

CHAPTER 2: READING LITERACY

Introduction

This chapter sets the framework for the assessment of Reading Literacy in English for grades III, VI and IX. The importance of Reading Literacy is discussed first, followed by incorporation of 21st century competencies in the Reading Literacy assessment, definition of Reading Literacy, organisation of the domain, and how it will be assessed. Learning Outcomes to be assessed for establishing a link to the curriculum are also specified in this chapter.

The fundamental importance of reading to the human condition is clearly stated in the English Curriculum Framework PP-XII, REC (2013, p1)

Reading is the key to unlocking the vault of the wisdom of the race. To read well is to be in contact with those who have gone before us, who have discovered what it is to be human and the best ways to organise themselves to achieve happiness.

Numerous research studies have emphasized the importance of Reading Literacy as a foundational skill in building fundamental skills of the 21st century. Holloway (1999) suggests that reading skills are essential to the academic achievement of middle and high school students. Further, it is considered an essential skill for successful participation and integration into the society (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Smith *et al*, 2000).

In the 21st century, the ability to access different sources of information and collate them has become increasingly important (OECD 2018). The access to information is controlled by the ability to read making it a fundamental skill to a student's quality of life. The ability of individuals to read has an impact not just on the individuals but also on the prosperity of a nation as a whole. Canadian economists have found that the average literacy level of a nation's population is a better predictor of its economic growth than the educational achievement over a long period of time (Coulombe *et al*, 2004).

The Silken Knot – Standards for English for Schools in Bhutan also underscores the importance of reading as a foundational skill in the 21st century. Thus, it is important to undertake an assessment

of Reading Literacy to understand the strengths and identify the areas of improvement in the current school system.

Assessing 21st Century Competencies and Values

One of the objectives of NEA in Bhutan is to assess the prevalence of the 21st century competencies among Bhutanese students. The nine attributes defined in the BEP 2014-2024 are used to specify the 21st century competencies on the basis of the four learning and achievement imperatives – Knowledge, Competencies, Values and Attitudes. Typically, assessment instruments focussed on the cognitive domain are not the best instruments to measure values and attitudes. Therefore, the Reading Literacy domain will focus on measuring knowledge and competencies on the following three attributes using cognitive instruments:

- Knowledge and Understanding
- Intellectual Competence
- Communicative Competence

Other attributes will be addressed by developing and selecting texts that reflect the values mentioned in the nine attributes.

The table below shows how the various attributes can be measured in the Reading Literacy domain.

Table 2.1 Attributes to be measured in Reading literacy

Attributes	
1.	Knowledge and understanding – The ability to acquire the basic concepts of literacy in order to fulfil their potential and adapt intelligently to challenges and contribute to society. A literate citizen demonstrates the following knowledge and understanding competencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reads with deep understanding of texts in order to gain information about personal local and global issues and also to appreciate various literary traditions;• extracts relevant information from texts to draw appropriate conclusions;• interprets and applies information read in texts to solve problems and issues at the personal, local and global levels; and• makes connections and transfers learning from one situation to another.
2.	Intellectual competence - The ability to apply critical thinking, problem-solving and innovative skills to generate new possibilities, and to create new ideas or knowledge. A literate citizen demonstrates the following competencies:

- uses information read to create new knowledge;
- evaluates facts and opinions critically to understand issues;
- identifies and analyses information critically, in order to solve real-life and complex problems;
- evaluates arguments from various sources critically and draws appropriate conclusions; and
- reflects on texts to draw inferences and form appropriate judgements.

3. **Communicative competence** – The ability to express opinions and understand complex issues through mastery of English. A literate citizen demonstrates the following communicative competencies:

- summarises concepts and information read;
- evaluates information and opinions read through appropriate social and cultural lenses;
- correctly applies verbal and written instructions, procedures and other information; and
- analyzes, clarifies, and interprets complex information and issues effectively.

Defining Reading Literacy

One of the objectives of the NEA is to go beyond curriculum and evaluate students' ability to utilise their knowledge and skills to become contributing citizens, and to successfully integrate and participate in society. Therefore, this assessment takes the 'literacy' approach following international best practices in assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The 'literacy' concept goes beyond knowledge, understanding and skills inherent in each learning domain; it encompasses the ability to acquire and apply such knowledge and skills.

The definition of Reading Literacy in the NEA is as follows:

Reading Literacy is the ability of an individual to make meaning from written texts at various levels through an interactive process to fulfil personal and social needs and be a contributing member of the society.

Reading literacy ...

The term 'Reading Literacy' is preferred to 'reading' to convey the breadth of coverage. Reading Literacy goes beyond the mere decoding of words. It includes skills such as locating, interpreting, drawing inferences and reflecting on the form and content of various texts. The term is also intended to indicate that reading is done in a context and for a purpose.

... is the ability of an individual to make meaning from written texts ...

Reading Literacy is the ability that students demonstrate by deriving meaning from the materials they read. The term ‘written text’ is included to indicate that spoken texts are excluded. Written texts could be in various formats – handwritten, printed or digital – and could be continuous or non-continuous.

... at various levels ...

Gray (1960) defines reading as having three levels – reading the lines, reading between the lines and reading beyond the lines. Reading Literacy comprises skills at all these levels. It begins with the ability to decode and goes on to comprehension and to the higher levels of cognitive abilities.

... through an interactive process ...

This phrase emphasises that reading is not a unidirectional process where a reader directly absorbs the written word. Instead, the reader brings a whole gamut of previously acquired skills and knowledge to the table that influence how texts are interpreted, comprehended and inferred. These include the reader’s prior knowledge, experiences and beliefs.

... to fulfil personal and social needs ...

The manner in which a text is read is often influenced by the context and the purpose. No text is read in isolation. Therefore, to assess Reading Literacy in a realistic manner, texts chosen must depict a rich variety of contexts and purposes to reflect the authenticity of reading in real life scenarios. ‘...*personal and social needs...*’ reflects the various needs of a reader and must be understood from an individual’s perspective. For instance, personal needs could include reading a story or a poem for pleasure. Social needs could be fulfilled by reading blogs, newspapers, magazines etc. to be better informed and by reading e-mails, chats, social media posts etc. to communicate.

... and be a contributing member of society.

It is important to understand the significance of Reading Literacy not just from the perspective of the individual but also from the perspective of society at large. This phrase is intended to convey that Reading Literacy is essential for a citizen to be able to meaningfully engage with and participate in society and contribute to its progress.

Organisation of the domain

The Reading Literacy domain will be described in terms of *context*, *text variables* and *item variables*. Context refer to the theme or setting of the texts. Text variables refer to parameters such as text type, text format, appropriate length and complexity. Item variables comprise the cognitive competencies being assessed, and item formats used to frame the item. Items presented in the Reading Literacy domain will generally be presented as units that include a reading text and items that assess comprehension of the text.¹

1.1.1 Contexts

This domain encompasses various purposes and contexts in which reading takes place. Therefore, to ensure a broad coverage of contexts, the texts included in the assessment will be categorised as *personal*, *local* and *global*. Appropriate representation of each category will be ensured. Definitions of different contexts are provided below.

Personal contexts are those that have individual focus. Reading tasks fitting a personal context include those that are primarily for self-enjoyment or development, such as reading a text for information or pleasure, e.g. reading a story.

Local contexts have an interactive focus requiring engagement with other individuals or with elements of the community, including the nation. This type of context involves day-to-day situations and activities at home, school, local community and the country where the focus of thought and action lies in connections and interactions with people or objects to which the learners are familiar with. Reading texts reflecting a local context include a letter from a friend, a school timetable or a description of one's hometown or the country.

Global contexts have an external focus on broader situations that may affect whole communities or countries, or have an even wider, global relevance. Texts fitting this context type include those dealing with broad social issues such as public policy, transport systems, and advertisements.

¹.

Reading texts that reflect a global context include a newspaper report, articles in a magazine or a historical description.

Table 2.2. Distribution of contexts in the Reading Literacy assessment

Contexts	Grade III	Grade VI	Grade IX
Personal	50-60%	40-50%	15-25%
Local	30-40%	35-45%	30-40%
Global	5-15%	10-20%	40-50%

The range has been calculated based on the design and context of the English curriculum.

2.4.2 Text variables

Text variables refer to parameters such as text type, text format, appropriate length and complexity.

Whatever the text variable, the following criteria shall be used while selecting the text:

- be appropriate in content and relevant to the students' age at the target grade level;
- cater to a range of student abilities at grades III, VI and IX;
- be self-contained (for example, an extract from a longer magazine article should require no prior knowledge from the reader about the topic or the article);
- contain materials that students are not likely to have encountered; for example, it should not come from a textbook or other frequently-used teaching resource;
- be factually accurate;
- be grammatically correct;
- be appropriately illustrated;
- be appropriate in terms of socio-cultural context;
- be gender-sensitive;
- be fair, that is, equally accessible for students from all backgrounds likely to take part in the assessment; and
- be inclusive in the usage of texts and graphics to support and extend meaning.

2.4.2.1 Text types

Text type refers to genre, orientation and broad purpose of a text. It is important to ensure a wide representation of text types in the assessment as different types of text have different inherent features. It is essential that an assessment of Reading Literacy comprises as wide a range of texts as possible. The types of text to be included in the NEA are described below.

Imaginative texts represent feelings, ideas and mental pictures using words or visual images. Such texts present and develop characters, events and themes, and deal with questions relating to *when*, or *in what sequence*. The primary goal is to entertain the readers. Examples of imaginative texts are short stories, plays, comic strips etc.

Descriptive texts present information about people, objects and abstract concepts or constructs; these kinds of texts address *what* questions and some *how* questions. Description includes forms of writing sometimes referred to as exposition. Examples of descriptive texts include describing a person, place, plant, problem, feeling or a phenomenon, or, at the level of precursor skills, a label for an image.

Persuasive texts deal with opinions and points of view, and are used to persuade the reader. They address some of the *which* and *why* questions. Examples of persuasive texts are a letter to an editor, a book review, an advertisement, a job application and a discussion of the benefits or disadvantages of a certain public policy.

Instructional texts explain what to do in order to complete a specified task, and thus address some of the *how* and *when* questions. Examples of instructional texts are giving directions for finding a location, listing materials and steps required to make an object, and explaining what to do in an emergency.

Transactional texts aim to achieve a specific purpose involving an exchange of information between two or more parties, such as arranging for something to be done. Transaction is represented by reading tasks such as a message from a friend or correspondence related to the delivery of goods.

In addition to these text types, the NEA in Bhutan will include items for grade III that involve assessing comprehension of single words, phrases or sentences. These will be categorised as **Labelling**.

The intended proportion of text types at different grade levels is provided in table 2.1.

Table 2.2 Distribution of text types in the Reading Literacy assessment

Type of texts	Grade III	Grade VI	Grade IX
Imaginative	25-35%	20-30%	10-20%
Descriptive	20-30%	30-40%	20-30%
Persuasive	5-15%	10-20%	25-35%
Instructional	10-20%	10-20%	10-20%
Transactional	5-15%	5-15%	10-20%
Labelling	5-15%	0%	0%

The range has been calculated based on the design and content of the English curriculum.

The proportions reflect the importance of different types of texts at different grade levels, and also the likelihood of encountering or using such texts at different age levels. For instance, as students graduate to higher grades, they are more likely to encounter persuasive texts than other types of texts. Students in grade III, however, are much more likely to encounter stories and other imaginative texts.

2.4.2.2 Text formats and length

Texts can be of different formats – continuous, non-continuous and mixed. **Continuous texts** comprising of complete sentences have a traditional paragraph structure. **Non-continuous texts** contain phrases or incomplete sentences, for instance, in the form of bullet points. Materials in the non-continuous text could be organised in text boxes, graphs, diagrams or tables. **Mixed texts** contain both continuous and non-continuous formats within a single text. Examples include a page from a newspaper that comprises prose text and graphs, or several texts on a single theme but in one format such as several opinion pieces by different authors related to a single issue.

It is important to ensure that the range of complexity of texts increases as the grade level increases. Among the various measures of complexity of a text that can be quantified is its length. Therefore, the length of the text used in each grade has been considered as provided below.

Table 2.3 Approximate length of texts in the Reading Literacy assessment

Text Length (all text types)	
Grade III	1-100 words
Grade VI	100-250 words
Grade IX	200-350 words

The approximate text length is based on the time, design and context of the English curriculum framework. The age and cognitive development of students have also been taken into consideration. A further concern is to ensure that the texts are of sufficient length and complexity to allow questions to be asked that assess the full range of reading comprehension sub-skills.

2.4.3 Item variables

Item variables are described in terms of the levels of cognitive processes involved in order to respond to the items.

1.1.1.1 Cognitive Processes

The Reading Literacy assessment includes four Processes as defined below.

Code	Processes	Description
R1	Locate information	Students need to locate and extract a specific piece of information explicitly stated in the text. Sometimes the information to be located is found in a single sentence and sometimes it must be gleaned from several paragraphs. This kind of reading has been called ‘reading the lines’ (Gray, 1960) because no inference or only minimal inference is required to complete this kind of task.
R2	Grasp ideas and interpret information	Students need to demonstrate that they have understood an idea being conveyed in the text and have interpreted it correctly. For example, students may need to identify the text’s main idea and/or the sequence of events and/or relationships between ideas, events or characters across the text. In addition, students may need to draw simple conclusions based on their interpretation of the text.
R3	Infer information	Students need to demonstrate an understanding beyond the information and/or ideas stated explicitly in the text, hence they are asked to read between the lines. For example, the students may be asked to identify the text’s underlying

		theme, evaluate its title by examining the text from more than one perspective, and make inferences about the qualities or actions of characters.
R4	Reflect on and evaluate texts	In items testing this process, students are asked to relate and evaluate the information given in the text with what they already know and make judgements. As this skill goes beyond the text itself, it has been called 'reading beyond the lines' (Gray, 1960). The broad range of tasks categorised under this competency include focusing on the intended audience of a text or the attitude of the writer; making an evaluation of an argument or a judgement about a character; explaining the effect of a text feature such as its layout; and comparing behaviour of a character in a story with that of acquaintances.

The intended proportion of items for each Cognitive Process at different grade levels is provided in the table 2.3.

Table 2.4 Distribution of Cognitive Processes in the Reading Literacy assessment

Processes	Grade III	Grade VI	Grade IX
Locate information	35-45%	20-30%	10-20%
Grasp and Interpret	25-35%	30-40%	20-30%
Infer information	15-25%	20-30%	30-40%
Reflect and evaluate	5-15%	10-20%	20-30%

The range has been calculated based on the design and context of the English curriculum.

The distribution of items of various categories across different grade levels shows an increase in the number of items requiring higher-order cognitive processes as the grade level increases. This reflects the idea that as students begin to read, they spend more time decoding and thus need to develop their reading skills more to be able to display higher-order cognitive processes.

Assessing the domain

Each Multiple Choice Question (MCQ) item will, in general, be considered a score point. The Constructed Response Tasks (CRT) items such as those with partial credit may, however, generate multiple score points. A sufficient number of items will be developed to ensure that a proficiency scale can be generated.

The next section defines item formats, provides details of item difficulty and specifies the selected LOs.

2.5.1 Item formats

The assessment will include both MCQs and questions requiring short written responses (CRTs). The intended proportion of these will be the same across grade levels, as provided in the table 2.6.

Table 2.5 Distribution of item formats across all grade levels in the Reading Literacy assessment

Type	Proportion
MCQ	80-85%
CRT	15-20%

2.5.2 Item difficulty

It is important for an assessment of this nature to include items covering a broad range of difficulty levels to ensure that sufficient information can be gathered about students at all ability levels. Therefore, at the time of item development, the team shall develop items spread across different levels of difficulty. Item review and pilot data will be used to ensure that a sufficient number of items from an appropriate spread of difficulty levels are included in the assessment.

Measurable Learning Outcomes

Due to the requirements of a technically robust large-scale assessment it is not possible to measure all LOs defined in a curriculum. Therefore, the LOs have been reviewed and the measurable ones have been selected. In order to ensure that the assessment provides an opportunity for all students to demonstrate their ability, appropriate LOs from two grade levels below and two grade levels above each of the identified grades (III, VI and IX) have been reviewed and included, e.g., the LOs for grade VI assessment include LOs from grade IV to VIII.

Table 2.6 Measurable Learning Outcomes for the Reading Literacy

Grade III	
GI R1	Use meaning, structure and visual cues to read new text.
GI R2	Expand their bank of known words to read simple texts.
G IR3	Recognize new words using meaning, structure and visual cues.
GII R4	Identify simple rhyming words, end rhymes and internal rhymes in poetry.
GI R 5	Read stories, poems, nursery rhymes and songs that introduce students to people, objects and events beyond their immediate environment.
GII R6	Locate and report on information from the text.
GIIR 7	Identify the main idea of a short text.
G IV R 8	Read stories and poems about subjects outside their personal experience.
GIV R9	Read non-fiction texts descriptions of the natural world and explanations of natural phenomena – for knowledge and information.
GV R10	Read fiction and non-fiction texts for explicit and implicit meanings, particularly texts dealing with themes of friendship, cooperation, loyalty, and courage, among others.
GV R11	Employ textual features such as subtitles, diagrams, charts and graphs to help them make meaning with non-fiction texts.
Grade VI	
GIV R1	Read stories and poems about subjects outside their personal experience.
GIV R2	Read non-fiction texts – descriptions of the natural world and explanations of natural phenomena – for knowledge and information.
GV R3	Read fiction and non-fiction texts for explicit and implicit meanings, particularly texts dealing with themes of friendship, cooperation, loyalty, and courage, among others.
GV R4	Employ textual features such as subtitles, diagrams, charts and graphs to help them make meaning with non-fiction texts.
GVI R5	Read various kinds of formal writing – business letters, applications, and invitations – and know their different purposes.
GVI R6	Recognize the difference between fact and opinion in newspapers.
GVI R7	Distinguish points of view (first person narrator, third person narrator).
GVI R8	Identify figurative language in texts – simile, metaphor, personification and onomatopoeia.
GVI R9	Identify the elements of short stories – setting, characters, plot and theme.

GVII R10	Recognise denotative and connotative meanings of words in texts.
GVII R11	Recognise the music in poetry achieved by rhyme and rhythm, alliteration, and assonance.* (*Recognition of the literary devices will be assessed)
GVIII R12	Recognize the emotive effect of words in the texts they read.
Grade IX	
GVIII R1	Identify the features of a variety of texts and use them to support their reading.
GVII R2	Recognize the denotative and connotative effects of words in the texts they read.
GVIII R3	Recognize the emotive effect of words in the texts they read.
GIX R4	Utilise the features of literary texts to help them understand the ideas they encounter in the texts they are reading.
GIX R5	Evaluate the point of view of the writer on issues like right and wrong, justice and injustice, in literature.
GXI R6	Analyse how authors achieve their effects using linguistic, structural and presentational devices – points of view, figurative language, flashback, parallel argument, symbols and image patterns - and use this information to help make meaning with the text.