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## What ails the teaching of Social Sciences in Schools?

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### Abstract

#### Keywords

Social Sciences;  
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Upper Primary;  
Secondary.

Social Sciences has been a core component of the School Curriculum, and no other school subject is so intrinsically linked to the achievement of the aims of School Education, as is the subject of Social Sciences. Regrettably, however, the subject has failed to gain the attention and interest of teachers, school administrators, learners, and all stake-holders, by-and-large. Consequently, Social Sciences as a school subject is perceived to be among the least important. While the very nature and composition of the subject itself possess a challenge, the indifference in attitude towards the subject has also compounded the problems associated with the teaching-learning of the subject. This study has attempted to find out some of the problems associated with the teaching of the subject, from the perspective of the academic and professional backgrounds of Social Sciences teachers in schools of Kohima town in Nagaland.

### Introduction

The Social Sciences subject has been a core component of the school curriculum in India following the directives of the NPE, 1986, and the consequent *National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education: A Framework, 1988* (NCERT). Prior to this, the subjects of History, Geography and Civics were studied as separate subjects at the Upper Primary level, with the addition of Economics/Commercial Geography at the Secondary stage. Since 1988, however, the components were integrated into a

single subject of Social Sciences from the Upper Primary level onwards. The National Curriculum Framework, 1988, reiterated that, 'Social sciences is perhaps the singular curricular area which can prove to be the most effective tool for providing education in the context of all the core components indicated in the NPE-86'.

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF), 2000, lay continued emphasis on the important role of Social Sciences in 'facilitating the learners to grow into well informed and responsible citizens, who could

participate and contribute in the process of nation-building' and in developing a curriculum which helps in developing an emotionally intelligent learning society that 'learns how to learn' and also 'learns to live together'. The NCF-2005 has observed that the Social Sciences carry the unique responsibility of creating a strong sense of human values, and hence, its teaching should aim at generating in students a critical moral and mental energy, inculcating perspective and knowledge towards developing a 'just and peaceful society', thereby acknowledging its overarching importance in education.

As a school subject, Social Sciences draws its content from disciplines such as History, Geography, Political Science, Economics, Sociology, and an increasing range of emerging global issues and problems, thereby encompassing diverse concerns of society. The goals of studying this subject not only covers a wide range of content but also a variety of skills and attitudes required of intelligent, pro-active and responsible members of society. The subject is not only aimed at developing well-informed citizens but more importantly, laying the foundations of analytical and creative minds, which is indispensable in preparing citizens for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Given the vastness and complexity of the content and the objectives that need to be achieved, teaching Social Sciences is a complex and challenging process, requiring teachers who are academically as well as professionally competent. It has been rightly commented by the *Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE, 2005)* that, 'with the upgradation of courses and contents, Secondary Education, particularly in Science, Mathematics and Social Sciences, require specialist teaching faculty'. While the disciplines that make up the Social Sciences have their distinct content areas as well as methodologies that justify the preservation of boundaries, on the contrary, the boundaries of the disciplines need to be opened up and integrative approaches need to be applied to understand a given phenomenon, keeping in view, the aim of teaching of the subject at the school level.

The teaching of the school Social Sciences is, however, beset with multiple problems. At the outset, the nature of the subject which draws its content from so many independent disciplines, though all inter-related, itself poses the biggest challenge. Coupled with this is the call for adopting an integrated approach giving a holistic perspective to understanding diverse themes and content areas from a 'world view'. While it may be possible for teachers to have academic competence in teaching one or two components of the subject, it may be difficult to have such competence in all the component areas, that too with the ability to integrate the content from across the disciplines. Having subject knowledge of only one or two components of the Social Sciences would render the teaching of the subject ineffective. The academic competence of Social Sciences teachers in handling the component disciplines being an obvious challenge, the professional competence in transacting the subject, using appropriate and relevant approaches and methods of teaching, would pose an equally challenging problem.

The NCF-2005 had noted that Social Sciences was often considered as a non-utility subject as compared to the Natural Sciences and therefore given less importance. Further, there appears to also be a belief that the Social Sciences merely transmit information and are text-book centred. The *Focus Paper on Teaching of Social Sciences, NCERT, 2006*, noted that, 'low self-esteem governs the classroom-transaction process, with both teachers and students feeling uninterested in comprehending its contents'. This could be a contributing factor to why, of the various subjects taught in the schools, Social Sciences was found to be the fifth most liked subject, as was informed in a study by Mehta, et al (2007).

### **Social Sciences subject under the Nagaland Board of School Education**

Social Sciences or Social Studies as it was earlier called, has been a part of the Core Curriculum under the Nagaland Board of School Education since 1988, prior to which History, Geography and Public Administration were studied as

separate subjects at the Upper Primary (Classes 6 to 8) and Secondary (Classes 9 and 10) levels. The subject consisted of two papers- Social Studies-I (History & Civics) and Social Studies-II (Geography, Economics & Study of Nagaland), each of 100 marks. Following the *NCF-2000*, the nomenclature, Social Sciences was adopted and the subject consisted of only 100 marks. Currently, Social Sciences at the Upper Primary level consists of History, Geography and study of Nagaland, while at the Secondary level, it consists of History, Geography, Political Science and Economics.

Given the background, and the challenges in the teaching-learning of Social Sciences in schools, this study has been undertaken to find out the academic and professional background of Upper Primary and Secondary level teachers, teaching Social Sciences in schools of Kohima, Nagaland, and the associated problems, thereof.

### Objectives of the study:

This study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

- i) To find out the academic background of Social Sciences teachers, with regard to the subjects studied at the Graduate and Post-Graduate levels.
- ii) To find out the professional background of Social Sciences teachers.
- iii) To find out the perceived status of Social Sciences as a school subject.

### Methodology

The study adopted the Descriptive Survey Method of Research. Questionnaire developed by the surveyor was employed to teachers teaching Social Sciences at the Upper Primary and Secondary levels in Schools of Kohima, the capital town of Nagaland. Stratified Random Sampling method was applied in selection of schools for the study. The Sample for the survey consisted of four (4) out of five (5) Government Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools, and

17 out of 35 High Schools and Higher Secondary Schools under Private Management in Kohima town, at the time of conduct of the study. Altogether, 57 Social Sciences teachers from the total of 21 Schools were covered under the study.

The data collected through the Questionnaire employed, were scored and entered into tables on the basis of the different aspects identified. Simple arithmetic procedures were employed to calculate the scores, and presented in percentages.

### Findings of the study:

The study arrived at the following findings:

- i) Of the total respondents (57), it was found that 60% were females and 40% were males. 21% of the respondents were under Government Management, while 79% were under Private Management.
- ii) 54% of the Social Sciences teachers were Graduates while some 43% were Post-graduates. A negligible percent (3%) of teachers had Master Degree in subjects not relevant to Social Sciences.
- iii) Majority of the teachers were Second division holders right from Matriculation through Graduation. Among the Graduates, 51 per cent were Second division holders and 33 per cent were Third division holders with only 1 securing a First division. Among the Post-Graduates, 60% and 34% were Second and First division holders, respectively.
- iv) Only 15 (26%) of the total respondents had the requisite Professional qualification (B.Ed.). Of the teachers under Government Management, 42% were found professionally qualified, while it was only 22% among teachers under Private Management.
- v) While 46% teachers were teaching Social Sciences exclusively, 30% were found to be also teaching English.
- vi) It was found that out of the total number of teachers teaching History and Political Science components of the Social Sciences, 81 and 97 per cents respectively had studied the relevant subjects up to the Graduation

level and above, while in the cases of Economics and Geography, which are also components of the Social Sciences, it was only 48% and 14% respectively, indicating low competencies in teaching the subjects. It was also seen that most of the teachers teaching Geography (68%) had studied the subject only up to the Matriculation level.

- vii) Subject allocation on the basis of specialisation and subject combination at Graduation was found to be only 47 per cent. It was found that teachers teaching History and Political Science components of the Social Sciences appeared to have been allotted the teaching of the subject as per subjects offered at the Graduation and Post-graduation level, but those teaching Economics and Geography may have been offered the teaching of these areas based on Interest, Stream in which Graduated or as per Equal distribution of Workload among teachers.
- viii) There appeared to be a conflict in the opinion of the teachers with regard to the 'ease' or 'difficulty' in teaching the subject. While 68% had stated that teaching Social Sciences was easy, an equally large number of the respondents (60%) had also said that it was Challenging and Difficult.
- ix) It was found that 35% of the respondents would prefer to teach Social Sciences in higher classes if given a choice. Another 23% also indicated that they would prefer teaching areas of the subject in which they had content mastery and 17 per cent preferred to teach in lower classes. This is indicative of a good number of teachers teaching the subject without sufficient background of the component areas they were teaching.
- x) Teachers (75%) perceived that school authorities did not give as much importance to Social Sciences as compared to other school subjects.
- xi) 51% of the teachers perceived pupils to have no awareness of the importance of Social Sciences, while 33% perceived pupils to have interest in the subject but found it difficult.
- xii) It was found that 55% teachers had been assigned teaching of Social Sciences as Arts Graduates, 10% as Commerce Graduates, and

on the basis of subjects studied at degree level (35%).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

From the findings of the study, it may be concluded that Social Sciences teachers were academically well qualified in terms of degrees, with 46% Post-graduates, and mostly second division holders. In terms of the necessary academic background and competence in the component disciplines of the Social Sciences subject, more than 80% teachers had studied History and Political Science up to the graduation level, which would have given them the necessary confidence in teaching the respective components. However, with only 46% and 14% having studied Economics and Geography respectively, up to the graduation level, the teaching of these components would definitely be challenging for the teachers. With 68% of the teachers having studied Geography only up to Class 10, it is indeed a concern as to how these teachers teach the subject.

In terms of the professional competence too, with only 26% having undergone B.Ed., teachers would be lacking the pedagogical knowledge of teaching the subject, leave alone making use of the advocated Integrated approach, giving a holistic perspective to understanding the social phenomena. The lack of a reasonable content knowledge of the different component disciplines of the subject, especially in Economics and Geography, along with the lack of pedagogical knowledge among majority of the Social Sciences teachers, could be the reason why most teachers find teaching the subject challenging and difficult. With the limited academic and professional background, it is no surprise if Social Sciences teachers are unable to impress upon the importance of the subject on the learners, make the learning of the subject easy and interesting. The problem is further compounded with the indifferent attitude of school administrators, who assign any graduates in Arts to teach the subject.

To conclude, therefore, it may be suggested that, if the teaching of Social Sciences is to effectively

achieve the objectives envisaged, the recruitment of teachers should include subject specialists in all the core disciplines that constitute the content of the subject at the Secondary level, having studied the disciplines at least up to the degree level, and also ensure that only professionally qualified teachers, with sound pedagogical knowledge in Social Sciences are recruited. While it may be difficult for schools to appoint sufficient number of teachers with the requisite academic backgrounds in the different disciplines, regular content enrichment programmes in all the component disciplines of the school Social Sciences curriculum may be organized to ensure minimum content knowledge of the core areas, among the teachers.

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