

## **Assessment of Social Science and Commerce Textbooks and Teaching Learning Processes**

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The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) brought out model syllabi and textbooks for Class I – XII on the basis of National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF 2005). These curricular materials have been adopted or adapted and used in a considerable number of schools in India. The present study is an attempt to understand and assess the utility of Classes IX to XII Social Sciences (History, Geography, Political Science, Sociology and Economics) and Commerce syllabi and textbooks in classrooms. The emphasis is laid on teacher’s organisation of classroom practices— use of textbooks, pedagogical approaches, opportunities given to promote activity based learning, classroom assessment practices and student’s learning levels. It also attempted to understand perception of teachers and students about curricular materials and desirable curricular goals incorporated in curricular materials. To elaborate, this study attempted to examine whether the use of syllabi and textbooks has resulted in the shift from teacher-centred to student-centred classroom practices, changes in assessment practices and student’s learning levels in social sciences and commerce subjects and reduction in stress among students and teachers. In addition to these, the study also attempted to find answer to the questions such as whether students were able to connect the social sciences and commerce curricular

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contents with their immediate environment and what was the extent of teachers understanding of national curricular concerns?

Forty-eight government and private-aided schools affiliated to three Boards viz., Central Board of Secondary Education (five schools), Haryana (19 schools) and Uttarakhand Secondary and Higher Secondary Examination Board (24 schools) participated in the study. These schools are run by the state education departments of Uttarakhand (16 schools), Haryana (17 schools), private educational trusts and funded by State Governments (2 in Haryana and 8 in Uttarakhand), *Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti* (NVS, 2 in Haryana and 1 in Uttarakhand) and *Kendriya Vidyalaya Samiti* (1 KVS each in Haryana and Uttarakhand).

The schools included in the study followed NCERT syllabus and were prescribed to use NCERT textbooks. As many as 200 teachers teaching social sciences for Classes IX to X, sociology and commerce for Classes XI and XII and 2500 students studying in Classes IX to XII in these schools participated in the study. Nine tools consisting of questionnaires, classroom observation schedules, focus group discussion schedule for students and teachers, achievement tests, school profile and checklist and field notes were used to collect qualitative and quantitative data from students, teachers and schools. Mixed methods approach and triangulation were followed to analyse the data.

The key findings and observations of the present study briefly describes about; (i) the use of NCERT syllabus and textbooks, (ii) perception of students and teachers on syllabus and textbooks (iii) nature of social sciences and commerce classrooms, (iv) connecting school curriculum with local environment and daily lives, (v) understanding of national curricular concerns, (vi) changes in assessment practices, (vii) students' learning levels, (viii) curricular overburden and stress. In Haryana, teachers used NCERT textbooks in 17 out of 30 classrooms. In Uttarakhand, 22 out of 29 teachers used NCERT textbooks. NCERT textbooks were used by teachers particularly for Classes IX to X. In Classes XI and XII, mostly private publishers' textbooks were used. The access to and use of textbooks in schools is driven by examination system. The research team observed that NCERT textbooks were not widely used in many schools and particularly in Haryana.

The content presentation in NCERT textbooks received only a satisfactory level appreciation by teachers in the study schools. Social Sciences and commerce teachers reported that language,

presentation and the quality of narratives in NCERT textbooks was of 'high standard' and was meant for urban students. According to them, students studying in rural schools were not able to connect the content with their local environment. Language and subject-specific terminologies used in NCERT's hindi-version textbooks were major sources of discomfort for both students and teachers. Many terms used in textbooks were not used in common parlance. Not only the number of topics was more in Social Sciences courses for Classes IX and X, particularly for, but also some chapters of these Social Sciences textbooks chapters were found lengthy. However, students appreciated the visuals and general layout of NCERT textbooks. Both students and teachers appreciated the variety of questions given in the textbooks. Though both students and teachers appreciated activities given in textbooks, but most activities suggested in textbooks were not conducted in schools. Teachers reported not having enough time to conduct activities given in the textbooks. According to teachers, maps were insufficient for teaching history and geography. Teachers expected that data and information given in textbooks should be update. As fact-based questions are asked in examinations, students are required to supply answers with latest information. The pedagogical reasons for the use of subject-specific textbooks introduced in these classes by the NCERT and suggested in the curriculum framework documents were not understood by teachers. Teachers found difficult to see the linkages between subject objectives and how they were incorporated in different textbooks. Teacher's understanding of what is happening in the knowledge domains of different social sciences and commerce within and outside India was limited due to which they did not understand why topics and themes given in the textbooks are organised and presented differently. Mostly teachers thought in terms of subject boundaries. Inter-disciplinary approaches followed in some topics were not appreciated by them. Limited understanding of changes in social sciences and commerce syllabus and textbooks and their philosophical underpinnings as suggested in NCF 2005 (for example, constructivism as a way of organising teaching-learning process) was true even for KV and JNV teachers who worked closely with NCERT relatively for longer period and underwent training within their system and in NCERT. The perception of gap about various themes was wide and significant in Haryana than in Uttarakhand. For example, teachers felt that there was no need to teach sustainable development and people's

movements in the geography textbooks. Social sciences teachers also considered that it was not their job to teach history of culture, literature and language included in the NCERT history textbooks. Rather, they felt that more contents related to Indian history could be included in the syllabus. Social sciences teachers could not recognise that Indian history is being taught continuously for three years, i.e., in Classes VI, VII and VIII.

Most social sciences and commerce teachers in the sample school classes relied heavily on writing on board, reading the textbook and explaining the points. There were a few hands-on activities, group works and projects. Teacher posing questions and students answering them was the only interaction between teachers and students. Many a times, questions asked were very superficial, without making the child inquisitive and were just based on lower-order thinking skills like remembering facts. Textbooks were used for testing the learners' rote learning skills. Only in a few classes, teachers encouraged students' active participation. The discussions carried out in classrooms in the form of questions and answers did not provoke the learners. Many students were inactive during class lectures. However, teachers managed classes better. At times, they could appreciate students' answers and help them to find answers, though the quality of questions, as pointed out earlier, was superficial and recall-based. In most classrooms, students were silent, docile and passive. All these indicate that social sciences and commerce teachers' classroom practices are generally teacher-centred.

A major section of people in Haryana and Uttarakhand reside in rural areas and agriculture is the major source of livelihood. Cutting across schools, a few students connected social science concepts and topics with daily life issues such as agriculture, weather, monsoon, village panchayat, environment, state and national level elections. Girl students highlighted gender discrimination they face in their homes and shared in classrooms. Occasionally caste and religion find space in a few classroom discussions. However, all these depend mainly on the teachers' interest and motivation. Also, the study found students not getting enough opportunities to share their lived experiences in classrooms. It was common to see the students not being able to differentiate experiences which can be shared in classroom from those which need not be. In a few occasions, rural students were not able to understand the urban-centric contents in Business Studies course such as multinational

companies and functioning of corporate sector. Many teachers reported that students were not “intelligent enough” to connect social sciences and commerce concepts with daily life experiences. Compared to the scope available in NCERT textbooks, the amount of discussion taking place in classrooms, as reported by students and teachers, was relatively less. However, a new beginning is made in the social sciences and commerce classrooms, providing scope for discussions on social issues.

Teachers did endorse that the textbooks, particularly the political science textbooks, provided opportunities for developing the national curricular concerns. However, their perception towards national curricular concerns NCC as expected in national curriculum framework documents was not satisfactory. This was true for teachers in both the states and centrally funded sample schools.

The sample schools in both Haryana and Uttarakhand introduced changes in the assessment practices in the light of NCF-2005. The state of Haryana introduced semester system from 2006 for Classes IX-XII. Uttarakhand introduced CBSE pattern prevailed prior to 2009. JNVs and KVs introduce assessment practices as directed by the CBSE and their respective administrations. There are a few similarities and differences in the states and central boards’ assessment practices. The end-of-the semester examinations of Haryana schools for Classes IX and X are almost similar to the CBSE summative assessment. However, the CBSE gives emphasis on both formative and summative assessment equally, whereas the Haryana Board still gives emphasis on closed-book written examinations at the end of each semester. While social sciences and commerce students of CBSE schools reported conducting project works and hands-on activities more frequently, there was a complete absence of these in Haryana and Uttarakhand Board schools. Even if these activities were noticed in some schools, most of them were carried out for name sake. There was a clear divide between students and teachers with regard to their perception on the semester system in Haryana. While students reported liking the semester system, it was a major source of stress for teachers. Students reported that they need not have to study vast syllabus and textbooks for closed-book examinations, whereas teachers felt that they were pressurised to teach large amount of syllabus within the short span of time, to prepare students to take on Board level semester examinations. Teachers had to set question papers for

monthly tests called Unit Tests held twice in a semester, prepare and submit mark details of these tests and at the same time prepare students to take on the semester examinations. Uttarakhand also changed the examination system but not as that of Haryana. Rather, they followed CBSE in a half-hearted manner leaving many issues unresolved. Marks were allotted for continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) and for doing projects, yet teachers and students were not found doing projects and activities as seen in CBSE schools. The CCE introduced by the CBSE has increased the workload for the teachers working in JNVs and KVs. Class XI students of the CBSE schools reported difficulties in transition-moving to annual examinations from CCE system.

Though the semester system has reduced the stress levels of students in Haryana, as pointed out earlier, it has increased the stress levels among the teachers. One important source of stress for the students in general in both Haryana and Uttarakhand was the use of five books—four brought out by NCERT (four subjects—history, geography, economics and political science) and one (disaster management) brought out by the CBSE / SCERT. Another source of stress was the non-comprehensible nature of contents particularly the NCERT Hindi version history textbooks. Both teachers and students found it difficult with regard to some contents in history textbooks.

Students' learning achievement in the sample schools was low—less than 40 per cent. Their learning levels were relatively better in *social sciences* and *sociology* than in commerce subjects—*business studies* and *accountancy*. Learning gaps across school managements was high in Haryana than in Uttarakhand. Compared to CBSE school students, students' learning achievement was relatively low in schools run by state governments of Haryana and Uttarakhand. However, the learning achievement gap was not wide and consistent across subjects. Compared to Uttarakhand, the learning achievement of Haryana students was better. There was a wide gap in the learning levels of boys and girls in Haryana with boys' performing better in some subjects. In Uttarakhand, girls' learning levels were better in almost all subjects at the higher secondary stage. Learning levels in Classes IX–X social sciences were moderate and similar for both boys and girls. The learning achievement of Other Backward Class (OBC) students were better than the students belonging to other categories. This was particularly found in Class XII *sociology* and *accountancy* both

in Haryana and Uttarakhand. Though urban students in general had better access to learning resources, this has not resulted in better learning achievement in the sample schools. The learning levels across Classes IX to XII suggest that students were able to recall what they have learned in Classes IX and XI much better than what was taught in Classes X and XII. It was expected that students at the higher secondary stage are grown up and they can understand abstract ideas. The level of learning achievement in different subjects and topics within subjects indicated that students had difficulty in dealing with theoretical and legal aspects. Students answered most topics which were related to their daily lives. However, as a caveat, considering the period and the way in which achievement tests were conducted in schools, many of these evidences should be treated as preliminary observations which require further investigation.

Education is in the Concurrent List of the Indian Constitution and State Governments play crucial role in providing schooling in India. Although some states prepare syllabi and textbooks on their own, states aspire to use national level syllabi and textbooks and expect that this would result in improvement of teaching learning processes in schools. The present study shows that this need not be so. The present study reveals that merely following NCERT syllabus and recommending NCERT textbooks to schools may not result in higher learning achievement.