional. Students empathize with agrarian communities. Sustainability is framed as resilience and ecological balance. The phrase “*All eyes turned to the sky, waiting for clouds.*” — symbolises a shared cultural experience. ‘Waiting for the rain’ is not an individual waiting for it rather a collective wait. It depicts how the advent of monsoon is ceremonial in Indian way of life and clearly signal the intermingling of traditional ecological knowledge and a close connection between humans and nature.

The chapter ‘*Harvest Hymn*’ portrays a deep connection between human and nature and the harvesting is depicted not as economic production, rather as a community cultural celebration. Lines describing “Now we are ready to reap the grain”, “Let us thank the earth for her bounty” highlight that the harvest festival represents gratitude toward nature. These rituals, not mark as a sign of economic abundance and are mostly associated with festivals, thanksgiving, and community sharing. The poem has larger potential towards encouraging learners to value cultural rootedness and gratitude towards the environment.

### **Conclusion**

The English textbooks *Poorvi* for Classes 6–8 represent a significant curricular shift toward culturally rooted and ecologically conscious English education. NCERT moves beyond superficial environmental awareness, by embedding sustainability within cultural narratives. This indicates a move toward value-based ecological literacy rooted in Indian ethos.

English becomes a medium of cultural confidence and sustainable citizenship from being merely a global language. The stories of neem trees, monsoon rains, harvest celebrations, and healing spices, expose students to sustainability as part of their cultural heritage.

*Poorvi* assures English as an expression of Indian language rather than just the textbooks dominated by Western narratives, Sustainability is not introduced as technical jargon but as lived practice and it is subtly shown through trees, rain, spices, and harvest. However, urban sustainability issues such as pollution, waste management, and climate change activism are less explicitly discussed. Towards deeper understanding of

cultural rootedness and sustainable practices, students need also be taken on field trip to field site relevant to the content. They must be shown documentary showcasing sustainable livelihood and cultural practices on the related theme. Teacher may also try to engage students to do project work collaboratively on such theme which will provide experiential learning to them.

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