CHAPTER V
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS: PART II

This Chapter presents the data analysis for the following research methods and tools:

- Survey Questionnaire
- Focus Group Discussions
- Comparison with a ‘good school’ in each state
- Brief case studies from each state
- Curriculum & Textbook Analysis
- In-service training

5.1 SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

5.1.1 Introduction

The profile of teachers included in the survey in the two states is in Table 5.1 below. Two sets of teachers were invited in each state (district) in two separate meetings at the block level. These teachers belong to primary schools located near the 8 schools selected for the detailed study (classroom observations, student assessments etc.). The questionnaire may be seen at Annexure X.

Table 5.1: Profile of teachers included in the survey
(N=48 for Assam; 49 for Rajasthan. All figures below are percent of N)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Percentage teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Designation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Teacher</td>
<td>54.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Teacher</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time to reach school</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;30 min</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-60 min</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The profile of teachers surveyed in both states is largely similar. In Assam, the teachers were a little older, probably because teacher recruitments have not taken place for a long time. This is also reflected in the longer years of experience reported by teachers in Assam compared with Rajasthan. Teachers in Assam stay much closer to the school than those in Rajasthan as reflected in the distribution of travel time to the schools.

The analysis of the teachers’ survey is presented below under the following topics:

- Expectations of student learning
- Perceptions of reasons for low student reading and writing achievements
- Other factors that influence reading achievements
- Opinions on appropriate sequence of teaching different skills
5.1.2 Expectations of Student Learning

(i) When can all children learn to read and write?
96% teachers in Assam believe that all children can learn to read and write by the end of grade 2. Only 71% teachers in Rajasthan held a similar belief. Thus, teachers’ have higher expectations of the students in Assam compared with Rajasthan. The comparison is starker if we compare the percentage of teachers who strongly agree that all children can learn to read and write by grade 2. While 58.3% teachers in Assam held that belief strongly, only 22.4% teachers in Rajasthan were in complete agreement.

(ii) Ability to write independently
All writing tasks are copying and handwriting tasks. 61% of all teachers believe that students cannot be expected to draft or compose in writing by the end of grade 2. Teachers in both states had similar (low) expectations. 33% teachers were of the opinion that students could do some independent writing by end of grade 3. Another 25.8% felt that this was possible only in grade 4, while 20.7% felt that students could do some independent writing only in grade 5.

This shows that teachers have low expectations of children. Their beliefs get translated in to the nature of writing tasks set for children in grades 1 and 2, where the focus is entirely on copying and handwriting practice. This is also a reflection of the mechanistic nature of teaching of language. The one silver
lining—19% teachers in Assam felt that students of grades 1 and 2 can do some independent writing.

5.1.3 Reasons for Low Student Reading and Writing Achievements

Teachers were clear that students in their classrooms had low reading levels. All (100%) teachers agreed that there is great disparity in reading levels within the classrooms in which they teach. During classroom observations also, it was seen that teachers were clearly aware of the big differences in reading abilities between students in their classrooms. This was true even for those teachers who did not seem dedicated to teaching.

(i) Most important reasons for low reading achievements

In both states, ‘shortage of teachers’ and ‘lack of parental support’ emerged as the most important reasons, in the teachers’ perception for low student learning (Table 5.2 and 5.3 below). In Assam, while teacher shortage was identified as the most important reason, lack of support at home emerged as the second most important reason (47.9% teachers identified this as the second most reason). In Rajasthan, lack of home support was identified as the most important reason. 42.9% teachers identified inadequate number of teachers as the second most important reason for low student learning. Overall, teacher shortage and lack of parents’ support were the number one and two reasons for low student achievements. In addition, 16 teachers (Assam & Rajasthan) included ‘irregular attendance of students’ as another reason (under ‘Other’ option) for poor reading achievements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher shortage</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents do not support students at home</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Most important reason for students not able to read well in grades 1&2
Table 5.3: Most important reason for students not able to read well in grades 1&2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher shortage</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents do not support students at home</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, all teachers identified external constraints, viz. inadequate number of teachers and lack of parental support, as primary reasons for students’ low reading achievements. None of the academic reasons included as options in the questionnaire, e.g. teachers do not adopt good language teaching practices, non-availability of good reading materials, inadequate training for language teaching, textbook approach and sequencing etc. figured as important reasons in the teachers’ assessment as contributing to low language learning.

(ii) Most important reasons for students’ poor writing skills
In Assam, the most important reason (according to teachers) was the ‘inadequate time available for writing’, owing to overall low instructional time (43.8% teachers) followed by ‘lack of support at home’ (25%). In Rajasthan, the most important reason quoted by teachers for students’ poor writing skills was ‘lack of support at home’ (63.3%), followed by ‘teacher cannot attend to individual students’ (16.3%).

(iii) Which students do not learn to read and write well?
A majority of teachers chose the following options:
- Children whose parents are not aware/don’t help at home
- Children who are less intelligent
In Rajasthan, 7 teachers added another reason, viz. students who are irregular at school.

5.1.4 Other Factors That Influence Reading Achievements
(i) Low instructional time
This is an issue in both states. The time for language teaching is lower in Assam compared with Rajasthan. In some schools, an extra language period
has been included in the afternoon, after the Mid-day meal (MDM) break. The feedback from school visits was that this extra period is not held regularly as younger students (grades 1 and 2) do not remain attentive after MDM. 97.9% teachers in Assam and 67.3% teachers in Rajasthan felt that it is difficult to teach young children after MDM. In Assam, the school visits corroborate this since we found no classes were found to be being held after MDM for Ka sreni to grade 2. All teachers (99.5%) expressed strong support to the statement that language teaching should get the most instructional time compared with other subjects in early primary grades.

(ii) In-service training and regular academic support
Overall, teachers in Assam were more optimistic about the in-service training and academic support provided by cluster and block level resource persons. In Rajasthan, there was greater skepticism about the usefulness of training. Onsite academic support and academic discussions during monthly meetings are completely absent in Rajasthan. However, both in Assam and Rajasthan, there have not been any training programmes on language teaching-learning in early primary grades in the past 2 years.

(iii) Importance of preschool
There is greater belief among teachers in Assam about the positive impact of preschool education on students’ language development in early primary grades. 85.4% teachers in Assam felt preschool provided a strong foundation for language learning in later grades. The corresponding percentage was 59.2 in Rajasthan. The main reason for this difference is that there is a preschool class (Ka Sreni) included within the primary school. Unfortunately, there is no teacher for this class and these children are neglected. They remain idle most of the time or are kept busy copying the alphabet and numbers. But, they do get socialized in to the school system in that one year. Also, many of them learn the alphabet. In Rajasthan, there is greater skepticism about early childhood education since the perception is that the Anganwadi centres do not provide any useful education at all.
(iv) **Storybooks could help develop reading skills**
An overwhelming majority of teachers in both states (Assam: 79.2%; Rajasthan: 73.5%) strongly felt that providing simple and interesting books according to students’ reading levels in the classroom would support development of reading skills.

(v) **Role of parents in student learning**
Teachers don’t want to take exclusive responsibility for ensuring that children learn to read and write well. They feel parents or guardians have an equally important role in ensuring students’ learning (73.1%). Another 18.8% teachers went a step further and asserted that parents had a more important role than the school in ensuring children’s learning. This is another reflection of teachers’ attitude of not feeling accountable for student learning in the classroom and putting the blame or responsibility on the parents/home environment. This refrain was common during teacher interviews, FGDs and informal discussion with teachers.

5.1.5 **Appropriate Sequence of Teaching & Learning of Different Skills**

(i) **Traditional versus textbook sequence (grade 1)**
The textbook in Assam has a word-based approach to introducing letters and *matras*. Also, words are introduced after a few consonants and vowels have been taught. The text also has some decodable sentences after a few lessons. The Rajasthan textbook has a letter-focused approach, but each letter is introduced through a key word. In both states, the sequence of introducing consonants and vowels is not the regular (*varnamala*) sequence. Almost 80% teachers in both states felt that the traditional *varnamala* sequence is much better than the sequence in their textbooks.

(ii) **Reading words follows learning letters**
85.4% teachers in Assam and 87.8% in Rajasthan hold a clear view that there is a strict sequence between learning alphabets and reading words. Thus word reading should follow learning of *all* letters. This belief is reflected in their
classroom practice where teachers do not provide opportunities for practice for combining letters and vowel signs to make simple words.

(iii) **Reading storybooks only after learning all letters and matras**
68.8% teachers in Assam and 69.4% in Rajasthan believe that children should be given storybooks to read only after they have learnt all letters and *matras*. Teachers were generally in support of a traditional teaching sequence spending most of grade 1 time on teaching letters and initiating *matras* towards the end of grade 1, and reinforcing *matras* in grade 2. They did not seem to be in support of using additional reading materials early in these grades.

(iv) **Focus only on reading and writing from beginning of grade 1**
All (100%) teachers who participated in the survey in Assam and 77% teachers in Rajasthan felt that the focus of language teaching in grade 1 should be entirely on reading and writing. The preschool stage could focus on oral language development. Rajasthan does not have a preschool within the primary school and the perception of *Anganwadis* is that no useful education happens there. Thus, the disagreement of 23% teachers in Rajasthan could be more linked to the poor functionality of preschool education. Basically, an overwhelming majority of primary school teachers (88%) believe that oral language development is not an important part of early grades language development and the focus should be only on teaching of reading and writing.

(v) **Reading and writing sequence**
About 94% teachers were of the view that students should learn to read before they are taught to write.

### 5.1.6 Classroom Practices for Language Teaching

(i) **Teaching reading and writing together**
83.3% teachers in Assam and 79.6% in Rajasthan believe that teaching reading and writing at the same time could be confusing for students.
(ii) Introducing a lesson
More than 96% teachers were quite clear that it is important to discuss and explain the background of the text before it is read out. Clearly, teachers are aware that texts in the textbook are not simple and require an introduction and background.

(iii) Importance of choral repetition
96% teachers believe that choral repetition after the teacher or a ‘fast learner’ student is a very useful strategy for learning to read. This belief is held equally strongly in both states.

(iv) Memorization is important
Some teachers believe that it is necessary for students to memorize a text to be able to read and understand it. More than one in four teachers (26.5%) in Rajasthan held this belief. The percentage of such teachers was much lower in Assam (6.25%).

(v) Comprehension is the only goal of reading
The response to this statement was quite different in Assam and Rajasthan. While in Assam, 97.9% teachers strongly agreed with this statement, only 24.5% were in strong agreement in Rajasthan. Another 67.3% somewhat agreed with this statement. This could be a reflection of the generally more mechanistic, drill-oriented approach to teaching of reading in Rajasthan. In Assam also, in actual practice, there was little focus on comprehension, but the teachers seem to understand the need for it.

(vi) Workbooks are useful
All (100%) teachers agreed that workbooks are very helpful in providing writing practice and improving students’ writing skills.

(vii) Formative assessment
In both states, teachers agreed that formative evaluation to understand each student’s learning levels was not being carried out.

(viii) Use of TLM
TLM is used mostly for demonstration to students and not for use by students individually, or in a group. Teachers gave the following as the most important reasons for inadequate use of TLM during classroom teaching:

In both states, more than half the teachers (Assam: 50.1%; Rajasthan: 51%) cited the burden of systematic storage and planning and advance preparation for use of TLM as the main reasons for their inadequate use. About one-fourth of the teachers in Assam blamed non-availability of the right kind of TLM for not using TLM in the teaching process. The multigrade situation--teacher having the responsibility of more than one class -- was quoted by almost 35% teachers in Assam as an important reason for not being able to use TLM. In Rajasthan, a few teachers (10%) mentioned the burden of non-academic work for not being able to use TLM. In Assam, teachers also stated that training did not include the use of TLM with clear examples.

5.1.7 Use of Story Books for Developing Reading Skills

Almost 80% teachers were of the view that storybooks could be useful in developing reading skills (Table 5.4). However, there was much less clarity on how they could be used. Most teachers felt that storybooks can be introduced only after students had learnt all letters and *matras*.

(i) Dedicated time for reading storybooks

The opinion on providing dedicated time for reading materials other than the textbook was somewhat divided. 41.7% teachers in Assam and 22.4% in Rajasthan felt they could arrange for an ‘exclusive’ reading time on a daily basis. The remaining teachers felt time for reading storybooks could be arranged once a week.

**Table 5.4: Usefulness of storybooks in enhancing reading skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very useful</th>
<th>Somewhat useful</th>
<th>Dedicated reading time can be provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Everyday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(ii) Reading aloud from storybooks is useful for developing reading skills
95% of teachers supported this statement in both states.

(iii) Motivation to read
All teachers recognize that the motivation to read is an important prerequisite for learning to read. We can build upon this consensus by including activities for reading aloud and shared reading of colourful, simple and interesting storybooks for beginning and early readers as a part of the curriculum for early grades.

5.1.8 Views on Grade 1 and 2 Textbooks
Teachers expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the current textbooks. This corroborates the perceptions documented during teacher interviews. The major issues are:

(i) Textbooks are difficult (language level)
83.3% teachers in Assam and 85.7% in Rajasthan agreed with the statement that language textbooks of grades 1 and 2 were difficult and much higher than the students’ reading levels. Over 55% were in strong agreement. Almost all teachers (99%) in Assam and Rajasthan felt that the textbooks did not provide simple and interesting texts that can motivate students to read. In Assam, 94% teachers strongly believed this to be correct, while a little under 60% felt strongly about it in Rajasthan.

(ii) Curriculum is ambitious
79% teachers feel that the expectation of the curriculum and textbook that children can read simple passages by the end of grade 2 is ambitious.

(iii) Textbook sequence in grade 1 is not appropriate
Almost 80% teachers in both states felt that the traditional sequence (varnamala) is more appropriate than what is incorporated in the textbooks.
(iv) Other opinions about textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assam</th>
<th>Rajasthan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should be simple and interesting</td>
<td>Should be simple and interesting, attractive (pictures)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should be according to children’s level and stage of development</td>
<td>Should be according to children’s level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbook for class 1 is too big in size</td>
<td>Should be systematic, supporting sequenced teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Matra teaching to be delayed to grade 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.9 Equity in Learning: Helping Students Who Lag Behind

(i) How do teachers support students who are struggling to read?

Table 5.5: Most important strategies used by teachers to help weaker Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assam</th>
<th>Rajasthan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Give greater attention to such students during the class</td>
<td>Ask brighter students to help the weaker ones in a group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask them to read aloud regularly and give feedback</td>
<td>Call their parents and ask them to support at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call their parents and ask to help at home</td>
<td>Give greater attention during class to these students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ii) Giving special attention to weaker students is problematic since brighter students feel neglected

This statement completely divided the surveyed teachers. About 52% teachers disagreed with this statement, while 48% agreed. From an equity perspective, it is difficult to oppose extra time and attention to the students who are lagging behind. However, it is also true that some students who are more advanced readers do not have any task to do for long periods because the teacher may be
busy with the weaker students. Clearly, the dialogue about ‘learning for all’ needs to be pursued with the teachers.

5.1.10 Constraints in Effective Teaching

(i) Multigrade teaching
Multigrade teaching emerged as the biggest constraint in effective teaching in both Assam (83.3% teachers) and Rajasthan (57.2% teachers). Other constraints that were mentioned include: irregular attendance of students; lack of home support and non-academic work at school (mainly in Rajasthan).

(ii) Stronger monitoring helps improve school quality
87.5% teachers in Assam and 98% teachers in Rajasthan believe that stronger monitoring by block and district education administration will help improve the quality of education.

(iii) Time lost to non-academic tasks
The average weekly workload of non-academic tasks indicated by teachers in Assam was 3.1 hours. In Rajasthan, it was considerably higher at 4.1 hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time for non-academic tasks: Percentage of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time for non-academic work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

59.2% teachers in Assam and 89.6% in Rajasthan stated that MDM consumed the most amount of time. Participation in training programmes, accounts related work, other administrative work and school construction also figured in the list of non-academic tasks that required considerable time. While assistant teachers were mostly engaged in MDM work, head teachers had some more responsibility of accounts, report writing and school construction.
(iv) Teachers’ desire for professional development

Table 5.7: Teachers’ priorities for professional development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First priority</th>
<th>Assam</th>
<th>Rajasthan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English content knowledge and teaching methodology (77.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of computers (24.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second priority</td>
<td>Mathematics teaching methods</td>
<td>Parents’ engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, teachers do not think that language teaching-learning is an important area for further professional development. English has been introduced as a subject from grade 1 in both states. In Assam, teachers seem more exercised about teaching of English. Government schools feel the pressure from private English medium schools to which the government schools were losing enrollment each year. The English period is usually accommodated before MDM in the timetable. In Rajasthan, English teaching does not seem to be taken that seriously. The English class is usually held after MDM and the teachers really don’t expect students to be learning much English.

5.1.11 Suggestions for Improvement in Language Teaching-Learning

Teachers were asked about their suggestions for the following:

- Steps they would like to take for improving language teaching-learning
- Steps they want others should take to improve the teaching and learning of language

Table 5.8 and Table 5.9 list the suggestions made by 4 or more teachers.
### Table 5.8: Steps teachers would like to take

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assam</th>
<th>Rajasthan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Provide more time for language each day</td>
<td>• Display TLM and use in teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Give greater emphasis on reading during language class</td>
<td>• Build strong foundation of letters and <em>matras</em> through repetition and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emphasize model reading by teacher</td>
<td>• Give more time for storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make better use of TLM and implement more activities for students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Arrange for small storybooks for students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Give more emphasis on mastering letters and <em>matras</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Give more time and emphasis on writing; give homework more regularly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Arrange for weaker students to be supported by the brighter students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers in Rajasthan had fewer ideas to suggest, or did not think about this question seriously.

### Table 5.9: Steps others should take

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assam</th>
<th>Rajasthan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Parents should be more aware; ensure children’s regular attendance and provide support at home for learning</td>
<td>• Parents should be more aware; ensure children’s regular attendance and provide support at home for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More teachers needed (one per class)</td>
<td>• One teacher per class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More time for language teaching</td>
<td>• More time for language teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher training for language teaching is important; should happen</td>
<td>• Textbooks need to be modified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Involve mothers and mothers’ group</td>
<td>• TLM to be provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• TLM and activities to be suggested</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students should attend regularly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Textbooks need to be modified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other suggestions by 1-3 teachers:

a. Assam: More group work; accurate pronunciation; discuss language teaching with other teachers; more attention to weaker students; other subject teachers should help in improving language skills; more
b. storytelling; notebooks and pencils needed; teachers should not be given non-academic work
c. Rajasthan: Build warm relationship with students and encourage them; more time for reading; give more attention to weaker children; clearly sequenced instruction; more group work; poems and games to attract children; give regular homework; strengthen early childhood education; introduce workbooks.

5.2 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Teachers in the FGDs were asked the following questions: Students are not learning to read and write well in the first two primary grades. What, in your opinion are the reasons for this situation? What can be done to improve student learning?

Table 5.10: FGDs: Top three reasons for low student achievements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Assam</th>
<th>Rajasthan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>One teacher has to attend to 2 or more classes. Not able to give adequate time to each class.</td>
<td>Parents are not aware, and do not support children at home for learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parents do not support children at home for reading and writing.</td>
<td>One teacher has to take several classes. For early grades, one teacher is needed per class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Inadequate instructional time for language teaching.</td>
<td>Irregular attendance of students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Providing one teacher per class</td>
<td>Increasing parental awareness to ensure regular student attendance and support at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Increasing parental support for learning at home</td>
<td>Providing one teacher per class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Increasing instructional time for language</td>
<td>Ensure that letter and <em>matras</em> are mastered by students before starting the reading lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Improving training and academic support for teaching-learning of language; better use of TLM; textbooks to be modified: (a) more systematic decoding instruction (b) simpler texts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Additional reading materials in the form of simple and graded storybooks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These reasons and suggestions are very similar to the ones that emerged through the questionnaire responses. Teachers in Rajasthan did not discuss many academic issues. Teachers in Assam did discuss the textbook, training, academic support and the importance of reading, but kept getting back to what they felt was the main reason for low achievements, viz. inadequate teachers.

5.3 COMPARISON WITH A ‘GOOD SCHOOL’

5.3.1 Assam
The ‘good school’ selected in Assam was in a district adjoining the district where the field research for the 8 classrooms was conducted. A learning enhancement programme called ‘Bidyajyoti’ is being implemented in this school. The socioeconomic condition of the catchment area of the ‘good
school’ was very similar to that of the schools where the study was undertaken. However, this was ascertained merely based on discussion with teachers and local educational administrators. After the field work in this school, it was confirmed that the students’ background variables (father’s and mother’s education, father’s and mother’s occupation) had a very similar profile to that of the earlier 8 schools. The school background variables (total enrollment, class size etc.) were also similar.

(i) Main features of the learning programme in the ‘good school’

The ‘Bidyajyoti’ programme addresses the issue of multigrade teaching and provides a structured teaching sequence for all primary grades. The most important intervention is the students’ workbook that helps guide the learning sequence. The workbook includes a variety of carefully developed learning activities that are closely linked to the textbook. The workbook also includes extracts from the textbook lessons for reading, so it is a self sufficient teaching and learning material. Teachers receive 4-6 days of training each year that includes use of workbook, classroom organization, group work, and principles and methods of language and mathematics teaching in early grades. The focus is on concurrent assessment through the workbook exercises. There are also unit tests at the end of a few lessons.

(ii) Major findings for ‘good school’

a. Student performance in both grades was significantly better in this school. Also, the disparity was lower. Particularly impressive was the writing ability of students. Oral reading fluency rates were about the same as the best of the 8 (other) schools.

b. The proportion of time of teacher’s activity spent on student-centric activities like asking questions, discussion and guiding students’ group work was much higher at 29.8% (against the average of the other 8 schools of 24%).

c. The students’ on-task time was 71.9% against the average of 55.7% for the rest of the 8 schools.
d. Students’ activity time (average of grade 1 and 2) was as follows (Table 5.12):

Table 5.12 Distribution of student activity time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage time in activity</th>
<th>Good School</th>
<th>Average of other schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working with TLM</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing in Workbook</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No meaningful activity</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

e. Group work happened on each of the 3 days and the group activities required some collaboration between students. This was very different from the other schools where students worked individually on reading or writing tasks even when sitting as a group.

f. The workbook activities kept the students engaged in writing tasks for a considerable time even after the teacher had left the class. The teacher had corrected the students writing tasks almost on a regular basis.

g. The teacher was better prepared and more systematic in organizing classroom activities. More TLMs were used in this school; though they were used mostly for demonstration. On one occasion, the teacher distributed letter cards to students for making words.

h. Emphasis on comprehension was low in the regular teaching of the lesson. The workbook contains activities that require students to understand and respond. Some of these writing tasks that need some thinking had not been completed by all students.

i. There is too much reliance on the workbook and oral work is neglected.

j. There is a lot of dependence on choral repetition after the teacher or a ‘bright’ student even in this school

k. Students spend much more time on writing than reading and speaking.
1. The school did not have a library or reading materials inside the classroom. Students had no additional materials to practice their reading skills. Thus, there was no clear strategy for developing students’ oral reading fluency.

(iii) Learning from the comparison with ‘good school’

a. Teachers do respond by changing some of their practices and behaviour if there is regular training, discussion, on-site support and encouragement for adopting good practices.

b. A sequenced structure to the curriculum in terms of weekly suggested activities (along with TLM) is useful in enhancing time-on-task.

c. A teacher is motivated when s/he is able to see improved student outcomes

d. Certain practices like excessive dependence on choral repetition, inadequate emphasis on oral work and comprehension do not change easily. It is not enough to develop a ‘package’ and train teachers on that package, even if that package is based on an understanding of good practices of teaching reading. It is important that teachers understand the principles of language acquisition and teaching of reading. Change in practices about working on comprehension, exposing students to reading materials even before they have learnt to read etc. come about when there is a better understanding of the basic principles of learning and reading.

e. A workbook is very useful in providing a structure to the writing work and reducing exclusive dependence on copying and handwriting work. A well prepared workbook also has in-built scaffolding for the students at each step. However, the teacher finds this the best way to keep students engaged and writing overshadows reading and speaking.

f. A workbook can be useful in helping advanced students continue higher order writing tasks while the teacher could work with the weaker students with more oral or reading related work at a more basic level.

g. Frequent assessment is useful in understanding students’ progress and identifying students falling behind.

h. Reading fluency does not improve much unless students get a chance to read simple storybooks and other materials at their level on a regular basis.
i. Group work is very useful (more in grade 2 than grade 1) in ensuring high time-on-task and peer learning. Mixed performance level groups are appropriate to promote peer learning. During remedial instruction or differentiated reading instruction, achievement (commonly, though erroneously called ‘ability’ groups) groups are more useful, for short periods of time.

5.3.2 Rajasthan
The primary school selected in Rajasthan was in the same district (Ajmer) and had similar school and student characteristics as the other 8 schools. A programme called the Literacy Instruction Programme (LIP) is being implemented in grades 1 and 2 of this school with support from Room to Read.

(i) Main features of the learning programme in the ‘good school’
The LIP has a highly structured and sequenced year-long curriculum linked to the textbooks. There is a well-defined methodology for decoding instruction and steps for reading texts. There is a strong focus on revision and consolidation on a regular basis. Apart from revision after each unit, an intensive revision is carried out at the beginning of the year for grade 2 students to bridge the gaps between students. A workbook is provided that is closely linked with the textbook. Simple and interesting reading cards and storybooks are available for regular reading practice. There is provision for regular assessment and monitoring of students’ progress. Group work is encouraged and a bank of activities have been designed for group work to ensure that appropriate tasks can be provided to different groups.

(ii) Major findings
a. The mean scores were higher in almost all skills than the other 8 schools. However, almost 25% students in both grades could not read letters or CV combinations. Thus, the school was not able to help students who were lagging behind to improve their learning.
b. The time available for language teaching is high, but the time-on-task for students was low. Students remained off-task for almost 36% of the total class time. This is similar to the 35.5% average of all other schools.

c. Students spent more time writing in their workbooks than copying from the blackboard or textbook. The workbook tasks are varied and help in reinforcing newly learnt skills. However, the more application type exercises were not completed by the students.

d. Some oral work was done as prescribed by the LIP. However, there was no conversation or discussion and the teacher asked questions that mainly required one-word answers.

e. A lot of reading materials and TLM is available in this school. There is also a school library provided by Room to Read. However, the teacher used only letter cards for demonstration. The materials were not given to the students to use.

f. The steps followed for reading a lesson were more detailed and beneficial for students than the process followed in other schools. There was a pre-reading stage followed by reading of small chunks of the long lesson, explaining of vocabulary and asking of comprehension questions as well as an overall explanation of the story at the end of the reading. However, the teacher went through all the steps rather quickly.

g. No time was provided for reading of storybooks. On a scrutiny of the books available in the classroom it was seen that only 5 titles were at the level of beginning and very early readers.

h. The teacher was often confused about the sequence and strategy to be used. He was finding it difficult to coordinate use of the textbook and the activities and materials suggested by Room to Read. The teacher felt that the additional materials and activities became burdensome since they needed a lot of advance planning.

i. The Room to Read literacy instruction package is oriented to a monograde teaching situation and, therefore, does not help a teacher cater to a multigrade and multilevel situation within the classroom.
j. The teacher had placed some students from grade 2 in to the grade 1 group because they were just at the letter learning stage. Thus, some informal practices were being followed to address the multilevel situation in each class.

(iii) Learning from the comparison with ‘good school’

Here, the impact of the innovative programme was less pronounced than in Assam. Some of the learning from this programme was:

a. It is possible to create a print-rich environment in the classroom and provide adequate reading materials for students at different levels of reading ability.

b. A dedicated time for reading should be built in to the time-table, and simple graded storybooks or reading cards of different levels should be available for students with different reading levels within the same classroom. Reading by students should be monitored by the teacher.

c. While a workbook is really useful in providing a structure to the writing work, the teacher must explain the writing tasks and provide adequate guidance before asking students to write.

d. Oral language development should not be neglected by focusing entirely on reading and workbook activities.

e. Since a multilevel situation exists in each classroom, the teaching-learning strategy and materials must cater to this need.

f. The programme needs to cater to the multigrade situation by providing adequate guidance to the teacher about organizing tasks for students when s/he is in another class.

g. Any learning enhancement programme must be closely linked to the textbook to avoid confusion for the teacher (unless the textbook is replaced by other materials like in the Activity Based Learning Programme in Tamil Nadu).

h. Teachers should be involved or consulted when a new programme is being developed. They should not be treated as mere recipients and implementers of a strategy that has been thought out at the top and imposed on them. Adoption of a new strategy depends a lot on teachers’ attitudes and learning
behaviours. Training, discussion, regular on-site support and consultation will help improve teacher adoption.

i. Buy-in from the educational administration is a must if a new instructional strategy is introduced in the classrooms. They should reinforce the expectation of changed practices on a regular basis.

5.4 A FEW CASE STUDIES: CRUCIAL ROLE OF THE TEACHER

5.4.1 Case Study I: Bandiya UPS & Bhunabai UPS (Rajasthan)
These are 2 upper primary schools (grade 1 to 8) within 2 km of Ajmer city limits. Both are located on/near a highway and very well connected with the city. The social background of the students is quite similar. A majority of students in both schools belong to BPL families and are from OBC castes. Both schools have adequate number of teachers: 9 each in the two schools, including a headmistress. Both schools provide 2 periods each day; about 90 minutes of instructional time for Hindi teaching. Teachers in both schools who teach Hindi are graduates and come from Ajmer. The enrollment and attendance is similar in both schools, ranging from 10-20 in grades 1 & 2. The position for language teaching is more comfortable in Bandiya UPS where there are separate teachers teaching Hindi in grades 1 & 2 in separate classrooms. In Bhunabai UPS, grades 1 and 2 sit in the same classroom and are taught by one teacher in a multigrade-like situation.

The functioning of the language classrooms in these two schools is like chalk and cheese. A brief overview of the language teaching process and sequence in the 2 schools is given below:

(i) Bandiya UPS (grade 1)

a. The teacher repeated letters in their sequence while saying Ka se Kabutar, Kha se Khargosh and asked the students to repeat after her. Then, she called
a few students, one-by-one, to read the letters from the blackboard and asked others to repeat. Several students could not read all the letters. When she wrote a few letters randomly on the board, most students could not read. Then, students were asked to copy the letters from the board. A similar exercise was done with matras. Clearly, the students were not able to remember the letters and matras because the only activity for fixing letter-sound association was choral repetition and copying. No TLM was used.

b. In a lesson for combining letters without matras, the teacher wrote down a few two letter words from the first lesson of the textbook (Part 2). This lesson was to have been taught six months back as per the teaching plan! Not one child in the class could combine the two letters to pronounce the word. Some students attempted to read, but had no confidence that they could read a word. For example, a student would read the letters ‘ra’ and ‘tha’ correctly, but combine the two to say ‘than’. Obviously, there had been no phonological practice of combining sounds. The focus had only been on copying of letters and words and repeating them after the teacher or another student. For such exercises, only those students got called to the board who the teacher knew could read a bit.

c. The teacher had very low expectations of the students and felt that they could not learn matras in grade 1.

(ii) Bandiya UPS (Grade 2)

a. During a lesson to teach matras, the teacher wrote down several words with matras on the board and repeated them several times. Then she called those students who could read to come to the board. Most students were guessing and trying to locate the words they had memorized. The standard sequence over the 3 days in grade 2 was: (a) teacher reads out the words; students repeat (b) one student reads; others repeat, and (c) All students copy from the board.

b. Almost all students are off-task when one student is called to the board. No student could read a single word with matra even when it had been repeated several times.
c. Both teachers seemed quite indifferent to the needs of students from different backgrounds. They belonged to a middle class urban background and looked down upon the children and their family backgrounds.

(iii) Bhunabai UPS

a. The classroom was cramped with grades 1 and 2 in the same room. The time that the teacher spent in each grade was about 45 minutes.
b. The teaching process was not very different from other schools with a lot of emphasis on choral repetition. No TLM use was seen. No additional reading materials were used. However, the teacher was enthusiastic and the classroom was more task-oriented than other classrooms.
c. During the time students were doing a copying task, the teacher called each student one-by-one to her desk and checked their work and gave them another task more suited to their writing ability. Students felt confident to approach the teacher and the teacher circultated in the classroom.
d. The teacher was working hard, trying to reach out to every student. She (like the Bandiya UPS teachers) was also not too empathetic towards the students, but believed that it was her duty that they learnt to read and write.
e. Students’ learning was much higher than in Bandiya UPS.

(iv) Learning from the comparison between Bandiya UPS and Bhunabai UPS

a. A basic ingredient of an effective classroom is a teacher who feels accountable for student learning. She needs to give attention to all students and specifically help those who are falling behind. This quality can compensate for a lot of shortcomings in teaching methodology.
b. Willingness to learn is a crucial quality in a teacher. In Rajasthan, sadly, there have been no academic inputs provided to teachers for early grades language teaching. But, the Bhunabai teacher was keen to understand how she could improve her teaching methods. With good academic support, she would quickly be able to incorporate significant modifications in her strategies. The Bandiya teachers did not seem interested in understanding other strategies for teaching decoding.
c. Teachers who are from an urban, middle class, and upper caste background find it difficult to understand the daily lives, problems and learning issues of children who come from deprived backgrounds. They are not able empathize with such children and a big distance remains between the teacher and children. They would always complain about the lack of hygiene, lack of parental interest and support etc. This was visible in several schools in the Rajasthan sample, e.g. Devpura PS, Bubani PS, Bandiya UPS, Shahi ka Badiya PS, Khoda Ganesh PS and Bhimpura ks Badiya PS.

d. An enthusiastic teacher who attempts to tailor some tasks according to individual student needs can make a big difference.

5.4.2 Case Study II: Devpura PS and Mormangri PS (Rajasthan)

These two schools have a very similar profile. There are two teachers in both schools. The students belong to poor gujar communities with a high level of parental illiteracy. The students do not speak or fully understand standard Hindi in the initial years at school. Enrollments are low in both schools with each grade having between 10 to 20 students.

(i) Comparison between classrooms in these two schools

There is a world of difference between the grade 1 and 2 classrooms in the two schools.

a. The teacher in Devpura PS was openly critical of the children and their families. The Mormangri PS teacher had made friends with the young children. He felt that this was the only way to get these children involved in the classroom process.

b. The Devpura PS teacher had very low expectation from the students. He did not believe that they could learn to read in the first 2 grades. The Mormangri PS teacher also felt that the curricular expectations were high, but said that his students did manage to read haltingly by the end of grade 2.

c. The Devpura teacher blamed the parents for not supporting the children at home and maintained that this was the main reason for the low achievements
of the students. The Mormangri teacher felt that the school has the most important responsibility in ensuring that the students learnt to read and write.
d. The Devpura teacher followed the strategy (common in most schools in Rajasthan for grade 2) of (a) teacher reading the lesson first, while students repeat in chorus, (b) teachers asks a few simple recall type questions, (c) one or two students (who can read) read aloud and others repeat, (d) perfunctory explanation of a few word meanings, and (e) writes some sentences or whole lesson on the board and asks students to copy. The Mormangri PS teacher did not follow any innovative strategies, but ensured that most students were involved at almost all stages of the lesson. Thus, he started with a pre-reading session that helped arouse interest and gave some background knowledge about the setting of the lesson (a forest). While reading the lesson, he asked several questions and allowed the students to answer in their mother tongue, while also repeating the word in standard Hindi. He followed the same strategy of asking children to repeat after him in chorus, and then asked a few students to read aloud while others repeated in chorus. During this time, he went over to individual students to check if they had their finger in the right place. Later, he asked them to copy from the textbook. While giving homework, he differentiated the tasks according to the reading/writing ability of the students.
e. The Mormangri teacher sat with the researcher for almost 4 hours after the observation trying to understand good practices in teaching young children to read. He lamented that he did not get any guidance from the nodal UPS or the Block Resource Person. The Devpura teacher was least interested in any academic discussion.

(ii) Learning from the comparison between the teachers of Devpura PS and Mormangri PS
a. Teachers’ attitude towards the students and their expectation from the children are crucial in creating a positive classroom climate.
b. Since the textbook level is high, it is important to spend more time on oral discussion and reading of some simple texts. Simple storybooks can be very useful in helping beginning readers.

c. Storybooks are also useful in providing more advanced readers with some reading tasks, while the teacher attends to the weaker students for supporting them on lower-order skills.

d. Many teachers are willing to learn new strategies and use them. The key is to involve them in a consultative process and work with them as experienced adults while discussing and explaining desirable practices.

5.4.3 Case Study III: Grade 2 Teacher: Dandua Majgaon LP School (Assam)

One of the teachers in this school who taught grade 2 was quite different from the rest of the teachers who were observed in other schools. The major strategies used by her were not very different from the rest of the teachers in that block. Choral repetition after the teacher and another ‘bright’ student consumed a lot of time. The teacher did not adjust her level of teaching to the level of the students. But, there were a few things that were different:

a. She had allocated 2 periods each day for Assamese. In almost all other schools in the block, only one period of 45 minutes was allocated for Assamese, but she managed to provide double the time.

b. She called one of the periods as ‘language’ and the other, ‘reading’. During the reading period, she would stress more on reading by individual students and provide greater attention to those who were struggling to read. She was enthusiastic and always moving around the classroom. The students also felt engaged in the whole process.

c. The classroom had a lot of print in the form of charts, posters, functional print etc.

d. She organized students in to groups and assigned reading tasks. Of course, these tasks were of the choral repetition type.
e. She wanted to learn more about good practices for teaching reading. She said that she carried out periodic skill-based assessments based on some tools she had once collected from the DIET.

Providing more time for language instruction and setting aside a dedicated time for reading by individual students helps develop reading skills. Students in this classroom had better reading skills than in the remaining 7 classrooms in Assam.

5.4.4 Case Study IV: Grades 1 & 2 Teacher: Lungamukh LP School (Assam)
The teacher for grades 1 & 2 (and Ka sreni) had joined this school only 3 months back. Before that, the school had just one teacher and many children had left the school and joined other nearby schools. In the past 3 months, she managed to bring back most of the earlier students by ensuring that there was regular teaching and parents developed confidence in the school. She did not have an understanding of the good practices of teaching language. She depended on choral repetition and copying as the most common strategies for grade 2. For grade 1, she used some letter cards and a few wall charts to teach letters. However, the most distinguishing characteristic was her understanding of every child’s learning level, and her effort to go to as many children as possible to see what they can read, and assign differentiated writing tasks based on their levels. This was not a common practice seen among teachers in Assam. Like the teacher from Dandua Majgaon LP School (Case Study III), she was animated and mobile, and could keep students engaged for a long time.

5.4.5 Conclusion
None of the examples above relate to good practices in language teaching. There is very little conceptual understanding among teachers (or academic staff within a district) of how children learn to read or appropriate practices that build reading skills. Therefore, these examples relate mainly to teacher
qualities of enthusiasm, concern for equity and effort to help those students who are falling behind, creating a positive classroom climate and empathy with children from deprived backgrounds. Another characteristic that distinguished the good teachers was their willingness and desire to learn how to improve their practices.

5.5 CURRICULUM AND TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS

Presented below is a summary of the main issues emerging out of the analysis of the language curriculum and textbooks for grades 1 and 2 in the two states. The detailed analysis is not included here.

5.5.1 Language Curriculum

a. In both states, the curriculums do not state the aims and objectives of teaching language. There is no guidance to textbook authors and teacher educators about the role of language development in communication, thought and cognition.

b. The curriculums of both states do not include any guidance about essential elements or key principles of teaching-learning of reading and language. Thus, there is no description of foundational skills like concepts of print, phonological and phonemic awareness, oral language development, visual discrimination etc. Concepts relating to word recognition, systematic phonics instruction, fluency development, comprehension, and vocabulary development are also not discussed. Thus, the curriculum competencies are not backed by any conceptual framework for reading or language development. Is it important to focus on the content in the texts and get students to memorize the information or is the text only a tool for developing skills of fluency and comprehension to help students become skilled readers?

c. The curriculums do not take a position on appropriate methodology for teaching early reading skills. What is the approach to teaching of consonants and vowels and matras? How do children learn to read words? Is the
approach bottom-to-top, where the learning of letters through a phonics
approach is the first step followed by systematic teaching of blending of
these symbols to form syllables and words? Or is it a top-to-bottom
approach, where the emphasis is on meaningful texts as the starting point? Is
a balanced literacy approach being suggested? There are no answers to these
questions. In the field, at block and school level, various terms like sentence
based, word based and letter based approach are used to describe the
strategies for teaching beginning reading (early grade 1).

d. The learning objectives and competencies are stated as a continuum for the
primary grades across the broad skill areas of listening, speaking, reading
and writing. The number of competencies included is very high and,
therefore, the key ones are lost in the long list that includes many sub-skills
as well as content knowledge expected of students at the end of each grade.

e. The key language competencies are interspersed with statements about
information expected to be learnt/memorized by the students. Thus, it does
not remain a pure set of language competencies. For example, in the
Rajasthan curriculum, the list includes (a) Will be able to read names of days
of the week (b) will be able to say names of flowers, fruits, trees and animals
(c) will be able to name seasons and their importance (d) understand the
diversity in culture, festivals, food habits, and way of life in the state (e)
develop the values of cooperation, nationalism, respect, bravery, hard work,
honesty and truth. This detracts from an emphasis on the essential
competencies in reading and language and confuses essential skills with
knowledge of content.

f. There are no clear guidelines for development of textbooks, workbooks or
other teaching-learning materials that can operationalize the intention of the
curriculum.

g. The curriculums of both states do not provide any operational definitions or
standards for any of the skill areas. Thus, a statement like: ‘Will be able to
read familiar words and simple sentences (by the end of grade 1)’ does not
provide a basis for measurement of achievement. There is no standard
defined for deciding if students have achieved the expected outcome. In the absence of such a yardstick, teachers and others involved in assessment use the textbook as the only guiding material to assess the students’ learning level. However, the textbook itself is written without any clear guidance of curricular expectations around expected vocabulary in each grade or the nature, length and difficulty level of text to be included. For the curriculum to be a document that guides formative and summative assessment, it should contain clear guidelines for preparing assessment tasks at every stage of language development. For example, the competency-‘Read with expression and understanding’ can be assessed only when it is further defined to describe (a) nature and length of text to be read, (b) kind of comprehension expected, (c) expected oral reading fluency rate (say words per minute) etc.

h. While both curriculum documents emphasize use of other reading materials and locally relevant texts, this is lip service since such materials are not available in most classrooms. There are no guidelines about the nature of these supplementary reading materials and their use to develop reading skills.

i. The two curriculums are silent about the progression of expected outcomes during the course of the year. Thus, the competencies and outcomes have not been broken up term-wise to provide a clear guidance about sequencing and progression through the year. This would have helped textbook writers and assessment.

j. The curriculum document is not available with teachers. In fact, in both states, the curriculum was not available even with cluster and block academic personnel or even DIET faculty members. Thus, the textbook remains the only material that guides the teaching-learning process in a school.

k. The language curriculums for grades 1 and 2 of both the states are focussed on decoding skills with very little emphasis on comprehension. Memorization of texts is also emphasized in the Rajasthan curriculum.
1. The curriculum in Assam was prepared in 1999 and Rajasthan in 2000. They have not been revised for more than a decade, to be informed by recent approaches in reading instruction.

5.5.2 Textbook: Grade 1

(i) Assam

a. Overall approach: The textbook was developed on the pattern of the NCERT’s *Rimjhim* series for language. It was introduced in 2009. It follows a balanced literacy approach with a focus on decoding activities as well as meaning based activities. The activities include recitation, listening, speaking, reading, writing, and some drawing and dramatization. Each lesson includes (a) a rhyme for recitation, (b) pictures for storytelling or conversation, (c) words or short text for reading, (d) activities for reinforcing letters and *matras*, and (e) exercise for writing letters or reinforcing letter knowledge. The book seems to try and follow a whole language approach, while also including some decoding work. The lessons are confusing for the teachers as they include a whole lot of activities with different objectives and the focus on learning to decode does not come through clearly.

b. Approach to teaching letters and *matras*: The assumption of the textbook (not stated anywhere in the curriculum) is that children would have learnt all the letters in the preschool class (*Ka sreni*). Thus, in each lesson, 6-8 letters or *matras* are introduced for revision or reinforcement. Letters are introduced through key words and pictures. Also, there are small rhymes and short sentences where words begin with the letters being introduced in that lesson. This is followed by exercises where the letter knowledge is reinforced. However, the activities for letter-sound association and blending (phonics) are not systematic. There is not enough scope for phonological and phonemic awareness work. The approach of this textbook is very different from the traditional approach for teaching letters and *matras*. 
c. Approach to word recognition and reading connected text; scope for reading practice: Each lesson has a set of words for reading by students in addition to rhymes and short texts. There seems to be some emphasis on ‘sight or logographic’ reading, because the words and small texts included in the lessons cannot be read by the students at that stage, as they include letters and matras that have not yet been introduced. The texts are short, but beyond the reading level of most students. There is an over-emphasis on rhymes and poems, while simple and interesting story texts could be more motivating and easy to read for beginning readers.

d. Difficulty level of texts: Since the texts are difficult for students to read in grade 1, they are usually read aloud by the teacher followed by choral reading. Thus, these texts do not provide support for developing reading fluency. The gradation of texts (nature and length) across the year has not been developed systematically.

e. Practice exercises: Practice exercises are varied and not limited to copying. Thus, they form a good basis for reinforcement of letter and word recognition. However, they are not adequate in number. Some of the exercises require detailed explanation from the teacher and preparation of students before they can start writing. The scope for oral activities is limited.

f. Writing expectation: Writing expectation is limited to writing letters and words. In the last lesson, a student is expected to frame a few sentences.

(ii) Rajasthan

a. Overall approach: The textbooks were introduced in 2002. There are 2 textbooks for grade 1. They are both integrated (language and mathematics) books. The first part is suggested for use for the first 3 months and includes pictures for discussion. The number of pictures is very limited and there is not enough scope for conversation. There are also no suggestions for read aloud stories. Teachers do not spend much time teaching the part 1 textbook and begin the year with teaching letters. The second part includes introduction to letters, matras, word recognition and texts. 4 to 5 letters and matras are introduced in each lesson through key
words (1 word per letter). The sequence of introducing letters seems to have no logic. There is very limited scope for revision or practice. Lengthy texts of 2 to 3 pages are introduced from lesson 10 and continue till lesson 29. These are not graded at all. The textbook does not really have a clear approach to the process of ‘learning to read’.

b. **Approach to teaching letters and matras:** The textbook does not specify this clearly. The only guidance is one picture with a word that starts with the targeted letter. 4 to 5 letters and *matras* are introduced in every lesson. There are just 1 or 2 activities at the end of each lesson that are grossly inadequate to reinforce decoding skills.

c. **Approach to word recognition and reading connected text; scope for reading practice:** Each lesson has several words and a text (from lesson 10). The texts are long and not easy to read. The emphasis (in the advice to the teacher) in each lesson is on inculcating some values or getting children to memorize some information (e.g. lesson 19: Instruction to teacher: develop qualities of bravery, fearlessness and tolerance through this lesson). This undermines the primary objective of a text in an early grades language textbook, viz. development of vocabulary, fluency and comprehension skills and motivating children to read more.

d. **Difficulty level of texts:** The level of texts is too high, considering the real level of students’ reading abilities. For this reason, most teachers do not use the textbook at all for teaching language in grade 1.

e. **Practice exercises:** Very limited exercises at the end of the lesson. Most of the writing exercises involve copying from the textbook. The exercises also require memorization of the text.

f. **Writing expectation:** The writing expectation does not go beyond writing letters or copying words from the text. There is no expectation of any independent writing.
5.5.3 Textbook Grade 2

(i) Assam

a. Overall approach: The textbook includes stories, information based texts and poems. The lessons are comprehensive, including a variety of activities like (a) storytelling based on pictures, (b) rhymes for choral recitation, (c) writing of words and sentences, (d) breaking and combining conjunct letters and difficult *matras* newly introduced in grade 2, (e) choral reading practice of words with these new letters/*matras*, (f) forming words using conjunct letters, (g) comprehension questions requiring written answers, (h) classification exercises, and (i) writing sentences independently. The book assumes that students have mastered word recognition in grade 1 and are beginning to read connected text fluently. The texts in the book are long and difficult and require a high level of reading skill among students.

b. Balance between meaning based activities and mechanical skill based work: The texts lend themselves to work relating to comprehension and vocabulary development. However, they are not used in that manner by the teachers. One major reason for the lack of focus on comprehension is the difficulty level of the texts and the low level of reading abilities of the students in grade 2. The decoding oriented drill and practice work becomes dominant in the classroom because it finds a prominent place at the end of each lesson. This is mostly related to practice for conjunct letters. Teachers have interpreted the main objective of the lessons in the grade 2 textbook to be introduction and practice of conjunct letters to the students.

c. Reading Practice: The texts are difficult and long. Many of the texts have been written with the sole objective of introducing conjunct letters, and contain difficult words included only for reinforcing particular conjunct letters. The texts from the beginning to the end of the year are not graded as per difficulty level. They do not offer scope for students to practice newly learnt decoding skills. The texts are read by the teachers and a few students who are ahead of the class. The rest of the students merely repeat after the teacher or a brighter student.
d. **Writing exercises:** The writing exercises are varied and can help reinforce reading skills. However, almost 50% of the exercises are focused on reinforcing conjunct letters and word formation using these letters. This has led to a majority of classroom writing time being focused on handwriting drill for conjunct letters.

(ii) Rajasthan

a. **Overall approach:** There are two textbooks for grade 2 with 28 lessons in total. All these lessons have long texts including stories, poems and information texts. The approach to teaching these lessons is not clearly specified in the curriculum or the textbooks. The assumption is that students have mastered decoding skills in grade 1. The exercises focus on vocabulary (new words in the lesson) and comprehension questions that require memorization and direct recall from the text.

b. **Reading practice:** These texts are long and difficult. There is no gradation across the year. For example, lesson 2 is 4 pages long. Clearly, no attempt has been made for understanding the real situation of reading levels of students while writing these lessons. Many of the texts are not interesting enough to motivate beginning readers to attempt to read. More than half the lessons are information based texts or aim at developing values. There are only 6 fun stories in both the textbooks. The language used in poems is abstract and difficult. For example, the poem called *Tiranga* in the Part 2 textbook has at least 8 difficult concept words in just two stanzas, e.g., prosperity, development, symbol, sacrifice, protection etc.

c. **Exercises:** The exercises at the end of the lesson focus on word meanings and comprehension questions. The questions emphasize memorization of the text. The limited writing work is all of the copying type. There is little scope for revision and remediation of decoding skills learnt in grade 1.

5.5.4 Workbooks

In Assam, workbooks developed under the *Bidyajyoti* programme were in use till 2011. They have been discontinued this year. These workbooks contained
good activities for revision and application of reading and writing skills. Teachers stated that the workbooks were useful. However, in Assam, with the limited instructional time, students did not get much time for completing the workbook exercises during the language class. In Rajasthan, no workbooks have been developed for language for grades 1 and 2. Workbooks for other subjects were not available in schools, and teachers felt it was a big burden to distribute and collect the workbooks. They preferred the handwriting and copying tasks that could be easily explained and corrected.

5.5.5 In-Service Training Programmes

(i) Assam
There has been no in-service training for primary school teachers on language teaching in 2010 and 2011. The new language textbooks were introduced in 2009. These are based on the NCERT textbooks and have an approach very different from the earlier textbooks. There has been no orientation of teachers on the new textbooks. No guideline on their use has been circulated by SCERT. Some teachers remembered some of the inputs on language teaching they had received in 2007 and 2008 under the Natun Padakshep (New Initiative) training programme where the focus was on strategies for teaching reading in grades 1 and 2. Teachers felt that training had become routinized and not as useful as it was in the early years of SSA.

(ii) Rajasthan
A 6-day summer training programme is held each year for all teachers of primary and upper primary schools. The training is common for all teachers and there is little focus on primary grades, even less on grades 1 and 2. Most teachers could not recollect the focus or content of the 2011 training. The module for 2011 focussed on the Right to Education Act, subject content knowledge for Mathematics, English, Science and Social Studies. The content knowledge was more relevant to teachers of the upper primary grades. For language, the only input was about creating motivation and interest among
students at the beginning of a lesson by starting with recitation of a rhyme or storytelling.

From the perception of teachers it appears that training has become completely discredited. This is further discussed in Chapter VI.