

Status of Social Sciences: A Heads of Schools' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The Social Sciences as a core school subject plays a vital role in the development of learners into well adjusted, informed, responsible, reflective, intelligent citizens, for membership in the 21st century society. Despite this crucial role, Social Sciences as a school subject has been relegated to a secondary position among the 'harder' subjects like Mathematics and Science, or even the Languages. The content of the subject, being drawn from the disciplines of History, Geography, Political Science, Economics and Sociology, itself poses a challenge to teachers teaching the subject, while the nature in which the syllabi for the same have been framed, makes the subject information-packed and cumbersome. While the problems faced by Social Sciences teachers and pupils are well known, this study has attempted to find out the perspectives of Heads of Schools towards the subject, which could well be another factor contributing to the declining status of the subject.

Keywords: Social Sciences, Core Curriculum, Declining Status, Heads of Schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is an acknowledged fact that the quality of schools depends on the quality of teachers that man the system. But while the transactional processes and their outcomes are dependent on the proficiency and competencies of teachers, it is also equally important that schools have sound managerial and academic leaderships, that possess a deep understanding of the importance of the components that constitute the school curriculum. Only then would there be a robust school system that supports the academic, man-power, and physical requirements, thereby, doing justice to the aims and objectives of the curriculum and ensuring quality.

Social Sciences, or Social Studies, as it was earlier called, has been an integral component of the School Curriculum in India, following the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986, and the National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education: A Framework, 1988 (NCERT), that followed it. Subsequent to this, the subjects of History, Geography, and Civics were studied as different subjects up to the Upper Primary level, with the addition of Economics/ Commercial Geography at the Secondary stage.

As a school subject taught from the Elementary to the Secondary stages, Social Sciences draws its content from the disciplines of History, Geography, Political Science, Economics and Sociology, giving it an extremely broad coverage and scope. It would not be an over-estimation to state that no other school subject is as crucial to the realisation of the aims of Education, as the Social Sciences. With the purpose of building intelligent, informed, humane, responsible individuals, this subject has a vital role in preparing learners for global citizenship. It is however a fact that Social Sciences as a school subject has been perceived as an uninteresting, useless, and unimportant subject not only in India, but the world over. While a variety of factors may have contributed to this marginalisation of the subject – complex nature of the subject, having drawn its content from a wide range of independent disciplines; the nature in which the Social Sciences Syllabus has been designed, making it a mere package of information that need to be memorised and reproduced during examinations; limitations in teacher preparation for the subject in Pre-Service Teacher Education programmes; defective methods and approaches adopted by teachers teaching the subject; lack of content mastery among teachers, given the wide scope of the subject covering several disciplines; - this study attempts to find out the perceptions that Heads of Schools have, on Social Sciences. This has been considered as an important factor contributing to the given status of the subject, as it is the School Heads who provide academic leadership, giving the right perspectives of the school curriculum to teachers, pupils, parents and the community at large, appointing

teachers as per requirement and competency, giving due importance to all subjects in terms of school time-table, facilities, and making provisions for necessary experiences in the different subjects.

1.1. Background of the Study

This study has been undertaken in the Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools of Kohima, the capital town of the state of Nagaland, India. The researcher, as a teacher educator in the pedagogy of Social Sciences for about eighteen years, in a Secondary Teacher Education Institution in the town, had been observing over the years, how the subject of Social Sciences had been given secondary importance in schools, be it by the school authorities, pupils, parents, and teachers, including those teaching the subject. It was also observed that, while teachers appointed in schools for teaching the core subjects like English Language, Modern Indian Languages (M.I.L.), Science and Mathematics, at the Elementary and Secondary levels required to have subject specialisations in the respective subjects at the Bachelor's or Master's Degree, general Arts or Commerce Graduates, or even those with other non-social science subjects were appointed to teach Social Sciences in schools. The allotment of classes in the school time-tables was also observed to be lesser, as compared to classes allotted to subjects like Science and Mathematics or even English Language. It was therefore felt that a study to find out the perspectives of Heads of Schools towards Social Sciences as a core school subject, and the appointment requirements for Social Sciences teachers, would be important in determining the factors contributing to the declining status of the subject. Hence, this study was undertaken.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

This study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To find out the academic and professional background of the Heads of Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools in Kohima;
2. To find out the total strength of teachers appointed for different core subjects in the schools;
3. To find out the minimum requisite qualifications required for appointment of teachers for teaching the different core subjects;
4. To find out the bases for allotment of teaching Social Sciences to teachers; and
5. To find out the comparative importance of the five core school subjects, as perceived by Heads of Schools.

2. METHODOLOGY

The Descriptive Survey Method has been adopted for this study. The data for the survey were collected through Questionnaire prepared by the surveyor, and finalised through feedback and inputs received from experts in the field. The data thus collected, were tabulated item-wise, using tallies. Total scores were calculated and presented in simple percentages.

The population of the study consisted of 40 Heads of Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools in Kohima town, of which, five (5) were under Government Management, and 35 were under Private Management. Stratified Random Sampling was adopted for selection of the Sample for the study, consisting of four (4) Government Secondary/Higher Secondary Schools, and 25 Secondary/Higher Secondary Schools under Private Management. A total of 24 Heads of Schools responded to the survey.

3. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study arrived at the following findings:

1. Of the 24 Heads of Schools, 17% were under Government Management, while 83% were under Private Management. Of these, 54% were Male, and 46% were Female. However, of the four (4) Heads under Government Management, three (3) were Female.

2. While all the Heads under Private Management were Professionally qualified with a B.Ed. degree, only 65% of those under Private Management possessed a professional degree. It was interesting to note that one Headmaster had a Bachelor degree in Pharmacy with B.Ed, while another had a Master degree in Divinity.
3. Most of the Heads of Schools (58%) had administrative experience of 1-5 years, followed by 6-10 years (42%). Only 46% of the respondents were found to have had teaching experience in Social Sciences.
4. It was found that 50% of the responding schools had a total enrolment of up to 220 in Classes VII – X, and another 46% per cent with an enrolment ranging from 221 to 580 pupils. Only 1 school had an enrolment of up to 700 pupils.
5. It could be inferred that the average enrolment per class/section was 41-55 pupils in 42 per cent of the responding schools, which is high in terms of the prescribed teacher to pupil ratio. Only 37 per cent of schools had 25-40 pupils per class/section. The average enrolment of 21 per cent schools was found to be very high, ranging from 56-85 pupils per class/section.
6. Of the 24 schools under study, 37 per cent had only 1 section per class with 2 Social Sciences teachers. In the schools that had 1-2 sections per class, the number of Social Sciences teachers appointed were ranged from 3 (16%), 4 (16%) and 5 (11%). There appeared to have a wide variation in the number of teachers appointed for teaching Social Sciences.
7. Taking into account the total number of teachers appointed for teaching different subjects in the responding schools, English appeared to have higher number of teachers (90), followed by Science (80) and Social Sciences (78).
8. It could be inferred that most of the Heads of Schools (75%) did not appear to have given much importance to professional qualification for appointment of teachers which was reflected in their responses that teachers had the requisite minimum qualification while professionally qualified teachers were found to be very low, Private schools in particular (21%).
9. It was seen that only 37 per cent of the Heads of schools gave preference to a combination of History and Political Science at the Graduation level, for appointing teachers in Social Sciences, while an equal percentage did not give preference to any subject combination. The components of Economics and Geography therefore appeared to have been neglected. None of the respondents had indicated Geography as a preferred subject combination at the Graduation level.
10. It appeared that most Heads of Schools allotted the teaching of different subjects on the basis of either subject specialisation (83%), or subjects studied (75%) at Graduation/ Post-graduation level by the teachers.
11. With regard to determining the number of teachers teaching Social Sciences, highest percentage of the Heads of schools (54%) stated to have determined the number of teachers on the basis of 2 teachers per class, while 33% stated 1 teacher per class.
12. It was found that Headmasters (54%) had assigned teaching of Social Sciences to Arts Graduates and on the basis of subjects studied at degree level (33%).
13. The Heads of Schools marked English as the most important subject followed by Mathematics and Science. It is interesting to note that Social Sciences was placed in the fourth in order of importance of the five core school subjects. Only 17% each had marked Social Sciences as the second and third most important among the given subjects.

4. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The very nature of the Social Sciences as a school subject, demands teachers who have sound academic background in the disciplines that constitute the subject. However, there exists no provision in schools for appointment of teachers specialising in each of the content areas. The objective of teaching the subject at the school level also requires teachers to adopt an Integrated Approach in teaching to enable pupils understand the interweaving relationship of man with different aspects of human society and the environment at large. This calls for teachers teaching Social Sciences to not only have a broad understanding of all components of the subject but also to possess professional skills and competence in handling the subject matter to ensure

achievement of desired learning outcomes among the learners. In the absence of sound academic and professional background, teachers teaching Social Sciences may fail to help pupils achieve the objectives of studying the subject. This, however, appears to be given less importance, with most Heads of Schools giving no importance to the subject combination or specialisation for appointment of Social Sciences teachers, or in requiring professional qualification in the appointment of teachers.

Furthermore, while majority of the Heads stated that teachers were allotted subjects of teaching based on their subject combinations at the Graduation level, this appeared not to have been the case for subject allotment in Social Sciences, with very few School Heads giving importance to the subjects of Economics and Geography while appointing teachers. Also, while 45% of the Heads of Schools had been teachers of Social Sciences, this, however, did not affect their perception of the importance of the subject, with 83% respondents indicating that Social Sciences was the fourth in importance among the 5 Core School Subjects. This is indicative of their lack of awareness of the importance, and of the primary role that Social Sciences plays, in preparing individuals for responsible citizenship in society, despite having been themselves, Social Sciences teachers.

It may therefore be concluded that the declining status of Social Sciences as a school subject may not only be attributed to the nature of the subject alone, but the core of the problem may be attributed to the matters of policy, that do not require appointments of Social Sciences teachers having subject expertise in all the component disciplines of the subject. Also, the general view that Social Sciences is an unimportant subject, needs to be deconstructed, and School administrators would come to play an important role in the effort towards this end. Hence, the role of School Administrators in changing existing policies, giving due importance to all the Core components of the School Curriculum for their worth, changing biased pre-conceived notions, and taking pro-active efforts in making the School Curriculum vibrant and objective oriented, would help bring about desired outcomes to our education system, and help built responsible, reflective and democratic citizen, in which the school Social Sciences plays a vital role.

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