

Effective Use of Social Science Textbooks: A Neglected Aspect of Education in Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

Textbooks are part of the curriculum found in today's classrooms because they allegedly provide a framework for thinking about what will be tested and taught, to whom, when, and how. Textbooks are one of the most important educational inputs: texts reflect basic ideas about a national culture, and ... are often a flashpoint of cultural struggle and controversy. They convey a global understanding of history and of the rules of society as well as norms of living with other people. Social science textbooks have traditionally been styled as a simple narration of facts. The idea that textbooks must provide a format which invites the active participation of students has rarely been put into practice. Instead, there has been a linear monologue, punctuated only to check whether or not students have dutifully accepted what was uttered. In the state of J&K, the quality of Social Science textbooks and classroom teaching has not risen to expectations. Too often there has been the lament that social sciences are dull and uninspiring. The most common complaint is that they are meant only for rote learning and cramming. The paper aims by offering recommendations on improving Social Sciences textbook usage in Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: textbooks, perceptions, approaches, issues, teaching and training,

Introduction

Textbooks are part of the curriculum found in today's classrooms because they allegedly provide a framework for thinking about what will be tested and taught, to whom, when, and how. Despite its role in classrooms, little attention has been given to the role of curriculum from textbooks and its impact in teacher preparation and teacher development, particularly in teacher education courses.¹ Textbooks are at the heart of educational enterprise, as they offer students "a rich array of new and potentially interesting facts, and open the door to a world of fantastic experience".² The literature provides evidence of the significant role of textbooks as "primary vehicles for delivering content knowledge, for determining in large measure what goes on in a class", and for assessing what students do and do not learn. It has been identified that access to and availability of textbooks is a particularly significant factor in predicting academic achievement. In this post-modern world of technological advancement, rapidly changing markets and increasing competition, teachers are faced with new academic and pedagogical challenges. In order to prepare students, teachers must teach more challenging and extensive subject areas develop different instructional strategies and reach a wider range of students. Having a high-quality curriculum to guide instruction is an important part of meeting these challenges.³ Therefore, it is necessary that curriculum reforms in Jammu and Kashmir need to take place in such a way that gaps between the curricular framework and the textbook are bridged and the needs of learners from diverse backgrounds are reflected in curricula and textbooks. Curricula and the textbooks should be more meaningful and relevant for the life experiences of the learners in their own locale and should prepare them for real life. Practically, the social science textbooks of my State (Jammu & Kashmir) need improvements, not to make the learners alienated but to identify with their own local environment to lend them a sense of belonging and identity. And certainly teachers need help in making intelligent use of the social science textbooks we have and those the future will hold for us. And students, especially, the more capable ones, should be led to see textbooks as only the beginning, a springboard for further explorations into other sources of knowledge.

The World Bank, for example, suggests that reforms be initiated in relation to textbooks in developing countries; textbooks being a "critical part of education, as necessary as classroom itself, as indispensable as the classroom teacher".⁴ This is in fact true; in the area of teachers education in Jammu and Kashmir indicates that teachers mostly teach to impart basic knowledge or textbook content to students. Such an approach typically results in poor academic performance in Jammu & Kashmir.

As evident from the above discussion, textbooks serve a central role in educational quality reform. Reported on several attempts that have been made to update Jammu & Kashmir Social Science textbooks in order to address students' needs and improve quality. What is missing from these attempts, however, is an emphasis on exploring the relationship and interaction between the social science textbooks and the teacher; and how they make use of this resource, (i.e., to identify whether the books actually work as designed, whether teachers can make use of the textbooks as intended, and whether students truly understand the material).⁵

"The textbook is, in fact, the heart of the school and without the ubiquitous text there would be no schools, at least as we know them."

(Ian Westbury, cited in Oakes & Saunders, 2004)

Role of Social Science teachings in Jammu & Kashmir

The social sciences encompass diverse concerns of society and include a wide a range of content, drawn from the disciplines of history, geography, political science, economics and sociology. The selection and organisation of material into a meaningful social science curriculum, enabling students to develop a critical understanding of society, is therefore a challenging task. The possibilities of including new dimensions and concerns are immense especially in view of the student's own life experiences. It is important to reinstate the significance of the social sciences by not only highlighting its increasing relevance for a job in the rapidly expanding service sector, but by pointing to its indispensability in laying the foundations for an analytical and creative mindset. It is often presumed that only natural and physical phenomena lend themselves to scientific inquiry, and that knowledge areas pertaining to the human sciences cannot be, by their very nature "*scientific*". But it is necessary to recognise that the social sciences lend themselves to scientific inquiry just as much as the natural and physical sciences do, as well as to articulate the ways in which the methods employed by social sciences are distinct (but in no way inferior) to those of the natural and physical sciences. The social sciences carry a normative responsibility to create and widen the popular base for human values, namely freedom, equality, trust, mutual respect, respect for diversity, etc. Thus, social science teaching basically should be aimed at investing in a child a moral and mental energy so as to provide her with the ability to think independently and deal with the social forces that threaten these values, without losing her individuality. Social Science teaching can achieve this by promoting children's ability to take initiative to critically reflect on social issues that have a bearing on the creative coexistence between individual good and collective good. Critical reflection pre-supposes a comprehensive curriculum in which learners – both teachers and children – participate in generating knowledge without any latent and manifest forces of coercion.⁶ It is through this non-coercive and participatory mode that children and teachers of Jammu & Kashmir stand the best chance of making teaching and learning interesting as well as enjoyable. The disciplines of Jammu and Kashmir State that make up the social sciences, namely history, geography, political science and economics, have distinct methodologies that often justify the preservation of boundaries. The boundaries of disciplines need to be opened up and a plurality of approaches may be applied to understand a given phenomenon. For an enabling curriculum, certain themes that facilitate interdisciplinary thinking are required.

Popular Perceptions of Social Sciences in Jammu & Kashmir

The popular perception of social sciences in Jammu and Kashmir is that it is a non-utility subject. As a result, low self esteem governs the classroom-transaction process, with both teachers and students feeling uninterested in comprehending its contents. From the primary stages of schooling, it is often suggested to students that the natural sciences are superior to the social sciences, and are the domain of 'bright' students and there is a widespread belief that social science merely transmits information and is too centred, on the text, which is required to be memorised for examinations. The curriculum of majority of Public schools of Jammu and Kashmir is that, the social science is concerned a boring subject and should be taught in the last 40 minutes of the class, when the learners are too exhaust. Because, this is a fact that no such teaching aid are available (except globe) in majority of Public schools of Jammu and Kashmir. And the reality is that the content of social science textbooks is considered to be unconnected to daily realities. It is also felt that the examination paper rewards the memorisation of these superfluous 'facts', with the children's conceptual understanding being largely ignored. There is a general perception that not many desirable job options are open to students specialising in the social sciences.

Thus, Social science teaching needs to be revitalized towards helping the learner acquire knowledge and skills in an interactive environment. The teaching of social sciences must adopt methods that promote creativity, aesthetics, and critical perspectives, and enable children to draw relationships between past and present, to understand changes taking place in society. It is a known fact that more graphics and colors help in better learning because they stimulate more areas in the brain. Problem solving, dramatization and role play are some hither-to under explored strategies that could be employed. Teaching should utilize greater resources of audio-visual materials, including photographs, charts and maps, and replicas of archaeological and material cultures. In order to make the process of learning participative there is a need to shift from mere imparting of information to debate and discussion. This approach to learning will keep both the learner and teacher alive to social realities. Concepts should be clarified to the students through the lived experiences of individuals and communities. It has often been observed that cultural, social and class differences generate their own biases, prejudices and attitudes in classroom contexts. The approach to teaching therefore needs to be open-ended. Teachers should discuss different dimensions of social reality in the class, and work towards creating increasing self-awareness amongst themselves and in the learners.⁷ And, it is important to reinstate the importance of the social sciences in Jammu and Kashmir by not only highlighting their increasing relevance for jobs in the rapidly expanding service sector like UPSC and KAS examinations but also by pointing to their indispensability in laying the foundations of an analytical and creative mind.

Some Major Issues

My analysis as a teacher identifies Social Science textbooks related issues in Jammu and Kashmir:-

Content Load: The National Focus Group endorsed the point made by the Yash Pal Committee, as well as by NCFSE 2000, that we should try to minimise the emphasis on retention of information without comprehension. Given that syllabus framers and textbook writers need to choose what to include from a mass of relevant information, the effort should not be to convey as many facts as possible. Instead, a focus on concepts and the ability to analyse socio-political realities should be stressed.⁸ If we take the example of XII class Political Science text book of JKBOSE, the contents load are too large which increases the mental pressure not only to the teachers but the learners as well as their parents.

Plurality and Local Content: In a plural society like ours, it is important that all regions and social groups be able to relate to the textbooks. This is often impossible given the centralised nature of textbook production. Therefore, it is necessary to work towards institutionalising an alternate, more decentralised mechanism of knowledge-generation in which teachers, students, and the local community feel empowered to bring in their own realities to the content of social studies. Relevant local content should be part of the teaching-learning process, ideally transacted through activities drawing on local teaching-learning resources.⁹ All these good features are not seen in the Political science textbooks of class X, XI and even in class XII of JKBOSE.

Scientific Rigour: It is often presumed that only natural and physical phenomena lend themselves to scientific inquiry, and that human sciences (history, geography, economics, political science, etc.) cannot be, by their very nature, 'scientific'. In view of the 'higher status' and legitimacy enjoyed by the natural sciences, some practitioners of the social sciences seek to imitate the methods of the physical and natural sciences. In light of the above, it is necessary to recognise that the social sciences lend themselves to scientific inquiry just as much as the natural and physical sciences do, as well as to indicate ways in which the methods employed by the social sciences are distinct to those of the natural and physical sciences. Social Science is a very interesting subject as it is related to our social environment not only to Jammu and Kashmir but throughout the globe. Therefore while teaching Social Science, realistic picturisation of subject matter is very important like discussed through narratives, case studies and exercises etc. It is the responsibility of the concerned Government of Jammu and Kashmir to provide all necessary things like class room furniture, proper seating arrangement and all types of teaching materials (audios, visuals, maps, pictures and projectors etc.).

Normative Concerns: The social sciences carry a normative responsibility to create and widen the popular base for human values, namely freedom, trust, mutual respect, democracy, equality and respect for diversity. Given this, social science teaching should aim at investing in children a critical moral and mental energy to make them alert to the social forces that threaten these values. Through the discussion of concerns such as threats to the environment, caste/class inequality, state repression, through an interdisciplinary approach, the textbook should stimulate the child's thought process and creativity.

Interrelationship among Disciplines: The disciplines that make up the social sciences, namely history, geography, political science, and economics, have distinct methodologies that often justify the preservation of boundaries. The boundaries of disciplines need to be opened up, and a plurality of approaches applied to understand a given phenomenon. For an enabling curriculum, certain themes that facilitate interdisciplinary thinking are required. These themes should be culturally relevant, and concepts introduced bearing in mind the age of the child. There is a need to select themes where different disciplinary approaches can facilitate an in-depth and multiple understanding. However, not all themes can be discussed in an interdisciplinary manner. A careful selection of a few themes needs to be made, as well as having separate chapters relating to different disciplines.¹⁰

Teaching Approaches of Social Sciences in Jammu and Kashmir

While framing the new Social Science textbooks in Jammu and Kashmir, it is an attempt to execute the national curriculum 2005, in which investment in information, associating children with life outside school, reducing the tradition of textual knowledge and learning by memorization and to work in the direction of child centered learning. These points should be taken into consideration:-

Beginning each chapter: - The chapters should begin with an introductory boxes and a large visual. These are designed to give an idea of what will be discussed in the chapter. Most introductory boxes have questions to engage children to draw out their own experiences. Teachers are encouraged to also use their own visuals and questions.¹¹ The Madhya Pradesh Board of Secondary education has decided that contents and skills related to the chapters have been given under the heading of 'We will study' in the beginning. This will help the teachers while teaching and evaluation.¹²

In-text questions and exercises: - First, to help the teacher assess how much of the chapter the child has understood by connecting with and constructing her own knowledge. Second, many in-text exercises are designed to expand the child's understanding of concepts by connecting them with her own experiences. The questions under 'Discussion' are meant for discussion in small groups, and then sharing with the class. These are

very important for developing children's understanding of concepts and allowing children to learn from one another. These should in no way be ignored for any reason. All the chapters should be in-text questions ('Think', 'Discuss', 'Write Down' and 'Find Out') and exercises. Third, they help the student recall and make connections with what has been taught earlier.

End text questions: - The end text questions are designed to encourage the student to understand and think, rather than simply memorise the chapters. Students must be encouraged to write the answers in their own words.

Use of images: - The illustrations and photographs are as, or sometimes more, important than the text. Images can help children visualize situations they are not familiar with. The teacher is encouraged to use other relevant visuals as well whenever possible. Visuals can be found in the library, newspapers, and magazines and on the internet.¹³ It is a known fact that more graphics and colors help in better learning because they stimulate more areas in the brain. Madhya Pradesh Board of Secondary education has decided that Maximum efforts to provide information through graphs, pictures and maps have been made.

Use of narrative: - Narratives are very informative in the Social Science textbooks. There are several narratives – both fiction and non-fiction – to enable the child to understand ideas and institutions. The narratives should be used to encourage children to think and discuss. Students should be encouraged to identify with the narratives as much as possible. In some places students should be asked to write their own narratives. The students should be encouraged to write and narrate these as creatively as possible. They must also be used to make linkages with concepts taught in other subjects.

Making sense of new terms: - Special care should be taken to make the language of the book as simple as possible. However since English is not the first language for a majority of children in Jammu and Kashmir, some terms may be new to children. Such terms should be discussed with children in their own language like Kashmiri and Urdu. The meaning of a word cannot be just another word. You must make sense of the idea behind it, by discussing how and where it is used. It is not just words like 'administration' or 'livelihood' but also simpler terms like 'shepherd' that need to be discussed in this way. Moreover, children should be encouraged to fearlessly speak and write their own thoughts without focusing too much on their spellings and grammar to begin with. This is the only way their understanding will deepen.¹⁴

Therefore, it's hoped that the new Social Science textbooks will help the learners to grasp the information related to the subject in an easy and simple manner. It should also help to develop their skills and qualitative development in the subject. Such types of books will definitely help in children's' participation in learning, reducing mental pressure and making the contents interesting.

"The first thing that strikes you is, again, the look of the book. The pie-charts and maps have had a face-lift. Inclusions like "Did You Know?" are very interesting. Graphics and the quality of pictures too have improved. Attempts made to make the book much better are visible in the revamped exercises and inclusions like the crosswords".¹⁵

Thus, it is the moral and constitutional duty of JKBOSE to review and revision the school curriculum to make the social science textbooks student-centred and in consonance with the demands of society, in the light of the recommendations of The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005. Definitely, the prosperity of the school curriculum strengthens the social fabric of society. As societies are dynamic and evolving, the school curriculum too must constantly respond to the changing demands of thinking and developing society.

It is the responsibility of JKBOSE to redevelop or revise all the Social Science textbooks and curriculum from Primary Stage up to Higher Secondary Stage, in such a way that it will ameliorate the problems of curricular burden. The textbooks should be designed keeping the original script of NCERT intact, with local contextualisation within the diverse socio-cultural realities of the children of Jammu & Kashmir, which will definitely add the beauty of the book and help the students to explore their local social, economic, cultural and political milieu as active learners, while constructing knowledge for themselves when provided the right learning environment.

Approaches to Teaching Social Science

Social Science is a very interesting subject as it is related to our social environment. But the teaching of it is much generalized. This also affects the desired results. Therefore, teaching realistic picturisation of subject matter is very important. It is necessary to revitalize social science teaching, to help the learner acquire knowledge and skills in an interactive environment. It has often been noticed that there is an increasing gap between the promises made in the curriculum and what is happening at the level of the child's perception. It is important that the process of learning should promote the spirit of inquiry and creativity among both children and teachers. The teacher is an important medium of transacting the curriculum and simplifying concepts in a language comprehensible to students. Therefore, teaching should be seen as an opportunity for teachers and students to learn together, thus developing a democratic culture within institutions. In order to make the process of learning participatory, there is a need to shift from the mere imparting of information to involvement in debate and discussion. This approach to learning will keep both learners and teachers alive to social realities. Concepts

should be clarified to the students through the lived experiences of individuals and communities. For example, the concept of social equality can be understood better through citing the lived experiences of communities that make up the social and cultural milieu of the child. It has also often been observed that cultural, social, and class differences generate their own biases, prejudices, and attitudes in classroom contexts. The approach to teaching, therefore, needs to be open-ended. Teachers should discuss different dimensions of social reality in the class, and work towards creating increasing self-awareness both amongst themselves as well as among the learners. The provision of supplementary material in the classroom will increase the autonomy of the teacher vis-à-vis the textbook and also provide a level of confidence in planning activities and projects. The need for a finite syllabus to incorporate infinite cultural and local contexts can be taken care of through the generation of these materials. The NFG also discussed the adverse effects that the minimal provisions of infrastructure and poorly qualified Para-teachers have on the learning of the discipline. The linkages between adequate infrastructure and the teaching of social studies is not often commented upon because instruction in the subject requires no obvious space like the way in which a laboratory is required for the teaching of science. However, the effective teaching of social science is crucially linked to the efficient functioning of the school library and of teachers who are trained to use the resources that the library provides towards the creation of challenging projects and activities. This shift away from rote learning to comprehension through the implementation of projects can only take place if the teacher is able to assess the child's understanding through other means rather than just the completion of the project. A more nuanced assessment of whether the child is learning through project work might help mitigate the present 'manufacturing' of these projects in the market as ready-made objects that parents can buy. It will also help to modify the prevailing belief that increased marks on project work translates into 'easy marks' to be gained with the least effort.¹⁶

Training for Teachers

The teaching of social science has not been very effective partly due to the lack of an adequate emphasis on teacher's training programmes. While the pre-service training syllabus needs a thorough review, the in-service training should also be given attention. The state has to provide the necessary logistical and financial support for effective and frequent in-service training so that the teachers' understanding of the subject is updated. The use of Teachers' Handbooks in the different disciplines of the social sciences should be made mandatory. The textbooks, instead of being treated as the 'only source', should be seen as 'one of the sources' for developing one understands. Indeed, many problems like low self-esteem, curricular load, cramming, and rote learning can be addressed more effectively by an empowered teacher whose capabilities have been enhanced through teacher training. The outcome of social science research studies could be made accessible to the vast numbers of teachers through serious and effective training both at the pre-service and the in-service levels. Thus, it is the duty of State Institute of Education (SIE) Jammu and Kashmir to organise the pre-service and in-service training of Teacher Education with special emphasis on content training, organise workshops, preparation of instructional material and organise meetings, conferences, quiz competition, seminars, lectures and demonstrations and the most important is to organise short training programmes/ courses in modern management techniques for education officers and administrators.

Materials for Teaching -Learning

The following issues may also be taken into account while developing teaching-learning materials.

- Equal teaching time and marks should be allocated to the various components in the social sciences and the time table should be rotational to each and every schools of JK.
- A right balance should be maintained in the distribution of themes among the different disciplines, and wherever possible interrelationships should be indicated.
- Topics should be logically arranged in the right sequence, maintaining consistency throughout the syllabus.
- In textbook production, it should be ensured that all sections of the book have an equal numbers of chapters.
- Framing the curriculum at various levels in a synchronized manner to enable the students to learn in a stress free environment.
- Develop the study material with latest knowledge application in practical life and value oriented.
- A glossary of technical terms after each chapter and an index at the end of the book should be provided.
- Before publication, the textbooks should be vetted to check inadvertent gender and social bias.
- Before publication, the textbooks should be examined to avoid duplication and ensure uniformity of style.¹⁷

Conclusion

Textbooks are at the heart of educational enterprise, as they offer students a rich array of new and potentially

interesting facts, and open the door to a world of fantastic experience. The social sciences encompass diverse concerns of society and include a wide a range of content, drawn from the disciplines of history, geography, political science, economics and sociology. The selection and organisation of material into a meaningful social science curriculum, enabling students to develop a critical understanding of society, is therefore a challenging task. The possibilities of including new dimensions and concerns are immense especially in view of the student's own life experiences. It is important to reinstate the significance of the social sciences by not only highlighting its increasing relevance for a job in the rapidly expanding service sector, but by pointing to its indispensability in laying the foundations for an analytical and creative mindset.

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