



SHAPING SOCIETAL UNDERSTANDING AMONG LEARNERS: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GRADE VI SOCIAL SCIENCE TEXTBOOK PREPARED BY NCERT.

Education

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a critical analysis of the Grade VI Social Science textbook developed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) with a focus on how it shapes societal understanding among learners. The research explores the textbook's content, pedagogical approaches, and representation of social, cultural, and historical themes. Through qualitative content analysis, the study examines inclusivity, accuracy, and the promotion of critical thinking, citizenship, and diversity. Findings indicate that while the textbook makes significant efforts toward fostering an inclusive and pluralistic perspective, there are areas needing improvement in contextual relevance, gender sensitivity, and engagement with contemporary social issues. The paper concludes with recommendations for enhancing the textbook's role in developing informed, empathetic, and socially responsible citizens.

KEYWORDS

Societal Understanding, Social Science, NCERT Textbook, Grade VI Curriculum, Pedagogical approaches

INTRODUCTION

Social Science is the study of all human efforts over time and space. The purpose of Social Science learning, therefore, is to help learners understand how the world is. Social Science is not a single flower but a bouquet; it is a bouquet of disciplines. In the school curriculum, just as the collection of Physics, Biology, and Chemistry forms General Science, Social Science also represents a family of subjects. It began with Geography and History, and over time, Civics and Sociology were added. These are now represented as Social and Political Life in Indian schools. At its core, the Social Science curriculum is shaped by the need to understand history and the aspiration for social improvement. Social Science learning integrates knowledge, skills, and values. The need for the social sciences sought to use knowledge for social betterment. Social Sciences were intended to: Enlighten public opinion on complex social issues, improve public policy through informed recommendations, and foster active citizenship in school learners. While this was the ideal, reality often diverged. Indian Social Science pursues a dual mission: a scientific project aimed at understanding human behaviour and a national project to improve society, governance, and democracy. Like fire or atomic energy, Social Science can have both constructive and destructive outcomes, depending on its use.

INTRODUCTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN SCHOOLS

Social Sciences help learners understand society, human needs, economic systems, and political structures. Gandhiji's Basic Education curriculum (1938) was the first to introduce Social Studies in schools. The Zakir Hussain Committee emphasized respect for human progress, religious harmony, and national identity. Following independence, the Mudaliar Committee (1953) and the Kothari Commission (1968) promoted nation-building and citizenship education. The NCF 2000 highlighted national unity and civic duties. The NCF 2005 advanced this by advocating gender equality and critical citizenship. Social Science teaching and learning face a few challenges in schools at present. The NCFSE 2023 attempts to address these systematically. Some of the key issues are as follows:

a.) Social Science is usually taught as a subject that focuses predominantly on memorisation of facts, such as dates in history, names of geographical features across the globe, the listing of fundamental rights and duties, and the naming of economic institutions. The effort to understand, discuss, and appreciate concepts is often missing in Social Science classrooms. b.) Social Science is often divided into watertight compartments of History, Geography, Political Science, and Economics too early on in an extremely rigid manner. Students are rarely exposed to comprehensive engagement with any particular social phenomenon and usually learn to look at it through the lens of only one discipline. Therefore, the interdisciplinary thinking that students require to understand society is often not developed.

c.) Information in the chapters is too often transacted in the classroom with little or no connection to the lives of students. Since the subject is not made relevant or interesting to the students, it often ends up being boring, passive, or unrelatable.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Education is a powerful instrument for social change and informed citizenship. In India, the Social Science curriculum helps shape learners' understanding of society, culture, history, and governance. The NCERT Grade 6 textbook is significant as it introduces formal social knowledge. The study critically examines whether the textbook aligns with NCFSE-2023 goals, including inclusivity, critical pedagogy, and student-centred learning. Despite curriculum reforms, textbooks may still present biased or limited perspectives. This study analyses the content, illustrations, and pedagogy of the textbook to assess whether it fosters dialogue, questioning, and real-world engagement.

Objectives of the Study :

1. To find out the critical thinking skills of students about social issues, studying in Class VI with exposure to "Exploring Society: India and Beyond" developed by NCERT.
2. To examine how the textbook integrates real-life examples and scenarios to enhance societal understanding through teachers' feedback.

Research Questions :

1. To what extent are Class VI students exposed to "Exploring Society: India and Beyond" and equipped with critical thinking skills?
2. How do teachers rate the textbook in terms of illustrations, contemporary relevance, and value content?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Investigator made an attempt to review all relevant references conducted in the area under study.

Cabling, M. E., & Montano, R. J. (2024) explored the impact of warm-up activities on developing critical thinking skills in Social Science among Grade 7 learners in the Philippines. A quasi-experimental method was used, dividing 83 students into experimental and control groups with pretests and posttests. Findings revealed a significant increase in the critical thinking performance of the experimental group. Being Political. online (2024) presented a critical review of the NCERT Class 6 Social Science textbook to evaluate its alignment with child-friendly and critical thinking-based pedagogy. The methodology involved content analysis of chapters from the History, Geography, and Civics sections. Findings indicated that while the textbook language is accessible and gender-sensitive, it lacks sufficient fieldwork prompts, ICT integration, and higher-order question formats. The review concluded that while the textbook encourages curiosity, its design could more robustly foster critical

analysis and civic reasoning. Witarsa, R., & Muhammad, A. (2023) conducted a study in Indonesia to enhance critical thinking among elementary-level social studies learners through project-based civic education. Results showed a statistically significant improvement in critical thinking indicators like reasoning, comparing perspectives, and evidence-based reflection in the experimental group compared to the control. Sasmita, D., Sapriya, S., & Maryani, E. (2022) designed a framework to develop critical thinking indicators in Social Studies learning for elementary students. The findings recommended methods like student-centred inquiry, real-life case discussion, and reflective writing to be integrated into textbooks and classroom practices to develop critical reasoning from an early age. Ali Emad Muhammad (2020) investigated the perceptions and practices of secondary school teachers regarding critical thinking instruction in Social Studies in the Kurdistan region. Findings revealed that although teachers recognised the value of critical thinking, they rarely implemented it due to constraints like curriculum load, limited training, and emphasis on factual recall. Sri Hapsari (2016) conducted a descriptive study in Indonesia to assess the critical thinking Skills of students studying social science at the junior high school level.

The findings indicated that while students showed strong skills in interpretation and explanation, they struggled with evaluation and making independent judgments, reflecting an imbalance in higher-order reasoning skills. Baljeet Kaur (2016), in her research on caste representation in school textbooks, highlights how textbooks often omit caste-based discrimination or treat it superficially. She advocates for a more honest and detailed engagement with caste realities. This is crucial in analysing whether the NCERT textbook meaningfully discusses caste and equality, particularly in the civics sections. UNESCO's (2015) *Global Citizenship Education* report outlines learning objectives that include promoting human rights, cultural diversity, and civic engagement. These global benchmarks serve as a reference point for evaluating whether the NCERT textbook aligns with international goals of fostering responsible and informed global citizens through social science education. Renu Mehrotra (2013) discusses the political use of textbooks in India, where curriculum decisions are influenced by changing regimes and ideological battles. Her work warns of the risks of historical revisionism and political bias, which must be kept in mind while analysing the NCERT Grade 6 textbook for objectivity and balanced perspectives. Anuradha Banerjee (2012) critiques the representation of tribal communities in NCERT textbooks, highlighting tokenism and stereotypical depictions. She argues for more authentic and context-specific inclusion of Adivasi voices and histories. Her research is directly relevant to evaluating how effectively the textbook represents India's tribal diversity and whether it allows space for multiple narratives. Manju Jain (2011) explores how curriculum and textbooks contribute to educational inequality. Her framework helps in assessing whether the Grade 6 textbook includes the perspectives of Dalits, minorities, and economically disadvantaged groups, thereby contributing to or challenging social inequality. Nandini Bhattacharya (2010) analyses how history textbooks construct national identity by selectively including or omitting historical events and figures. She contends that such narratives often serve political purposes. This is significant in evaluating the historical content in the Grade 6 textbook—whether it encourages critical inquiry into India's past or promotes a homogenised, uncritical national story. Gopal Pathania (2010), in his work on civic education, explores how textbooks introduce democratic values and civic responsibilities to students. He finds that often the approach is theoretical rather than experiential, lacking a real-world connection. This critique is valuable when examining how the NCERT textbook handles topics like government, rights, and equality and whether it encourages students to relate these concepts to their everyday life. Krishna Kumar (2007), in *What is Worth Teaching?*, critiques the Indian education system for excluding the lived realities and cultural contexts of marginalised communities. He argues that textbooks often present sanitised versions of society, avoiding conflict or inequality. This analysis is highly relevant to understanding whether the NCERT textbook acknowledges social inequalities, represents multiple perspectives, and provides children with a truthful, critical engagement with society. Kumar and Oesterheld (2007) examine how textbooks construct societal realities and how these representations affect learners' perceptions. They note that while textbooks attempt to present a national narrative, they often fail to reflect local realities and the everyday experiences of children, especially from marginalised backgrounds. This observation informs the critique of whether the Grade 6 NCERT textbook sufficiently connects classroom learning

with students' lived experiences. The NCERT Position Paper on Social Sciences (2006) outlines the rationale and pedagogical approach for teaching social sciences in schools. It advocates for moving away from rote memorisation toward inquiry-based learning that enables students to understand society and their role within it. The document stresses that social science education should promote critical thinking, awareness of rights and duties, and appreciation of diversity. This aligns with the dissertation's goal of evaluating whether the textbook encourages a meaningful societal understanding. G.K. Verma (2006) argues for integrating critical pedagogy into social science education to empower learners to question injustice and understand social structures. His views resonate with the NCF's emphasis on inquiry and are useful for assessing the kinds of questions, activities, and discussions encouraged by the NCERT textbook. Amartya Sen (2005), in *The Argumentative Indian*, emphasises the tradition of public reasoning and debate as central to Indian culture and democracy. He advocates for education that promotes critical thinking and dialogue. This philosophical grounding supports the analysis of whether the Grade 6 textbook encourages learners to question, discuss, and engage with social issues instead of passively absorbing content. Vimala Ramachandran (2004) reveals in her study on gender and equity in Indian primary education how textbooks subtly perpetuate gender biases through language, examples, and visuals. She advocates for gender-sensitive curriculum reforms. This is highly applicable in assessing how gender is represented in the NCERT textbook—whether girls and women are portrayed as active participants in society or relegated to traditional roles.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this Title is to describe the research approach, design, population, sample, sampling technique, and sample size used for data collection and analysis. The research adopted a qualitative methodology as the nature of the study required in-depth exploration and critical analysis of textbook content and learners' understanding.

Research Design

The research followed a descriptive research design within a qualitative methodological framework. Descriptive research aims to systematically describe a situation, problem, phenomenon, or behaviour. In this study, the descriptive design helped in identifying and analysing the presence and representation of societal concepts in the Grade VI Social Science textbook published by NCERT. It also supported the collection of data from teachers and students through surveys to gather their interpretations and responses. A survey method was employed to collect data using structured tools such as questionnaires and interviews, which enabled the researcher to gather authentic and diverse viewpoints from selected respondents.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all Social Science teachers working in CBSE-affiliated secondary schools in Ganjam district, Odisha, as well as Grade 6 students who are the direct recipients of the curriculum designed by NCERT. The Ganjam district comprises 22 CBSE-run schools, which follow the NCERT curriculum at the secondary level. The population for this study included approximately 10 Social Science teachers who teach Grade 6 Social Science and around 40–45 students who are currently studying from the selected textbook. These groups were considered ideal for providing insights into the textbook's content and its influence on students' societal understanding.

Sample of the Study

For this study, data will be collected from selected Odisha Adarsha Vidyalayas (OAVs) located in different blocks of Ganjam district, Odisha. These schools have been selected to represent a cross-section of learners from different regions within the district, providing a comprehensive context for the analysis of critical thinking skills among Grade VI students. The selected sample schools are OAV Kusumi, located in *Kukudakhandi* Block, OAV Karapalli, located in *Rangelunda* Block, OAV Patrapur, located in *Patrapur* Block, OAV Chamakhandi, located in *Chhatrapur* Block, OAV Pitatali, located in *Chikiti* Block. The sample comprised both teachers and students from a select number of schools. A total of 5 Odisha Adarsha Vidyalayas (OAVs) from the Ganjam district were purposively chosen. From each school, 10 students of Grade 6 and 2 Social Science teachers were selected.

Table 1: The Samples from different schools in Ganjam district

S.N.	Name of The School	No. of Students	No. of Teachers	Samples
1	OAV KUSUMI	10	2	12
2	OAV KARAPALLI	10	2	12
3	OAV PATRAPUR	10	2	12
4	OAV PITATALI	10	2	12
5	OAVCHAMAKHANDI	10	2	12
Total		50	10	60

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

OBJECTIVE 1:

To assess the critical thinking of students on social issues, students in Class VI were exposed to the textbook "Exploring Society: India and Beyond," developed by NCERT.

Tool Used: Structured questionnaire with Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) administered to Class VI students.
Sample: 50 students from CBSE-affiliated schools.

TABLE 2: FOR STATEMENT-I

The textbook encourages the grade 6 students to think about current social issues			
Sl.No.	Scales	Total Response	In %
1	Strongly Agree	35	58
2	Agree	15	25
3	Neutral	6	10
4	Disagree	3	5
5	Strongly Disagree	1	2

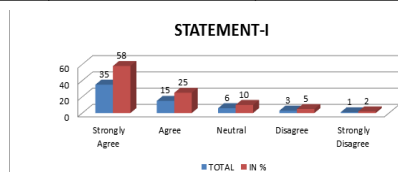


Fig 3: Showing interest in thinking about current Social Issues

Table 3: For Statement-II

STATEMENT-II			
It helps students to ask questions about what is right and wrong in society			
SL NO	SCALES	TOTAL RESPONSE	IN %
1	Strongly Agree	30	50
2	Agree	18	30
3	Neutral	7	12
4	Disagree	4	7
5	Strongly Disagree	1	2

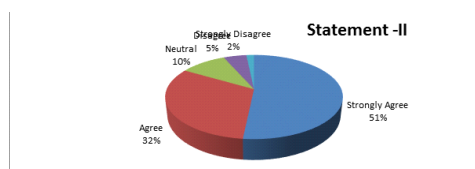


Fig 4: Pie Chart showing Response to ask questions about what is right and wrong in society

Table 4

STATEMENT-III			
The textbook encourages me to look at problems from different views.			
SL NO	SCALES	TOTAL RESPONSE	IN %
1	Strongly Agree	32	53
2	Agree	17	28
3	Neutral	6	10
4	Disagree	4	7
5	Strongly Disagree	1	2

Fig. 5: The textbook encourages me to look at problems from different views.

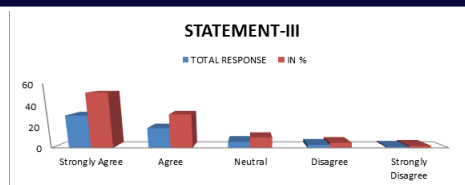


Table 5:

STATEMENT-IV			
I feel confident in expressing my opinion on social topics			
Sl No	Scales	Total Response	In %
1	Strongly Agree	28	47
2	Agree	20	33
3	Neutral	8	13
4	Disagree	3	5
5	Strongly Disagree	1	2

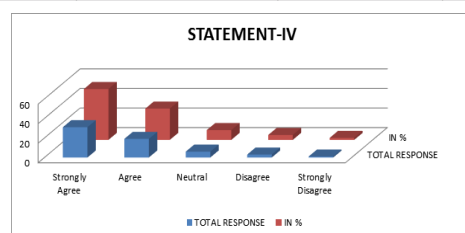


Fig 6: Response on feel confident in expressing my opinion on social topics

INTERPRETATION:

Most students agreed that the textbook encourages them to think critically about social issues. More than 80% reported that they are motivated to consider multiple perspectives, question societal norms, and engage in meaningful classroom discussions. This indicates that the textbook moderately supports the development of critical thinking among students.

OBJECTIVE 2:

To examine how the textbook integrates real-life examples and scenarios to enhance societal understanding through teachers' feedback.

Tool Used: Semi-structured teacher feedback through written responses and short interviews. Sample Size:10 Social Science teachers from CBSE schools.

Thematic Analysis of Teachers' Feedback

Theme	Description	Sample Teacher Comment
Real-Life Relevance	Teachers appreciated the use of real-life stories and relatable examples.	"The lesson on livelihoods uses examples of street vendors, which students see daily."
Scenario-Based Activities	Activities and case studies were seen as helpful in contextualising topics.	"The textbook has questions and cases that help learners connect with their surroundings."
Need for Local Context	Some teachers felt examples were too generalised.	"Some examples are urban-centric; rural students find it hard to relate."
Encouragement of Discussion	Teachers noted that the textbook allows space for open-ended discussion.	"The textbook's structure allows group work and debates in class."

INTERPRETATION:

Teacher responses revealed that the textbook makes an effort to integrate real-life scenarios, but also highlights a need for regionally relevant examples. Overall, the integration of real-world examples was seen as moderately effective in enhancing societal understanding.

SUMMARY OF DATA ANALYSIS

- The textbook promotes critical thinking among students by

- encouraging questioning, multiple viewpoints, and problem-solving discussions.
- Teachers agree that real-life relevance is well-integrated but recommend more local examples to enhance relatability.
- Through content analysis, it is evident that the textbook emphasises social values like empathy, cooperation, and the labour.
- Overall, both students and teachers acknowledge the positive role of the Grade VI NCERT Social Science textbook in shaping societal understanding and reflective thinking skills

MEASURE FINDINGS OF RESEARCH

Promotion of Historical Consciousness

- The chapter fosters early historical awareness by linking names to cultural and geographical contexts.
- It helps learners appreciate the continuity and change in India's identity over millennia.

Encouragement of Multicultural Understanding

- By presenting both internal and external perspectives, the chapter promotes pluralism and global awareness.
- Learners begin to see India not as a static entity but as a dynamic civilisation shaped by diverse influences.

Development of Analytical Skills

- The use of primary sources (e.g., Rig Veda, Mahabharata) introduces students to source-based learning, encouraging critical thinking
- Students learn to interpret historical texts and understand their relevance in shaping societal narratives.

Identity Formation and National Integration

- The emphasis on Bhāratavar ha and regional diversity helps students understand the unity in diversity theme.
- It contributes to national identity formation by linking ancient heritage to modern India

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study's findings have significant implications for multiple stakeholders in the education system, including curriculum developers, textbook writers, policymakers, teacher educators, and classroom practitioners. Social Science textbooks are not neutral documents; they play a formative role in shaping learners' worldviews, civic consciousness, and understanding of societal structures. When textbooks are inclusive, critically engaging, and contextually relevant, they can cultivate empathy, democratic values, and social awareness among students. Conversely, when they are fact-heavy, unidimensional, or biased, they risk reinforcing stereotypes, social inequalities, and uncritical attitudes.

Implications for Curriculum Developers and Textbook Writers:

The study underscores the need to integrate pluralistic perspectives and inclusive content that reflects the diverse realities of Indian society. It highlights that textbooks should go beyond mere information delivery and should promote questioning, analysis, and reflection. By incorporating multiple narratives, voices from marginalised communities, and real-life case studies, textbooks can become tools of empowerment rather than mere instruments of passive learning.

Implications for Policymakers: The findings point to the need for periodic textbook review and revision to ensure alignment with democratic ideals, constitutional values, and contemporary societal needs. Policymakers must also ensure that textbook development processes are transparent, participatory, and inclusive of diverse expert inputs. This would enhance both the credibility and effectiveness of textbooks as national learning resources.

Implications for Teacher Educators: Teacher education programs should equip teachers to critically engage with textbooks rather than treat them as rigid scripts. Teachers should be trained to use textbooks as dynamic resources for dialogue, debate, and experiential learning. This requires integrating pedagogical strategies that encourage participatory, learner-centred approaches.

Implications for Classroom Practices: Teachers should be encouraged to use textbooks as starting points for deeper inquiry rather than as the final word. Activities that connect textbook concepts to

learners' everyday experiences can make Social Science education more meaningful and transformative.

Implications for Researchers: This study provides a foundation for further research on the intersection of textbook content, pedagogy, and learning outcomes. Future studies could explore how learners interpret textbook narratives or how teachers mediate content in classroom settings.

CONCLUSION

By adopting these recommendations, NCERT and other education authorities can transform Social Science textbooks into powerful tools for democratic education. Such improvements would help nurture critical, empathetic, and socially responsible citizens equipped to participate meaningfully in a pluralistic society. Aligning textbook content with inclusive values, critical pedagogy, and active learning principles will not only fulfil the aims of the National Curriculum Framework but also strengthen the foundation of India's democratic and social fabric. Ultimately, reimagined textbooks can serve as catalysts for social change, empowering learners to challenge injustice and contribute positively to the nation's development.

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