

Exploring the Role of Illustrations in Secondary-Level English Textbooks under Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE)

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ABSTRACT

Textbooks are not only tools for delivering content but also visual mediums that influence how students engage with and understand academic material. This study explores the perceptions of B.Ed. student teachers regarding the role and effectiveness of illustrations in Class IX and X English textbooks prescribed by the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE). A total of 60 pre-service teachers were purposively selected as the sample for the study. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire containing both close-ended questions and open-ended questions focused on various aspects of textbook illustrations, including their relevance, cultural representation, environmental awareness, visual appeal, and inclusivity. The responses were analysed using frequency and percentage. The findings reveal that while illustrations are present in most chapters and generally considered helpful for comprehension and engagement, concerns remain regarding the extent to which they reflect local culture, avoid stereotypes, and effectively support classroom learning. The study underscores the importance of thoughtful visual design in textbooks to ensure both pedagogical value and cultural responsiveness.

Keywords: English Textbooks, Illustrations, Student Teacher Perceptions, Cultural Representation, Environmental Awareness, MBOSE

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks play a pivotal role in the teaching-learning process by providing students with structured content and foundational knowledge. Beyond textual information, textbooks also convey important social, cultural, moral, and human values that shape students' attitudes and perspectives. Among the various components of a textbook, illustrations hold particular significance as visual elements that enhance comprehension, engage interest, and reinforce learning through imagery.

Illustrations in textbooks can serve as powerful pedagogical tools. They help bridge abstract ideas with real-life contexts, making learning more relatable and accessible. Through images, students not only visualize concepts but also engage with representations of culture, tradition, environment, and social roles. Illustrations also influence the perception of gender roles, regional identity, and inclusivity—factors that contribute to the socialization of learners and their understanding of the world.

Historically, concerns about textbook quality have been raised by several commissions. The Secondary Education Commission (1952) criticized the narrow and theoretical nature of school content, pointing out the inadequacy of textbooks in delivering meaningful education. The Kothari Commission (1964–66) further emphasized the importance of high-quality, contextually relevant textbooks and introduced the idea of setting national standards for textbook production. However, the idea of a common national textbook has limitations, particularly when visual content such as illustrations must reflect diverse cultural and regional experiences to be effective.

Contemporary curriculum frameworks, such as the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, stress the importance of contextualizing content in students' lived experiences. NCF 2005 advocates for child-centred,

experiential learning that connects classroom knowledge to life outside school. It emphasizes creativity, cultural awareness, environmental sensitivity, and the inclusion of social concerns—all of which can be effectively communicated through illustrations.

The latest National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 further reinforces these views by highlighting the "Context Principle," which stresses the importance of grounding textbook content in students' local and cultural environments, especially during the Foundational and Preparatory Stages. It recommends moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar, enabling comfort while sparking curiosity. NCFSE 2023 also recognises that the visual and design aesthetics of textbooks—such as font size, colour, and inclusive illustrations—play a key role in student engagement. It advocates for the inclusion of local artists, teachers, and technical experts in the textbook development process to ensure contextual accuracy, inclusivity, and ageappropriateness. Moreover, it emphasizes that environmental education should adopt a social-ecological perspective and promote sustained engagement with nature, drawing on local traditions, sustainability practices, and community knowledge.

A well-designed textbook is expected not only to use accurate language and real-life examples but also to include thoughtfully created illustrations that support cognitive development, reflect cultural relevance, and promote inclusive values. In this context, evaluating how illustrations are used in English textbooks—particularly those used in Class IX and X under the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE)—becomes essential to understanding their role in student learning and social development.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Birdsell (2017) emphasizes the significant yet underexplored role that images play in ELT textbooks, particularly in terms of their pedagogical connection to the accompanying text. While the utility of visual aids in language classrooms is widely acknowledged, research indicates a gap in understanding how these visuals can be effectively integrated to enhance language learning. Scholars such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Forceville (1996) have laid the theoretical foundation by exploring metaphors not only in language but also in visual forms. Building on this, Birdsell highlights the need to investigate *visual metaphors*—images that metaphorically represent abstract concepts—as tools for fostering student engagement, social awareness, and higher-order thinking. Studies on multimodal and pictorial metaphors suggest that these visuals can promote creative and critical thinking, offering learners opportunities to interpret, question, and interact with content in deeper, more meaningful ways.

Dudhal (2022), in her study "*Exploring the Art of Illustration and Its Advantages in Visual Communication*," highlights the evolving nature of illustration from traditional book imagery to a dynamic blend of hand-drawn and digital media forms. She emphasizes that illustration art significantly contributes to visual communication by making content more vivid, engaging, and effective. The study underlines the role of illustrations in enhancing thematic clarity, capturing audience interest, and amplifying the impact of the message conveyed. This aligns with the growing recognition of illustration as a vital tool in educational and design contexts.

Judy Lavender Nicholas's study highlights the importance of using illustrations in early reading instruction to support comprehension and vocabulary development. In a visually driven world, children benefit from multimodal learning that combines text with images. Drawing on Arizpe and Styles (2003) and Paivio's Dual Coding Theory, the study shows that students who viewed illustrations while listening to stories demonstrated better comprehension and greater vocabulary gains than those who did not. These findings support the integration of visual elements into reading programs for emergent readers.

Kasmaienezhadford and Pourrajab (2015), in their study published in *Multi Disciplinary Edu Global Quest (Quarterly)*, highlight the important role of images in textbooks in enhancing students' creativity. They argue that pictures often engage students before the text does, stimulating imagination and supporting creative thinking. The study emphasizes that the educational value of images depends on their relevance and design, urging textbook designers to use visuals purposefully. Their findings suggest that well-integrated images can strengthen the learning process, while poorly chosen ones may limit educational impact. This research offers valuable insights for improving textbook design to better support creativity and learning.

Petrová, Vašíková, and Žáková (2025), in their qualitative study published in the *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, examine how preschool children perceive and use illustrations in books. Through semistructured interviews with 141 children aged 5–6, the study found that illustrations are key in sustaining

interest, guiding navigation through the text, and supporting comprehension. Children view images as essential for engaging with books independently, often using them to interpret stories without adult assistance. The findings emphasize that illustrations not only enhance reading motivation but also promote early reading autonomy, highlighting their integral role in early childhood literacy development.

Objective of the Study

To examine the perceptions of student teachers regarding various aspects of illustrations—such as relevance, cultural representation, environmental awareness, visual appeal, and inclusivity—in Class IX and X English textbooks under the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE).

Research Question

What are the perceptions of student teachers on the relevance, cultural representation, environmental awareness, visual appeal, and inclusivity of illustrations in Class IX and X English textbooks under MBOSE?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive survey method to explore student teachers' perceptions of illustrations in English textbooks prescribed for Class IX and X under the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE). The population for the study includes all student teachers undergoing pre-service teacher training in the Ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya. A purposive sample of 60 B.Ed. student teachers was selected, all of whom have opted for English as one of their method subjects.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of both open and close-ended questions focused on various aspects of textbook illustrations, including their relevance, cultural representation, environmental awareness, visual appeal, and inclusivity. The reliability of the tool was established using the test-retest method, and validity was ensured through expert validation from professionals in the field of English education and textbook studies.

Secondary data were obtained from relevant books, academic journals, curriculum frameworks, and educational policy documents, accessed through both online and offline sources. For data analysis, frequency and percentage were used to interpret the quantitative responses, while descriptive interpretation was applied to summarize findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Quantitative Data:

Table 1: Responses on Illustrations in Class IX and X English Textbooks under MBOSE with Reference to Cultural Representation and Environmental Awareness

Sl no	Question	Responses (N= 60), f-frequency											
		Class IX						Class X					
		Yes		No		Unsure		Yes		No		Unsure	
		f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Do the English textbooks of Class IX and X under MBOSE contain illustrations in most chapters?	50	83.3%	6	10%	4	6.6%	51	85%	5	8.3%	4	6.6%

2	Are the illustrations relevant to the themes or topics of the lessons?	59	98.3%	1	1.6%	0	0	57	95%	3	5%	0	0
3	Do the illustrations help students understand the text better?	60	100%	0	0	0	0	60	100%	0	0	0	0
4	Are the illustrations visually appealing and engaging for students?	57	95%	0	0	3	5%	59	98.3%	1	1.6%	0	0
5	Do the illustrations reflect the local culture and traditions of Meghalaya?	0	0	59	98.3%	1	1.6%	0	0	58	96.6%	2	3.3%
6	Do the illustrations help raise awareness about environmental issues?	27	45%	5	8.3%	18	30%	24	40%	8	13.3%	18	30%
7	Are the illustrations age-appropriate for Class IX and X students?	60	100%	0	0	0	0	58	96.6%	1	1.6%	1	1.6%
8	Do you think the illustrations represent diversity in terms of gender, culture, and region fairly?	55	91.6%	2	3.3%	3	5%	56	93.3%	0	0	4	6.6%
9	Are the illustrations free from stereotypes or biased depictions?	57	95%	1	1.6%	2	3.3%	54	90%	2	3.3%	4	6.6%

10	Do you think the illustrations in the English textbooks contribute to more effective learning in the classroom?	59	98.3%	0	0	1	1.6%	60	100%	0	0	0	0
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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Quantitative Data:

Table 1: Responses on Illustrations in Class IX and X English Textbooks under MBOSE from the Perspectives of Cultural Representation and Environmental Awareness.

The data collected from 60 B.Ed. student teachers indicates varied perceptions regarding the use of illustrations in Class IX and X English textbooks under the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE). A majority of respondents reported that illustrations are included in most chapters (83.3% for Class IX and 85% for Class X). Most participants considered the illustrations to be relevant to the themes of the lessons (98.3% for Class IX and 95% for Class X), and all respondents stated that the illustrations support comprehension (100% for both classes). Regarding visual appeal, a high percentage responded positively (95% for Class IX and 98.3% for Class X).

However, when asked about the reflection of local culture and traditions of Meghalaya in the illustrations, the majority responded in the negative (98.3% for Class IX and 96.6% for Class X). Views on whether the illustrations raise awareness about environmental issues were more varied, with 45% of respondents answering "Yes" for Class IX and 40% for Class X, while a notable proportion selected "Unsure" (30% for both classes).

Responses on age-appropriateness were largely affirmative (100% for Class IX and 96.6% for Class X). Regarding representation, most respondents indicated that the illustrations fairly depict diversity in terms of gender, culture, and region (91.6% for Class IX and 93.3% for Class X), and were perceived by many to be free from stereotypes or biased depictions (95% and 90%). On the question of whether illustrations contribute to more effective learning, responses were largely positive (98.3% for Class IX and 100% for Class X).

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Reflection of Environmental Aspects of Meghalaya through Illustrations in English Textbooks of Class IX and X under MBOSE

The majority of respondents observed that the English textbooks include illustrations that indirectly reflect certain environmental elements of Meghalaya. While direct environmental themes are limited, some illustrations—such as those depicting landscapes, natural surroundings, and rural life—hint at the region’s geographical features, vegetation, and natural beauty. Respondents noted that when such illustrations are present, they contribute to student engagement with environmental ideas by presenting familiar elements in a visually accessible manner. However, many also felt that illustrations could do more to highlight specific aspects of Meghalaya’s rich environmental resources, including its biodiversity, forests, and ecological concerns.

Reflection of Cultural Elements of Meghalaya through Illustrations in English Textbooks of Class IX and X under MBOSE

Most respondents observed that the English textbooks of Class IX and X under MBOSE offer very limited visual representation of Meghalaya’s cultural traditions and social life. Apart from the cover page, which features an image from a local festival showing people dressed in traditional attire of Meghalaya, there is no

illustrations within the chapters that depict the region's cultural identity. Illustrations related to tribal customs, local art forms, language diversity, or prominent cultural figures are largely absent. Respondents felt that this lack of cultural representation in the visuals makes it difficult for students to relate the content to their immediate socio-cultural context. Many suggested that a more deliberate inclusion of culturally rooted illustrations would enhance the textbooks' relevance and help students develop a stronger sense of identity and connection with their heritage.

Perceived Role of Illustrations in Raising Awareness about Cultural and Environmental Aspects

Respondents generally agreed that illustrations can play an important role in developing awareness of cultural and environmental aspects among students, particularly when they are relatable and regionally contextual. According to many participants, visually representing local heritage and surroundings through illustrations can create opportunities for learners to connect textbook content with their lived realities. While the current illustrations in the English textbooks offer some scope for this, the feedback suggests a need for greater emphasis on region-specific visuals to support student understanding of their own cultural identity and environmental surroundings. Overall, respondents viewed illustrations as a potentially powerful tool that, if thoughtfully designed, could enrich the learning experience by promoting awareness, appreciation, and responsibility among students regarding their cultural and ecological heritage.

CONCLUSION

Textbooks remain one of the most influential educational tools, shaping students' understanding of self, society, values, and culture. While much attention is given to the textual content, illustrations also play a significant role in reinforcing ideas, engaging learners, and reflecting the world around them. The way visual elements are presented in textbooks can influence how students perceive social realities, cultural identity, and environmental concerns.

As noted in the Position Papers of the National Focus Group on Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbooks (2006), the construction of knowledge in textbooks directly impacts students' attitudes toward life. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) also emphasizes the importance of relating educational content to the Indian context to make learning meaningful and relevant. In line with these principles, illustrations should ideally reflect the local culture, environment, and lived experiences of learners.

The analysis of Class IX and X English textbooks under the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) suggests that while the illustrations support comprehension and engagement, there is limited visual representation of the cultural and environmental heritage of Meghalaya. Enhancing the cultural and ecological relevance of illustrations could contribute significantly to students' connection with their own context, and foster greater awareness and appreciation for their surroundings.

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 further strengthens this perspective by placing the child's context at the core of the learning process, especially during the early stages. It emphasises that illustrations, along with textual content, should draw from local stories, art, nature, traditions, and practices to make learning more relatable, inclusive, and meaningful. The framework also advocates for interdisciplinary and socially rooted approaches to Environmental Education, encouraging students to see the interconnectedness of nature and society through visual and experiential learning. Moreover, NCFSE 2023 calls for greater involvement of local experts, designers, and teachers in the creation of textbooks to ensure that design, aesthetics, and content are sensitive to regional identity and diversity.

Aligning visual content with the broader goals of the National Curriculum Frameworks—both 2005 and 2023—would not only support inclusive and experiential learning but also promote a deeper understanding of local and national identity through the medium of English language education. Textbooks that integrate culturally relevant and environmentally conscious illustrations can thus become powerful tools for both academic development and the nurturing of informed, empathetic, and engaged citizens.

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Ethical Approval Statement:

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines, and ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review authority prior to data collection. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and their voluntary consent was obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents were strictly maintained throughout the study.