

Contextualizing the School Curriculum: Teachers as Facilitators

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Abstract:

IndexTerms:

In a questionnaire interview of 300 teachers from sixty schools in Mumbai affiliated to the SSC or ICSE Board, fifty percent believed in only textbook-oriented chalk-and-talk study, saying that they shied away from innovation because of time constraints¹. They also felt that their job is only to teach, and planning a curriculum was left to the coordinator; indeed, 20 percent had no idea about planning a curriculum, and 60 percent believed that planning merely means dividing the portion into equal parts for assessment! Thirty percent were open to new technology but were not confident enough to try it out themselves. Eighty percent said they believe examinations were “merely a tool to promote a child to the next year” and only ten percent believed that this pattern could be modified.

It is clear that major changes in our education system are required to cope with the evolving needs of society. This researcher obtained data from teachers from schools of various Board types in order to ascertain possible reasons for any differences in effectiveness that may be observed between schools of these Board types. For this purpose, the researcher constructed and validated a new questionnaire that inquired into various aspects of school policies and facilities as well as Board policies and curricula. The data obtained were analysed qualitatively.

Curriculum Dynamics Description Questionnaire

This tool was prepared by the researcher to collect data on curricular processes in different school types as reported by teachers.

Validity of the Tool

The face validity of the tool was ascertained by showing its contents to eight experts who opined that it appeared to serve the purpose it was intended for.

The content validity of this questionnaire was ascertained by obtaining the opinions of eight experts in the subject. Wherever necessary, an operational definition of the items included was provided to aid the experts.

Initially a pool of 144 items was developed. All 144 items in the original tool were retained at the end of the content validity run, based on their acceptance by at least seven of the eight experts. Modifications to the content were incorporated based on the suggestions from the experts.

Dry Run

A pilot validation run was then conducted by administering the questionnaire to seven teachers from schools affiliated to the various Board types and their responses were evaluated to determine whether the questionnaire could be understood by them and the responses met the researcher's requirements.

The questionnaire was finally administered to 41 teachers (respondents) from the various Board types. A total of 144 items were included under the following dimensions:

- Personal details
- Comparison of Boards of affiliation (6 items)
- School policies (20 items)
 - Staff appointment
 - Student admission
 - Teacher-pupil ratio
 - Fee structure
- Teacher quality (13 items)
 - In-service training
 - Motivation
- Curriculum transaction (84 items)
 - Grouping procedure
 - Quality of instruction
 - Textbooks
 - Available resources
 - Evaluation pattern
 - Follow-up schedule
- School style of functioning (13 items)
- Teacher perceptions (8 items)

The items in this tool were of the open-ended type and allowed for descriptive answers. Further suggestions were also invited from the teachers under appropriate dimensions of curriculum before finalising the tool.

The data obtained from teachers in the Curriculum Dynamics Description Questionnaire were qualitatively analysed in terms of the following dimensions. For each of these dimensions, the comparisons are made on the basis of school types.

Personal Details of Teacher Respondents

SSC: The ten teacher respondents included nine females; eight of them were assistant teachers and two were supervisors. All had a University degree in Education (B.Ed. or M.Ed.); seven were postgraduate degree holders. Their median teaching experience was 22 years (range, 12 to 37 years); nine teachers were from private, aided schools. Nine of them taught in Standard X, along with other classes. The subjects they taught included English, History, Geography, Science, Mathematics, French, Economics, Environmental Studies, Value Education, Social Studies and General Knowledge.

ICSE: The ten teacher respondents included six females; four of them were assistant teachers, two were teachers, one senior teacher, one head of department, one supervisor and one principal. All had a University degree in Education; six were postgraduate degree holders and one a Ph.D. holder. Their median teaching experience was 17 years and 6 months (range, 5 to 31 years); all were from private, unaided schools. All of them taught in Standard X, along with other classes. The subjects they taught included English, History, Geography, Science, Mathematics, Physics, Environmental Studies, Commercial Application, and Social Studies.

CBSE: The twelve teacher respondents included nine females; all were teachers. All had a University degree in Education; eleven were postgraduate degree holders. Their median teaching experience was 14 years (range, 2 to 23 years); all teachers were from government-aided schools. All of them taught in Standard X, along with other classes. The subjects they taught included English, History and Civics, Geography, Science, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Accountancy, and Business Studies.

IGCSE: The nine teacher respondents included seven females; three were teachers, one assistant teacher, two faculty, one co-ordinator, one deputy head co-ordinator and one executive co-ordinator. All had a University degree in Education; seven were postgraduate degree holders and one Ph.D. holder. Their median teaching experience was 13 years (range, 3 to 25 years); all were from private, unaided schools. All of them taught in Standard X, along with other classes. The subjects they taught included English, History, Mathematics, Economics, French, Business Studies, Chemistry, Physics, Business and Management and Theory of Knowledge.

Curriculum Dynamics Dimensions

Aims and Objectives of Boards

In response to the question on aims and objectives of the Board, teachers from schools affiliated to all the Boards stated that the aim was to impart knowledge, provide all-round development (personality, understanding and application) and prepare students for future challenges. Teachers from the IGCSE Board placed a global perspective to all the aims and also mentioned skill development, problem solving and lateral, logical and critical thinking abilities as the aims of education.

Teachers were requested to subjectively compare their school to schools from the other Board types under the following heads: syllabus, textbooks, teaching methods, examination system and results. In regard to the syllabus, teachers from the SSC Board were equally divided in stating that theirs was either on par with or were inferior to those from the other Board types. Nine of ten teachers from the ICSE Board felt that their syllabus was superior to that from the SSC Board; they were equally divided in stating that their syllabus was either on par with or superior to that from the CBSE Board. Five of seven felt that their syllabus was on par with the IGCSE Board; the rest felt that it was inferior. All respondents from the CBSE Board felt that their syllabus was superior to the SSC Board; they were equally divided in stating that it was either on par with or were inferior to those from the ICSE and IGCSE Board types. All respondents from the IGCSE Board believed that their syllabus was superior to those from the other Board types.

Regarding textbooks, a similar pattern was obtained, with teachers from the SSC Board being equally divided in stating that their textbooks were either on par with or inferior to those used in the other Board types; teachers from all the other Board types broadly agreed with this assessment and felt that their textbooks were superior to those from the SSC Board type. Teachers from the ICSE Board felt that their textbooks were either on par with or superior to those from the CBSE and IGCSE Boards, whereas those from the CBSE Board were almost equally divided in stating that their textbooks were on par with, superior or inferior to the ICSE and IGCSE Boards. All respondents from the IGCSE Board believed that their textbooks were superior to those from the other Board types.

A similar pattern was obtained regarding teaching methods, with teachers from the SSC Board being equally divided in stating that theirs were either on par with or inferior to those used in the other Board types; teachers from all the other Board types broadly agreed with this assessment and felt that their teaching methods were superior to those from the SSC Board type. The ICSE teachers generally felt that their teaching methods were superior to those in the CBSE schools and were either on par with or superior to those in the IGCSE Board. Those from the CBSE Board stated that their methods were on par with the ICSE and IGCSE Boards in most cases or less commonly superior or inferior to them. Almost all respondents from the IGCSE Board believed that their methods were superior to those from the other Board types.

The pattern was repeated regarding the examination system, with teachers from the SSC Board being equally divided in stating that theirs was either on par with or inferior to those in the other Board types; teachers from the other Board types broadly agreed with this assessment and felt that their examination systems were superior to those from the SSC Board type. Teachers from the ICSE Board felt that their examination system was either on par with or superior to those from the CBSE and IGCSE Boards, whereas those from the CBSE Board generally felt that their system was on par with those of the ICSE and IGCSE Boards. Respondents from the IGCSE Board believed that their system was superior to those from the other Board types.

Regarding results, teachers from the SSC Board were almost equally divided in commenting that theirs was on par with, superior or inferior to those from the other Board types. The ICSE and CBSE teachers generally felt that their results were either

on par with or superior to those from the other Board types. Respondents from the IGCSE Board believed that their results were superior to those from the other Board types.

A majority of teachers from all the Boards stated that the Board prescribed teaching methods in the teachers' handbooks.

Teachers from the ICSE and CBSE Boards stated that their Boards seek feedback from them on curricular processes; an affirmative reply to this question was obtained from only a minority of teachers from the SSC Board, and the teachers from the IGCS were equally divided in their response.

All teachers from the ICSE Board stated that their Board permitted vocational subjects in their schools. A "yes" answer was given by a majority of teachers from the other Boards as well, but there was no universal agreement among them.

Regarding flexibility in the choice of subjects in schools, teachers from the ICSE and IGCSE Boards were unanimous in stating that their students were allowed flexibility. A majority of teachers from the CBSE Board also answered similarly. However, only two of ten teachers from the SSC Board felt their students were allowed any flexibility.

School Policy

In response to a question on the objectives of their schools, teachers from schools of all Board types reiterated what they stated about their Boards' aims and objectives, namely, the all-round development of their pupils. A common thread in the answers to how the schools achieved this objective was promotion of co- and extra-curricular activities, including competitions, cultural and socially useful activities, excursions, and clubs.

(a) Teacher Selection and Appointment

Common criteria for appointment of teachers into various schools were qualification and experience. Personality and competence were other qualities mentioned by some of the teachers. Teachers from schools of the IGCSE Board mentioned, in addition, the need to pass a selection examination, which included a written component, demonstrations, as well as an interview.

The basic qualification required for the SSC, ICSE and CBSE Boards was a graduate degree in education (B.Ed.). Teachers from the IGCSE Board stated that they needed a postgraduate qualification; one teacher mentioned training in the Board or International Baccalaureate curriculum.

All teachers from all the Board types mentioned that command over the medium of instruction was considered during the selection process.

Whereas a vast majority of teachers from the CBSE and IGCSE Boards stated that having a higher educational qualification (apart from the basic educational qualification) – for example, management degree, masters' degree, computer qualification, guidance and counselling, special education – was a preference for teacher appointment, a majority of teachers from the SSC and ICSE Board stated that this was not given additional importance by the school. Those who responded that this was given preference stated that the reason was the perception that the additional qualifications would add extra dimensions to student education and management.

All responding teachers from the IGCSE Board, and a majority from the SSC (seven of ten) and ICSE (five of eight) Boards, stated that they do not have physically differently abled teachers among their schools' staff. Eight of eleven respondents from the CBSE Board, on the other hand, stated that they did have such teachers in their schools.

(b) Student Admission

Teachers from schools of the SSC and ICSE Board types mentioned that age, proximity to school, parents' education, and family background were among the primary concerns when selecting children for admission to their schools. Previous performance was also taken into consideration for older students. Teachers from schools of the CBSE Board stated that their priority was for children of Central Government employees and those with transferable jobs. The IGCSE Board schools based their selection largely on the basis of performance at entrance examinations or other such evaluatory exercises for these children.

Schools from the SSC and CBSE Boards largely had children from the middle socioeconomic class. Those from the ICSE and IGCSE Boards had a majority of students from the upper middle and high socioeconomic classes.

Almost all respondents from the SSC, ICSE and IGCSE Boards stated that their schools had students with learning disabilities. Only seven of eleven respondents from the CBSE Board mentioned having such students in their schools. Those who stated that they had such students mentioned that their numbers were small, usually less than 25 overall, except for two schools of the IGCSE Board that quoted higher numbers.

Such disadvantaged students were identified by trained teachers, counsellors, or medical practitioners or hospitals, as specified by the Board. Where such students were present, they were given special care by way of individual attention by trained teachers, counselling, remedial learning procedures, extra time at lessons and examinations, use of calculators or computers, and such appropriate steps.

Unlike the above, physically differently abled students were present in fewer schools from all the Board types (SSC: five of ten; ICSE: seven of nine; CBSE: six of ten; IGCSE: one of seven). When present, their numbers were almost always rated as "few" or less. The physical disabilities mainly included orthopaedic and eyesight and hearing problems. Such students were given priority seating, and attention and concessions appropriate to their problem. A few schools (especially from the CBSE Board) had physical facilities (ramps, elevators) available, but this was not universal.

Most schools made special attempts to integrate these students into the mainstream with regard to group activities. In response to a question about whether new teachers are oriented to dealing with such students, only a few teachers responded in the affirmative; the rest either replied in the negative or gave no commitment.

(c) Teacher-pupil Ratio

The average classroom strength was highest in schools of the SSC Board, ranging from 50 to 70. It was lower in the ICSE and CBSE Boards, ranging from 20 to 55, and lowest in the IGCSE schools, ranging from 15 to 44.

Total student strengths were similar in schools of the SSC, ICSE and CBSE Boards, ranging from 700 to 3000, the lower numbers being seen in the CBSE schools. Schools of the IGCSE Board had lower student strengths, with only 100-200 students each in four schools and 800-1100 students each in three schools; one school had a large student strength of 4200.

The total teacher strength varied widely, related to the number of students in the school. But in general the numbers were lower in schools from the SSC Board as a ratio to the number of students. The maximum number of teachers was 100 in the SSC Board, 120 in the ICSE Board, 200 in the CBSE Board and 225 in the IGCSE Board.

A majority of teachers from all the Board types (except CBSE) stated that they had more than one teacher per class for special situations, for example, computer training.

(d) Fee Structure

Schools of the SSC Board had the lowest fee structure, ranging from free education to as low as Rs 10 per month; only one school charged a monthly fee of Rs 550. Students from the CBSE Board paid the next lowest fees, ranging from freeship for girls to a highest of Rs 410 per month for boys. Students from the ICSE Board paid higher fees, at Rs 1000 to Rs 1800 per month. The highest fees were paid in the IGCSE schools, ranging from Rs 1800 to Rs 8000 per month. Additional fees for special classes (computers, sports, etc.) were charged by all SSC schools and by a majority of schools from the ICSE and CBSE Boards, but only one respondent from the IGCSE Board responded in the affirmative.

Teacher Quality

(a) In-service Training

A majority or all of the teachers from all the Boards stated that their schools or Boards organised in-service training for teachers and that they also participated in such training programmes organised by other institutions. The frequency of such participation varied widely in all the Boards, from “whenever required” to “regularly” to once or twice a year to even once in six years.

The types of such programmes generally included workshops, seminars and conferences in the SSC, ICSE and CBSE Boards, but the CBSE Board had more respondents stating that they had specialised training in computers and time and stress management. Teachers from the IGCSE Board stated that their workshops were also for personality development and that these were part of international courses and run by experts from abroad. Attendance at these programmes was compulsory in most cases for a majority of respondents from all the Boards.

Most teachers from the SSC, ICSE and CBSE Boards stated that lectures, discussions and demonstrations with or without audiovisual aids were their main methods of teaching. Interactive and activity-based methods were also mentioned by teachers from the CBSE Board. Teachers from the IGCSE Board did not mention classroom lectures, but instead emphasised the use of discussions, debates, computers, the internet and field trips. Almost all schools from all Boards organised workshops to orient teachers towards innovative methods of teaching.

(b) Motivation

A majority of respondents from all the Boards stated that their schools provided no incentive to boost their motivation levels. A majority of teachers from the SSC and ICSE Boards stated that their schools did not reward individual teachers for their effectiveness. Seven of 12 CBSE Board and seven of nine IGCSE Board teachers stated that their schools rewarded individual teacher effectiveness. Almost all schools, on the other hand, stated that students were rewarded in different ways for their individual effectiveness.

Most respondents from the SSC and ICSE Boards stated that their schools did not encourage action research by the teachers; a majority from the CBSE and IGCSE Boards stated that their schools did. Consequently, most teachers from the SSC and ICSE Boards conducted no action research, while most from the CBSE and IGCSE Boards did, and stated that most of them implemented their findings. A majority of teachers from all the Boards (except IGCSE) stated that they did not have enough time for action research. Time to teach their regular content was, however, considered adequate by almost all teachers.

All teachers from the IGCSE Board stated that their fellow teachers easily accepted innovative views; a majority from the CBSE Board, one-half of the ICSE Board respondents, and a minority from the SSC Board shared this opinion.

Curriculum Transaction

(a) Grouping Procedure

A majority of respondents from all Boards stated that they had no criteria for grouping students into various divisions in one standard. Where such criteria existed, they were based on languages or subjects in the curriculum; in some others, merit or ranks were taken into consideration.

(b) Quality of Instruction

The forty questions under the subhead “Quality of Instruction” were intended to determine how the school types prepared the students in the various psycho-social variables (creativity, emotional intelligence, political awareness, individual modernity, gender role attitude) that the researcher evaluated in them. In addition, they also inquired into how the curriculum caters to community, national and global needs. An attempt was made to determine the flexibility of the curriculum to adjust to changing needs, and the people responsible for such inputs.

SSC: Teachers were of the opinion that the strength of their curriculum was that it was basic and simple and catered to the psychological age of the students. However, they were of the view that the curriculum did not focus on practical aspects and was mainly textual; it did not provide adequate flexibility, and its functioning was restricted by the large number of students to be catered to.

A majority of teachers felt that their curriculum promoted political awareness, and did so by encouraging newspaper-reading sessions and by their history and civics lessons. Similarly, they were of the opinion that creativity was encouraged through arts and craft, as well as several projects and exhibitions undertaken by students in science and geography.

None of the teachers in any Board mentioned that they use the techniques of brainstorming, inquiry training, synectics, attribute listing or role play as a means of enhancing creativity.

Most teachers opined that their curriculum has facets that instil emotional intelligence among students, by promoting equality among students and teaching them values through lessons and religious and moral discourses.

All teachers agreed that the curriculum promoted modern and social-science values through science and other exhibitions and value education, but most felt that the extent of promotion was low.

Teachers were divided in their opinion about whether the curriculum aimed at removal of existing gender biases in society. A majority felt, however, that the curriculum promoted communal harmony and integration, and all agreed that it had a global perspective because it taught about world history and major world events and issues.

Teachers were equally divided about whether there were mechanisms for periodic review of their curriculum. Those who responded in the affirmative stated that these occurred mainly in staff forums. Most of them preferred not to respond to the question on whether decisions are taken based on these reviews; however, all agreed that teachers should be involved, and most felt that students should also be involved, in such decisions, and that they are actually involved in these decisions in their schools.

Some teachers felt that their schools do not bring about curriculum changes easily, but when they do occur they are in keeping with societal or child needs. There were varied suggestions for changes in the curriculum, from changes in individual subjects to changing student outlook from the past to the future. This requires a more practical approach in the curriculum, with more vocational options for students.

One-half of the teachers felt that the present curriculum is heavily overcrowded, and suggested that the content of individual subjects and the number of languages studied could be reduced. Four of ten teachers were aware of pedagogical changes that reflect the trends in society. These teachers stated that these were incorporated in the value education session. Teachers felt that values from the past like strict disciplining, honesty, respect and punctuality could influence what could be done in the present. All teachers opined that the curricular reforms will equip the students better for the future.

Dance and music classes, cultural programmes, art and essay competitions, school magazines, celebration of national and religious festivals, and singing of patriotic songs were listed as activities undertaken by the schools to promote Indian culture. Nine of ten teachers said that their schools conducted educational visits to cultural sites.

Elocution, public speaking, debates, poetry recitation, quiz, and essay writing were listed by the six teachers who said that their schools undertake activities to promote communication skills in students. Five teachers listed sports, group discussions and projects, and inter-house competitions as activities undertaken by their schools to promote compatibility traits.

A majority (9 of 10) of teachers stated that their schools do not prepare students for admission to international universities.

Allotting periods for use of the library, encouraging students to read books, and projects were listed as measures in their schools to encourage students to use the library. Seven of ten teachers stated that their schools have no provision for vocational subjects.

Only five teachers felt that their students respond favourably to changes in the curriculum. An even smaller number felt that parents are supportive of such changes; the rest are either not in support or have no reaction.

ICSE: Teachers were of the opinion that their curriculum was strong in application of knowledge, creativity, problem-solving and analysis, and did not stress on rote-learning. It was also student-friendly and provided autonomy. They, however, noted that the curriculum was often perceived as too vast for some students.

Most teachers were of the view that the curriculum promoted political awareness, but not to a large extent, and mainly through civics lessons. It also promoted creativity through multiple projects and exhibitions and extra-curricular activities. A few teachers felt that the curriculum instilled emotional intelligence among students, by value education, group activities, educational tours and societal activities.

Teachers were of the opinion that the curriculum reflected modernity to a large extent, and encouraged the use of the latest technology. It also encouraged group activity and participation in regional, national and international forums. It instilled a gender-neutral approach to all problems and situations, and encouraged equality of the genders in all activities. Only seven of ten teachers felt that their textbooks had a global perspective.

Six of the ten teachers stated that there were mechanisms for periodic review of their curriculum. Those who responded in the affirmative stated that the review was done either locally by the teachers and the principal or by the Board. The decisions taken based on these reviews are also taken by the school committees. A majority agreed that teachers and students should be involved in the decision-making, and that they are actually involved in these decisions in their schools.

A wide variety of responses were provided by the teachers when asked about what influences changes in their curriculum. These included the economic background of the student, resources provided by the school, student-centred curriculum to foster wholesome growth, curriculum relevant for the day and times, and principles. Only two teachers had suggestions for changes in the curriculum, one wanting to keep it abreast with times and the other wanting to make it more appealing to the child, in order to promote growth and also reduce the dependence on tuitions.

Six of ten teachers felt that the present curriculum is just right in content quantity; the others suggested more efficient methods of teaching and removal of unnecessary topics. Only three of ten teachers were aware of pedagogical changes that reflect the trends in society. Teachers felt that values from the past like emphasis on excellence and respect for authority could influence what could be done in the present. A majority opined that the curricular reforms will equip the students better for the future.

Morning assembly, Indian dance and music programmes, cultural programmes, and celebration of national festivals were listed as activities undertaken by the schools to promote Indian culture. Nine of ten teachers said that their schools conducted educational visits to cultural sites.

Elocution, debates, dramatics, and quiz programmes were listed activities undertaken by the schools to promote communication skills in students. Group or team work and games, social work and interacting with non-governmental

organisations were listed as activities undertaken by their schools to promote compatibility traits; two teachers stated that their schools had no such activity.

Only two of ten teachers stated that their schools prepared students for admission to international universities.

Allotting periods for use of the library, encouraging students to read books, making the library attractive to students, supervising students in the library, and giving them projects that required using the library were listed as measures to encourage students to use the library. Five of ten teachers stated that their schools have provision for vocational subjects.

Teachers generally felt that their students respond favourably to changes in the curriculum. Opinion was, however, divided about whether parents are supportive of such changes.

CBSE: Teachers singled out the ability of their curriculum to prepare students for competitive examinations. They were of the view that it was wide, comprehensive and broad-based in society. In the process, they felt that it may be too vast and demanding for many students.

Most teachers opined that the curriculum promoted political awareness, through civics lessons and mock youth parliaments. A majority felt that creativity was encouraged by the curriculum, as with the other Board types, through projects, competitions, exhibitions and workshops. Some of the teachers were of the view that the curriculum encouraged emotional intelligence, but were not able to provide substantiating evidence.

All of them agreed that the curriculum reflected modernity, but to variable extents. It encouraged awareness about latest developments and scientific tempo. They also stated that the curriculum encouraged equality of the genders in all pursuits and actively stressed and promoted equal opportunities and participation. A global perspective was present throughout the curriculum.

A majority (10 of 12) of teachers opined that there were mechanisms for periodic review of their curriculum. They mentioned teachers, committees and the NCERT as those who review the curriculum, and the NCERT or the Board as those who take decisions based on these reviews. All agreed that teachers and students should be involved in such decisions, and a majority stated that they are actually involved in these decisions in their schools.

Advances in science and technology, national and global trends, making the syllabus child-friendly are philosophies that influenced curricular changes in the school. Suggestions for changes in the curriculum included making the bags lighter, reducing the level of difficulty, taking a more practical approach in subjects, and replacing examinations with periodic tests.

Six of twelve teachers felt that the present curriculum is just right while four opined that it is heavily overcrowded; they suggested that the content of individual subjects could be reduced. Only four teachers were aware of pedagogical changes that reflect the trends in society, and stated that these were implemented in their schools. Only two teachers had an opinion on whether values from the past could influence what could be done in the present. All teachers opined that the curricular reforms will equip the students better for the future.

Morning assembly, dance, drama and music, cultural programmes, and celebration of national festivals were listed as activities undertaken by the schools to promote Indian culture. Eight of twelve teachers said that their schools conducted educational visits to cultural sites.

Elocution, public speaking, debates and discussions were listed as activities that schools undertake to promote communication skills in students; a noteworthy feature was that many schools emphasised mastery in English. Group activities and competitions were activities undertaken by their schools to promote compatibility traits.

A majority (9 of 12) of teachers stated that their schools do not prepare students for admission to international universities.

Allotting periods for use of the library, encouraging students to read books, projects and assignments that required library referencing, and supervision in the library were listed as measures in their schools to encourage students to use the library. Eight of twelve teachers stated that their schools have no provision for vocational subjects.

Opinion was divided about whether students respond favourably to changes in the curriculum. On the other hand, most teachers felt that parents are supportive of such changes.

IGCSE: Teachers stressed that their curriculum was student-friendly, practical and application-based, modern, and inculcating communication skills. Some noted that it was difficult to find teachers to fulfil these demands, and also felt that some of the older truths and systems were being neglected. The curriculum was difficult for students moving in from other Boards, and was more Western- than national-oriented.

Some teachers were of the opinion that the curriculum encouraged political awareness, but moderately. They all were of the opinion that creativity was encouraged by research, projects and exhibitions. All teachers also felt that the curriculum catered to emotional intelligence, by encouraging empathy, team-building and exploring wider horizons.

The teachers were of the view that modern values and attitudes were encouraged, by critical thinking, independent research, and an international perspective. Most agreed that the curriculum discouraged gender biases, and all agreed that it promoted communal harmony and integration. Only five of nine teachers felt that their curriculum had a global perspective.

Eight of nine teachers opined that there were mechanisms for periodic review of their curriculum. They stated that these were done by experts and committees and the Board, and took into consideration feedback from students, parents and teachers. Decisions based on these reviews are taken by the Board. All agreed that teachers should be involved, and six of nine felt that students should also be involved, in such decisions; only six stated that these were actually involved in the decisions in their schools.

Teachers felt that the Board decides about curriculum changes based on its philosophy, but this keeps in mind changing needs and societal requirements. No teacher had any suggestion for changes in the curriculum. Seven of nine teachers felt that the present curriculum is just right in content quantity; there were therefore no suggestions for rectifying anything. A majority (seven of nine teachers) were aware of pedagogical changes that reflect the trends in society, and stated that these were incorporated in

their curriculum to a large extent. Four teachers felt that there should be a healthy mix of values from the past and the present. Eight of nine teachers opined that the curricular reforms will equip the students better for the future.

Celebration of national festivals was the activity mentioned by most teachers as undertaken by the schools to promote Indian culture. Seven teachers said that their schools conducted educational visits to cultural sites.

Seminars, debates, speech and drama, group discussions and co-curricular activities were listed as activities that schools undertake to promote communication skills in students. Group activities and team work were activities undertaken by their schools to promote compatibility traits.

Unlike the other Boards studied, a majority (8 of 9) of teachers stated that their schools prepare students for admission to international universities.

Allotting periods for use of the library, research-driven assignments and projects were listed as measures in their schools to encourage students to use the library; the curriculum required the use of the library. Five of nine teachers stated that their schools have provision for vocational subjects.

Most teachers felt that the students and parents respond favourably to changes in the curriculum.

(c) Textbooks

All teachers, except three from the SSC Board, stated that their textbooks are a good resource for teaching the content expected at various levels. Whereas a majority of teachers opined that the topics are dealt with comprehensively in the textbooks, four from the SSC Board felt otherwise. Almost all teachers stated that the contents of the textbook were both factual and analytical; the rest felt the textbooks were only factual.

Almost all teachers from all the Boards stated that the textbooks did not exhibit any bias with regard to religion or gender.

Teachers from the SSC Board stated that their textbooks are revised only once in a decade. All the others stated that the revision took place more frequently, with the majority stating that this was done every year.

Teachers generally stated that they depended on the textbook to a large extent to carry out effective teaching strategies, and agreed that the students could rely on the text to enlighten themselves.

(d) Available Resources

Teachers from all the Boards stated that their schools have computers and in sufficient numbers, and that their students are allowed to use these. The average time spent by a student from the SSC and ICSE Boards on the computer was about an hour in a week. Students from the CBSE and IGCSE Boards generally spent more time, up to 7-8 hours a week in some IGCSE schools.

All schools from all the Boards provided internet connectivity for their computers. To prevent the misuse of this facility, schools allowed students to use the internet only under supervision; some SSC schools debarred students from using the internet.

A majority of teachers from the SSC and ICSE Boards stated that they have no facility for e-learning; the converse was stated by teachers from the other Boards. While this included only the use of audiovisual equipment in the SSC schools, those from the CBSE and IGCSE Boards had online studies and project assignments. A majority of teachers from all the Boards used computer-assisted instructional packages in the class; this was universal in the IGCSE Board. The frequency of its usage was, however, very variable.

A majority of teachers, except from the ICSE Board, stated that they are provided handbooks to aid their classroom teaching. All teachers stated that they resort to referring to other sources to enhance their own understanding of the content; teachers from the IGCSE Board stated that they do this frequently. Such sources included the internet, reference books, encyclopaedias, journals, newspapers, magazines, and guidelines.

Most teachers from all the Boards stated that their schools do not have residential facilities for staff and students who may need them. All the respondents from the CBSE and IGCSE Boards stated that their schools make use of the services of counsellors and psychologists; this response was also given by a majority of teachers from the SSC and ICSE Boards. In a majority of cases, these service providers were either part-time or visiting as needed; a majority of respondents from the IGCSE Board stated that they had full-time service providers.

Almost all the schools from all the Boards had a variety of co-curricular activities, including literary, stage, and community and sports events.

Almost all the schools offered bus services for their students, except in the CBSE Board, where only one-half of the teachers responded in the affirmative. None of the SSC schools studied had a gymkhana, and this was the case in a majority of schools from the CBSE and IGCSE schools; six of ten of the respondents from the ICSE Board stated that their schools had this facility. A majority of schools from the SSC and ICSE Boards had an auditorium; only one-half of those from the other Boards stated that their schools had one. Only one-half of respondents from all the Boards stated that their schools had book banks for the students.

A majority of respondents from three Boards stated that their schools had canteens that in most cases provided nutritious food; a notable exception was the CBSE Board, where the schools had no canteen or only a minimal cafeteria. A majority of schools, especially in the ICSE and CBSE Boards, had playgrounds with areas demarcated for outdoor games. Where this was not available, the schools used neighbourhood playgrounds for fixed times in a week.

(e) Evaluation Pattern

A majority of teachers from the SSC, ICSE and CBSE Boards stated that at their Board-level examinations, the questions are textual; only two of nine teachers from the IGCSE Board stated so. All teachers from the CBSE and IGCSE, and most from the ICSE, Boards stated that students are expected to apply themselves to unfamiliar situations; only two of ten teachers from the SSC Board stated so.

A majority of teachers from all the Boards stated that they monitored the progress of their students by periodic tests and assessments. The frequency varied from weekly or fortnightly in all the Boards to two-monthly in many SSC schools. A majority

of teachers from all the Boards stated that the evaluation method they used could distinguish between bright, average and below-average students. Whereas a majority of teachers from three Boards stated that they considered a variety of social and emotional aspects of a child during qualitative evaluation, five of the nine teachers from the IGCSE Board did not respond to this question.

A vast majority of teachers from all the Boards stated that they accept answers that are unconventional but rationalized by pupils in the examination answer papers. A majority of teachers from the SSC Board stated that their examinations encourage rote memorization; only one-half of teachers from the ICSE and CBSE Boards, and none from the IGCSE Board, stated so. Most of those who answered in the affirmative stated as reason that convention, or the Board itself, required this. Teachers from all the Boards used a variety of questions to raise critical thinking among their students.

(f) Follow-up Schedule

All teachers from the ICSE Board schools, and a majority from the SSC Board, stated that their schools had alumni bodies. Only two of ten CBSE schools and four of nine IGCSE school had such a body.

School Style of Functioning

Teachers from the SSC Board stated that their schools do not permit flexibility in the choice of subjects at high school. A majority of those from the ICSE and CBSE Boards, and eight of nine from the IGCSE Board, stated that their schools provide such flexibility. Most teachers from the SSC Board opined that feedback given by parents, teachers and students are infrequently used for improvement, whereas teachers from the other Boards stated that this was done often in their schools.

A majority of teachers stated that their schools function on democratic styles in order to form student councils. All teachers also stated that their schools encourage students to work in teams as often as the situation required. They organise group and team activities and curricular and co-curricular events to encourage this. Such activities, which encourage public performance, are also used by all schools to ensure increase in the self-confidence in students. A majority of schools from all the Boards arrange community activities and services (visits to institutions for the less privileged, outreach programmes, donation camps, socially useful and productive work) to create an empathetic attitude in pupils.

Most schools enforce forms of punishment to discipline students. These range from correction cards to counselling, chastisement, impositions, suspensions and detentions; corporal punishment is discouraged.

Almost all the schools have adopted steps to increase environment awareness among their students. Apart from environment studies, these include talks, projects, tree plantation programmes and interaction with non-governmental organisations. Most schools also conduct exercises in order to sharpen the cognitive skills of pupils, including aptitude and general knowledge tests, quizzes, puzzles and competitions. Students are encouraged to grow emotionally strong by a variety of methods adopted by most schools. All schools also teach students to be economically productive, socially useful citizens, using various methods including field trips, scouts and guides, visits to institutions, and camps.

Teacher Perceptions of Gender Role and School Location

Only a minority of teachers felt that some genders are more suited to certain types of jobs. A majority, for example, felt that boys can do well in the field of Home Science, and all respondents felt that a girl can become a good pilot or engineer. Several reasons were given for this, the most common being that selection of jobs should be based on skills and aptitudes and not on gender. A majority of teachers from all Boards also stated that they would encourage girls to take up unconventional jobs. A majority also felt that boys and girls need not be seated on separate rows in coeducational schools.

Except for teachers from the SSC Board, a majority of those from the other Boards opined that the location of the school has an impact on the motivational level of students.

Suggestions for Enhancing School Effectiveness

The present and similar research may help to confirm or allay perceptions of citizens about various school systems, and justify or otherwise their preference for a particular system. Such research may encourage parents and students to select schools of their preference in order to attain goals that they have chosen as appropriate for the future. This may paradoxically work to the further detriment of schools that lack such objectives.

Based on the findings of the present research, the researcher therefore wishes to offer the following recommendations for consideration.

- Education Boards and Councils need to review their curriculum to suit changing needs of society. This is particularly important for the SSC Board in the area of creativity, a psycho-social attribute that is increasingly looked for by institutions and industry. Having to cater to larger populations and from lower socio-economic strata makes the job difficult for this Board, but nevertheless the need cannot be ignored.
- Since a considerable number of schools of the SSC Board type are government-aided, the State has a responsibility to improve conditions in these schools, in the form of increasing teacher-student ratio, recruiting more and better trained teachers to handle a daunting job, and instituting additional incentives for such teachers. Conversely, a stricter check may need to be kept on these teachers to ensure that they deliver what is expected of them; incentives need to be balanced with expectations.
- Teachers from the IGCSE Board may need to pay attention to emphasizing traditional Indian values and norms in their students while they race to encourage global competitiveness.
- The present systems encourage teachers to teach and students to learn with the aim that students attain higher academic achievement scores because that has traditionally been the measure used to select students for higher education and employment. These scores do not reflect the performance of the students in the psycho-social attributes that are likely to be increasingly considered in future.

Schools should be encouraged to introduce progressive teaching-learning methods in order to nurture psycho-social characteristics along with academic achievement. A qualitative evaluation report of these characteristics should be provided in addition to quantifying academic achievement scores. Formative and summative evaluations should be done.

- Boards / Councils and policy makers should periodically review curricula and syllabi in order to introduce positive changes. The views of teachers, students and parents should be sought when such reviews occur, in order to obtain a wider perspective from the society that these institutions serve.
- Boards / Councils and policy makers should provide guidelines for textbook writers to introduce newer focuses with emphasis on situations that promote learning by doing rather than rote learning.
- Vocational guidance counsellors should be provided insights on existing trends in students from different school types.

References:

1. *Hindustan Times*, October 29, 2008, p. 3

