



SOCIAL SCIENCE CURRICULUM IN SCHOOLS: INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

(Review/ Theoretical Paper)

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Abstract

The paper reviews the social science curriculum with a focus on civic education at school level in India, the United States and England within an international comparative perspective. Social science as an academic discipline has largely remained a neglected domain of study at school level in India. It is, therefore, proposed to critically analyse the social science curriculum in India and to compare it with other countries for identifying the best practices and key concerns. For the purpose, the national level curriculum documents of social sciences in India have been compared and analysed with the similar documents of the United States and England. The paper is conceptualised to draw linkages, highlight similarities and point out differences in the national curriculum on civic education. The integrated themes that emerged while reviewing the social science curriculum include the present socio-cultural context of civic education, dynamic principles of curriculum organisation and contents of the national curriculum in civic education. The paper concludes with some key curricular concerns and practices of the United States and England which could facilitate the enrichment of curriculum and pedagogy of social sciences in India.

Key words: Curriculum, Social Sciences, Civic Education, Comparative Education

INTRODUCTION

Social science disciplines formally appear in the school curriculum at the elementary level. In most of the countries worldwide, social sciences are part of the core curriculum at the lower secondary level. Here they are taught as one integrated subject – such as social studies or social sciences – or are divided into history, geography and civics, or citizenship education. Teaching social sciences at that level usually serves nation-building purposes and fosters citizenship. In the best cases it could also help develop critical thinking, the ability to search

for facts and proofs, and the capacity to distinguish the truth and to recognize chronological relationships and patterns. The World Social Science Report (2010) asserts that there are very few studies on the extent to which social sciences are taught at the secondary education level outside traditional social science faculties. At the upper secondary level, there is no core curriculum and the topics taught vary with countries, streams, school types (academic, comprehensive, commercial or technical) and, in some cases, between programmes within the same school.

An increasing number of countries offer a variety of options within broadly defined streams, among which are history, geography, social studies, economics, civil rights, business, accountancy and entrepreneurial studies. No study has analysed the objectives and contents of different social science courses. Even within a country many curricula and social science courses coexist, with different objectives, teaching methods and groups of students. Some aim to prepare students to take part in the democratic process and to critically appraise social and economic trends, while others prepare students for problem-solving tasks. In the editorial introduction of the book, *Social Science Learning in Schools*, Poonam Batra (2010) argues that 'in many countries the term 'social studies' is used to suggest an 'integrated' study of social sciences in school education while the term 'social sciences' is reserved exclusively for use in university education. The curriculum views social studies in five traditions five-camp model for analysing the social studies curriculum: social studies as knowledge of the past as a guide to good citizenship, social studies in the student-centred tradition, social studies as reflective inquiry, social studies as structure of the disciplines and social studies as socio-political involvement.

A constant debate in the social sciences concerns the boundaries of social science. This debate has found different regional, epistemological and historical answers. For historical reasons, the social sciences are often defined as the disciplines that are in between the humanities and the natural sciences. As a result, the decision on which disciplines are parts of social sciences, do not vary a great deal from one country to another and over time. In some countries education is considered part of social sciences, in others it is not. In some countries history is part of social sciences; in others it is part of the humanities. From an epistemological point of view, social sciences have been diverse and are characterized by a multiplicity of methods, approaches, disciplines, paradigms, national traditions and underlying political and social philosophies. To many, this diversity is an asset and not a divide. To others it is a liability because it prevents the social sciences from addressing burning issues effectively. However, Rashmi Paliwal and C. N. Subramaniam (2006) suggested that terms such as 'national' or 'core' were not particularly helpful for any meaningful curriculum that has a context with which it engages with intimacy and familiarity. They opined that it would be quite contrived for any curriculum to situate itself in as vast and diverse as context as the nation as a whole. Instead, what is needed is an exemplar curriculum, situated in and addressing a particular context on the one hand and promoting other contextual learning materials on the other.

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 content of these textbooks is considered to be unconnected to daily realities. In addition, social science is viewed as providing unnecessary details about the past. It is also felt that the examination paper rewards the memorisation of these superfluous 'facts', with the children's conceptual understanding being largely ignored. Any effort to address the information overload in the social sciences will simultaneously have to review the current examination system. Alex M. George and Amman Madan (2009) states that social sciences are often seen as easy, probably because they deal with issues and processes that surround us all the time, and on which we have ideas and positions. Social sciences are expected to shoulder the bulk of the normative expectations from schooling as they are supposed to teach everything – from a commitment to keeping the streets clean to the internationalisation of a pluralist vision of the nation.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the social science curriculum with a focus on civic education in India and comparing it with other countries. Therefore, it is pertinent to cite some scholars in India who have worked on the area of civic education in India. For instance, Manish Jain (2005) has articulated that civics as a subject had appeared in the Indian school curriculum in the colonial period in the background of increasing 'disloyalty' among Indians towards the raj. His research of post-colonial civics in India suggested that the subject in its promises, conceptualisation and articulation in the textbooks awaits decolonisation like our education. He asserts that by not referring to the growing crisis in the state institutions and society, NCERT's civics textbooks distort reality, sanctify the state and strengthen the process of hegemonisation (Jain, 2005). Amman Madan (2003) argues that civics in India primarily served to propagate the worldview of public behaviour that our kind of state expected of its citizenry. While rethinking civic education for India, Madan further states that civic education is a particularly troubled area. It represents a space for learning about life in the public sphere, which though not separated in a water-tight way from the domestic and the personal, still involves several new relations and strategies.

In the following section, a brief background of the education system in India and other countries has been discussed. India has a national level apex body, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), which provides substantial guidelines regarding the school education across the country. NCERT develops the curriculum, syllabus and textbooks for different subjects and stages of school education. The documents, National Curriculum Framework (2005) and Position Paper on Social Sciences (2006) provide a recent conceptualisation on social sciences which have been analysed to review the curriculum in schools. Another country under review, England has a centralised Department for Education under the Government of United Kingdom which is responsible for education in state-funded schools. The Department for Education provides curricular guidelines in the form of a National Curriculum at different key stages for primary, secondary and higher levels in schools. There are a few core subjects and a range of foundation subjects, including social studies which are compulsory at one or more key stages in schools. The National Curriculum of Social Studies in England involves the subjects of history, geography and citizenship at

primary and secondary school levels, which has been taken into consideration for review in the paper.

The US school system, in terms of control and governance of the schools is quite similar to Indian school education, but it is very different from that of the schools in England. The US has a decentralised education system with a Federal Department of Education which provide funding and regulations for school education in various states. Although there is no national curriculum, the general content of the high school curriculum across the country has many consistencies. In the US, there is a national level association - National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) which is primarily responsible for social studies education at elementary, secondary and higher education levels. NCSS provides national curriculum standards and other resources in the disciplines of history, civics and geography at different school levels. It has recently developed a manual - National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (2010) which provides curricular standards for teaching, learning and assessment of social studies in schools. There is no such statutory and autonomous body like the NCSS for the development of social science curriculum either in India or in England.

The paper reviews the curriculum documents of social sciences at elementary school level in different countries. The national curriculum documents of social sciences at school level of five countries – India, United States and England have been critically analysed. In the critical analysis of the curriculum of different countries, the integrated themes that have emerged are the present socio-cultural context of civic education, dynamic principles of curriculum organisation and contents of the national curriculum in civic education.

The Present Socio-Cultural Context of Civic Education

In this section, the present socio-cultural context of civic education in India will be discussed first which is followed by other countries – United States and England. In India, different national level curricula in India have differed on the organisation of material in the social sciences. The recent National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) along with the position paper on Teaching of Social Sciences can be considered responsible for the present context of national curriculum in social sciences. The NCF articulates that the social sciences encompass diverse concerns of society which include a wide range of content drawn from the disciplines of history, geography, political science, economics, and sociology. Social Sciences as an academic discipline have remained as a neglected area of study as it is considered a non-utility subject. Therefore, there is need to emphasise that the social sciences are essential to provide social, cultural, and analytical skills required to adjust to an increasingly interdependent world, and to deal with political and economic realities.

The NCF, 2005 reiterates that the disciplines that make up the social sciences have distinct methodologies that often justify the preservation of boundaries. However, for an enabling

curriculum, certain themes that facilitate interdisciplinary thinking are required. It puts forward a need to select themes where different disciplinary approaches can facilitate an in-depth and multiple understanding and that these themes should be culturally relevant, and concepts introduced bearing in mind the age of the child. For civic education, the NCF suggested to bring a change in nomenclature, from Civics to Political Science. It states that 'Civics' as a subject had appeared in the Indian school curriculum during the colonial period against the background of increasing 'disloyalty' among Indians towards the Raj where emphasis on the obedience and loyalty of citizens; the colonial ethos of order, improvement, and rationality; the discourse of the shortcomings of personality in the Indian, and creation of civil society according to the universal values of progress were the key features of colonial civics (NCF, 2005; Jain, 2005). It urges that 'political science' by contrast, suggests the dynamism of a process that produces structures of dominance and their contestations by social forces. Political science imagines civil society as the sphere where more sensitive, interrogative, deliberative, and transformative citizens could be produced (NCF, 2005).

In United States, the civic mission of the schools has been affirmed in the National Education Goals included in the Goals 2000 under Educate America Act of 1994. The national level documents on National Standards for Social Studies and on National Standards for Civic and Government provide the present context of civic education. The national documents are intended to help schools develop competent and responsible citizens who possess a reasoned commitment to the fundamental values and principles that are essential to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy. The document is limited to content standards specifying what students should know and be and to do in the field of civics and government. They are "exit" standards; they do not specify what students should know and be able to do as they "exit" or complete grades 4, 8, and 12. To achieve the standards students are provided with the kinds of learning opportunities in the classroom, school, and community that foster the skills necessary for civic participation. They provide widely agreed upon guidelines for what all students in this nation should learn and be able to do in the field of civics and government. They are useful in the development of curricular frameworks, course outlines, textbooks, professional development programs, and systems of assessment. Ultimately, the value of these standards is determined in the classroom by knowledgeable, skilled, and dedicated teachers who have the capacity to make the study of civics and government the relevant, vital, and inspiring experience it should be.

England has a national level document on Citizenship Programme of Study for different key stages provides guidelines for education for citizenship which equips young people with the knowledge, skills and understanding to play an effective role in public life. The document states that Citizenship encourages them to take an interest in topical and controversial issues and to engage in discussion and debate. Students learn about their rights, responsibilities, duties and freedoms and about laws, justice and democracy. They learn to take part in decision-making and different forms of action. They play an active role in the life of their schools, neighbourhoods, communities and wider society as active and global citizens. Citizenship encourages respect for different national, religious and ethnic identities. It equips

Students to engage critically with and explore diverse ideas, beliefs, cultures and identities and the values we share as citizens in the UK. Students begin to understand how society has changed and is changing in the UK, Europe and the wider world.

Dynamic Principles of Curriculum Organisation

In India, the dynamic principles of curriculum organisation for children in the curriculum documents are discussed as follows. It enables children to understand the society in which they live - to learn how society is structured, managed, and governed, and also about the forces seeking to transform and redirect society in various ways. The learners should appreciate the values enshrined in the Indian Constitution such as justice, liberty, equality and fraternity and the unity and integrity of the nation and the building of a socialist, secular and democratic society. They should be able to grow up as active, responsible, and reflective members of society. They should learn to respect differences of opinion, lifestyle, and cultural practices. They should question and examine received ideas, institutions, and practices. They should acquire pleasure in reading, by providing them with enjoyable reading material. They should undertake activities that will help them develop social and life skills and make them understand that these skills are important for social interaction. In textbooks and in the classroom, the content, language, and images should be comprehensible, gender-sensitive, and critical of social hierarchies and inequalities of all kinds.

In US, the principles of curriculum organisation can be understood in terms of content standards, intellectual and participatory skills. The content standards specify not only the content to be mastered in civics and government, but also what students should be able to do in relation to that content. These standards include, either explicitly or implicitly, a specification of the intellectual and participatory skills students should acquire. Intellectual skills in civics and government are inseparable from content. To be able to think critically about a political issue, for example, one must have an understanding of the issue, its history, and its contemporary relevance, as well as a set of intellectual tools or considerations useful in dealing with such an issue. Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life. Participatory skills are encouraged in children as education in civics and government must not only address the acquisition of knowledge and intellectual skills; it also must focus specifically on the development of those skills required for competent participation in the political process. In England, the core principles underlying citizenship education involve learning and undertaking activities in citizenship contribute to achievement of the curriculum aims for all young people to become successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives; responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

Contents of the National Curriculum in Civic Education

In India, the national curriculum document on social sciences proposes an epistemological frame to discuss the focus of content areas in social sciences at school level. It urges that India should not be seen simply in terms of developmentalist approach. The problem with this approach has been that it treated poverty, illiteracy and casteism as obstacles to national progress, and also ignored gender issues. This mode of thinking may suggest that the common 'illiterate' masses have failed the nation. Textbooks were seen as the major source of knowledge. This foreclosed any possibility of innovation by an active participation of the learners, both teachers and students. The textbook should be seen as opening up avenues for further enquiry. This would encourage the learner to go beyond the textbook, to further reading and observation. The social science curriculum has hitherto emphasised developmental issues. These are important but not sufficient to understand the normative dimension, like issues of equality, justice, and dignity in society and polity. In view of this gap, there is a need to achieve a shift in focus from utilitarianism to egalitarianism that would address the normative concerns. There is urgent need to restore self-esteem to the social sciences by having them address social and political issues in such a way as to awaken in the students a real concern for social justice. Gender concerns have been addressed within the social sciences by including the success of a few women as 'examples' and some others in the chapters on India's freedom struggle. But 'gendering' the curriculum is not limited to increasing the number of references to individual women. Rather, what is crucial is the need to make the perspectives of women integral to the discussion of any historical event and contemporary concerns. This shift requires an epistemic shift from the patriarchal frame within which social studies is currently conceptualised.

The NCSS curriculum standards in the US offer a set of principles by which content can be selected and organized to build a viable, valid, and defensible social studies curriculum for grades from pre-K through 12. They provide the necessary framework for the implementation of content standards. The themes are interrelated, and a school course in a social studies discipline is likely to touch on more than one theme. The standards have been developed both in social studies and in many of the individual disciplines that are integral to social studies. The social studies standards address overall curriculum design and comprehensive student learning expectations, while state standards and the national content standards for individual disciplines (e.g., history, civics and government, geography, economics, and psychology) provide a range of specific content through which student learning expectations can be accomplished. The ten themes are culture, time, continuity and change; people, places and environments; individual development and identity; individuals, groups and institutions; power, authority and governance; production, distribution and consumption; science, technology and society; global connections; and civic ideals and practices.

In England, there are a number of key concepts that underpin the study of citizenship in the curriculum of England. Students need to understand these concepts in order to deepen and broaden their knowledge, skills and understanding. Democracy and justice involve participating actively in different kinds of decision-making and voting in order to influence

public life. This focuses on the role that citizens can take within the political and justice systems in England. It includes: freedom as part of democracy; fairness and the rule of law as part of justice; power and authority; and accountability. In rights and responsibilities, there are different kinds of rights, obligations and responsibilities – political, legal, human, social, civic and moral. The exploration of different kinds of rights and obligations and how these affect both individuals and communities is quite significant. Development of identities and diversity imply living together in the UK, appreciating that identities are complex, can change over time and are informed by different understandings of what it means to be a citizen in the nation. It involves exploring the diverse national, regional, ethnic and religious cultures, groups and communities in the UK and the connections between them. It includes the multiple identities that may be held by groups and communities in a diverse society, and the ways in which these identities are affected by changes in society.

Conclusion

The paper provides a brief background of the social sciences in the world and particularly in India. In the paper, the national curriculum documents of social sciences from India and four other countries have been compared and analysed critically. The national curriculum of social sciences with a focus on civic education in India has been compared with the United States and England. In the process of analysing the curriculum documents, some themes the present socio-cultural context of civic education, dynamic principles of curriculum organisation and contents of the national curriculum in civic education have been evolved which were discussed in detail in the previous section.

In the present socio-cultural context of civic education, it has been found that the context of India differ from other nations. In India, the national curriculum documents from 1975, 1988, 2000 and particularly National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) along with the position paper on Teaching of Social Sciences have been responsible for the present context of curriculum in social sciences. United States has concerned document, National Standards for Civic and Government which clearly states the civic mission of the schools. In England, a national level document on Citizenship Programme of Study for different key stages provides guidelines for education for citizenship which equips young people with the knowledge, skills and understanding to play an effective role in public life.

The dynamic core principles of curriculum organisation for children in India involve enabling children to understand the society in which they live - to learn how society is structured, managed, and governed, and also about the forces seeking to transform and redirect society in various ways. In US, the principles of curriculum organisation can be understood in terms of content standards, intellectual and participatory skills. In England, the core principles underlying citizenship education involve learning and undertaking activities in citizenship contribute to achievement of the curriculum aims for all young people to become successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve confident individuals who are able to

live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives; responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

In India, the national curriculum document on social sciences proposes an epistemological frame to discuss the focus of content areas in social sciences at school level which suggests a shift in focus from utilitarianism to egalitarianism that would address the normative concerns. It states the urgent need to make the perspectives of women integral to the discussion of any historical event and contemporary concerns. In the US, National Council for Social Studies provides curriculum standards and offer a set of ten interrelated themes which include culture, time, continuity and change; people, places and environments; individual development and identity; individuals, groups and institutions; power, authority and governance; production, distribution and consumption; science, technology and society; global connections; and civic ideals and practices. In England, there are a number of key concepts that underpin the study of citizenship which include democracy and justice, rights and responsibilities, development of identities and diversity, multiple identities that may be held by groups and communities in a diverse society, and the ways in which these identities are affected by changes in society.

To sum up, the study attempted to critically analyse and compare the social science curriculum, particularly civic education, in India with other countries at school level. For the purpose, the national level curriculum documents of social sciences in India have been compared with the similar documents of United States and England. In order to build comparisons among the five countries, a systematic analysis of the national social science curriculum has been undertaken to evolve integrated themes. The study intended to draw linkages, highlight similarities and point out differences in the national curriculum on civic education of the selected countries. It emerged that the curriculum of social sciences at school level varies remarkably in different countries. It is significant to note that there are many instances where the social science curriculum in India differs from other countries in terms of its epistemological frame, basic contents and organisation of the curriculum. The study highlighted some key curricular concerns and practices of the United States and England which could facilitate the enrichment of curriculum and pedagogy of social sciences in India.

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