UNIT 5  ORGANISING SUBJECTS IN
SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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5.1  INTRODUCTION

In Unit 4, we have discussed about the inter-relationships that exist between
curriculum, syllabi and various domains of learning at the school level. In course
of that discussion, we have also dealt with issues concerning integrated curriculum,
importance and types of curricular materials, learner-centred pedagogy and its
merits and demerits. As and when necessary, we may recall some of that discussion
in this Unit which is associated with the present theme, i.e., organising subjects
in school curriculum.

There are certain obvious questions that we have to address in this regard. The
first is about the bases for organising different subjects of study in a school
curriculum. The second is about the appropriateness of such organisation at different
levels of school education. The third pertains to meeting the goals of teaching and
learning at the school level. Does such organisation of subjects adequately address
the needs of students, teachers, and evaluators? At the end, we shall also address
the question regarding the use of a uniform syllabus as against the plurality of
syllabi designed at the local level or at the school level. The scheme of the Unit,
as given above, will give you some understanding about the significance of all these
questions and how important it is to address them.
5.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the rationale on the basis of which the syllabi of different subject areas are organised;
- explain why different subject-wise syllabi are drawn up for different levels of school education;
- describe how selection of content is made to design syllabi in different subject areas;
- explain how different needs of different stake-holders are met in the teaching and learning of different subject areas at different levels of school education; and
- discuss the implications of having a uniform syllabus vis-à-vis locally designed syllabi.

5.3 BASES OF ORGANISING SUBJECTS IN SCHOOL CURRICULUM

In this segment, we discuss the various premises and considerations, which play important role in organising subjects at the school level. We will also discuss how these considerations have varied from time to time in the Indian context, thereby not only imparting certain flexibility to curriculum framing but also hinting at the changing stances of the times concerned. To drive home the point further, we may turn towards instances to see how these considerations do vary from country to country too.

After independence, the Government of India and the State Governments took several steps to bring in certain degree of professionalism into curriculum framing. To realise this goal institutions like the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), State Institutes of Education (SIEs), State Textbook Boards (STBs), and State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) were established beginning with the 1960s. However, the first concrete step to reorganise school education in the country, which subsequently came to be known as the 10+2 system, and to provide for it a definitive perspective, a comprehensive curriculum that was named, ‘Ten Year School: A Framework’ was developed in 1975. This curriculum framework provided the basis for developing detailed syllabi for different stages of school education while making provisions for the teaching and learning of subjects like environmental studies and science and mathematics from the primary stage onwards. Thereafter, the ‘National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education: A Framework’, brought out by the NCERT in 1988, further contributed towards the concretisation of a ‘national system of school education’ in the country by lending it structural uniformity and academic consistency across the board.

This endeavour was even more bolstered in the new millennium. In the light of critical assessments of school education both in India as well as in more advanced countries like the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA), apart from at the international level by bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the ‘National...
The Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2000’ was brought out by the NCERT to make school education more relevant to the changing times and also to ensure ‘equity and excellence’. Hence, great emphasis was laid on ‘Minimum Levels of Learning’ (MLL) at each stage of school education while urging the syllabi in different subjects to be organised in a sequential manner to help learners acquire “the specified sets of competencies in each unit before moving on to the next one”. Besides, emphasis was also laid on the ‘learner-centred approach’ to achieve the carefully determined objectives of education at every stage as expected of the learners in keeping with their physiological and psychological development at that stage.

Close on the heels of this effort a major opportunity presented itself for improvement in the conceptualisation and the designing of syllabi in school subjects following the adoption of the ‘National Curriculum Framework, 2005’. It particularly took cognisance of the “real world”, which children live in, and the fundamental nature of each subject area from the perspectives of their respective boundaries, the inter-relationships that connect each other, stages at which these were to be studied and, over and above all, the age-group of the learners. On the whole, with the National Curriculum Framework, 2005, there came the assertion towards moving on “the long road to the goal of enabling the system of education to receive and nurture every child”.

5.3.1 School Subjects – Languages, Social Science, Science, Mathematics

The Curriculum Framework of 1975 categorised subjects for teaching and learning stage-wise. At the Primary stage, from classes I to V, it made provisions for (a) a first language, (b) mathematics, (c) environmental studies including aspects of both social studies and general science, (d) work experience and the arts, and (e) health education and games. At the Upper Primary stage, from classes VI to VIII, it provided for enhanced learning by (a) making additional provisions for a second language alongside the first language, (b) separating environmental studies into science and social science, (c) dividing work experience and the arts into two separate subject areas, and (d) adding physical education to health education and games. At the Secondary stage, consisting of classes IX and X, it added a third language to the above list.

The Curriculum Framework of 1988, developed on the basis of the ‘National Policy on Education, 1986’, did not deviate much from the 1975 formulation. Its only points of departure were in regard to the first two years of education, which named as ‘Pre-Primary Education’, and learning of three languages from the Upper Primary stage onwards. In regard to the first, its emphasis was not to undertake formal teaching of any subject, but to make learning experience joyful through group activities and play-way techniques. The other conspicuous feature of this curriculum was the dropping of the term ‘games’ from the lists of subjects at all levels.

The Curriculum Framework of 2000 was the first attempt at formulating a ‘Scheme of Studies’ for all stages of school education, including the ‘plus-two stage’. It also advocated: (a) a common scheme of studies for classes I to X; (b) integration of ‘ten core components’ as identified in the National Policy on Education, 1986 and basic values common to all the major religions in different subject areas at all stages; and (c) flexibility in the selection of content. As the curriculum stated clearly, “The general objectives of education will be realised through the content
and learning experiences related to different subject areas”. Accordingly, it renamed the first two years of education as ‘Early Childhood Education’ (ECCE) and called for it “to be made uniformly available to all children of the country to ensure equity”. Secondly, it termed the first eight years of education, including the first five years of the primary stage and the next three years of the upper primary stage, as ‘Elementary Education’. For classes I and II (ECE), it continued with ‘One Language’ (now categorically mentioned as the mother tongue or the regional language) and ‘Mathematics’ providing in both opportunities for children to gain experiential knowledge taking into account the natural and the man-made environment around them, while replacing ‘Environmental studies’ with ‘Art of Healthy and Productive Living’ (as the first two subject areas took care of environmental studies at this stage). ‘Environmental studies’, however, continued to be recommended as a separate subject area during the next three years of primary education. At the upper primary and the secondary stages, again, it clarified the three-language formula as consisting of the mother tongue or the regional language, one modern Indian language and English. Similarly, it clarified ‘Health and Physical Education’ to include “games and sports, yoga, NCC, and scouting and guiding”. To ‘Science’, it added ‘Technology’ making the subject, ‘Science and Technology’. At the higher secondary stage, it recommended for ‘differentiated and specialised in-depth courses in humanities, social sciences, science, mathematics, commerce and the like on the one hand, and a variety of vocational courses on the other’. It termed the first category of courses as the ‘Academic Stream’ while the second category of courses was named as the ‘Vocational Stream’. The ‘Scheme of Studies’ in each case was to have (a) ‘Foundation Courses’ and (b) ‘Elective Courses’.

The Curriculum Framework of 2005, building on the earlier efforts, brought in epistemological shifts in organisation of school subjects “with a view to making education more relevant to the present day and future needs”. Besides, its objective was also to reduce stress on children. It especially recommended “the softening of subject boundaries so that children can get a taste of integrated knowledge and the joy of understanding”. In language, it suggested the implementation of the three-language formula while recognising the mother-tongue of children as the “best medium of education”. In mathematics, it called for widening the scope of the subject by relating it to other subjects so as to “enhance the child’s resources to think and reason, to visualise and handle abstractions, to formulate and solve problems”. In science, it called for recasting the teaching of the subject to “enable children to examine and analyse everyday experiences”. While recognising the ‘disciplinary markers’ in social sciences, it called for a ‘paradigm shift’ in the teaching of the said subject from the perspectives of (a) integration of significant themes, (b) marginalised groups, (c) gender justice, and (d) sensibilities towards minorities. Furthermore, it called for recasting ‘Civics’ as ‘Political Science’ and teaching “the significance of history as a shaping influence on the child’s conception of the past and civic identity”. On a similar vein, it disavowed schemes such as the ‘Minimum Levels of Learning’, which in its words, “reinforced not only the rigid adherence to year-end outcomes, but also allowed for these to be further narrowed to lessons”.

With these ideas, the curriculum framework of 2005 recommended framing of syllabi at the elementary, secondary and the higher secondary stages, which included: (i) Language (Hindi – classes I to X; Urdu – classes I to VIII; Sanskrit – classes VI to VIII; English – classes I to XIII); (ii) Mathematics (compulsory – classes I to X; elective – classes XI-XII); (iii) Environmental Studies (classes III to V);
(iv) Science (compulsory – classes VI to X; elective (Chemistry, Physics, Biology – classes XI-XII); and (v) Social Science (compulsory – classes VI to X; elective (Geography, History, Political Science, Economics, Sociology, Psychology, Business Studies, Accountancy – classes XI-XII). Besides, the curriculum also recommended framing of syllabi for Art and Physical Education at all stages and Media Studies at the higher secondary stage. In a way, these subject areas, being recognised across curricula, have thus far come to define the domains of school education.

5.3.2 Bases for Organising School Subjects

One finds a few points standing out quite sharply while taking a look at the bases, which framers of curriculum have taken into consideration for zeroing in on the kinds of subjects that are to be taught at different stages of school education. For example, the curriculum framework of 2000 emphasised on “establishing uniformity of structure of school education, i.e., 10+2+3 throughout the country”. What is important here is to note that school education cannot be seen in isolation and that it must deal with those subject areas, which will offer scope for vertical mobility. Besides, there must also be some commonality built into the system for horizontal movement. This necessitates offering of subjects that have relevance as well as resonance through the entire spectrum of school education. This was echoed by the curriculum framework of 2000, when it called for providing “broad-based general education to all learners up to the end of the secondary stage to help them become lifelong learners and acquire basic life skills and high standards of Intelligence Quotient (IQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ), and Spiritual Quotient (SQ)”. The other base that is often taken into account is the learners abilities and the social context. In addition to it, the framers of curriculum also keep in mind the evaluative dimension of a given subject area. But for this criterion it would not be possible to assess students’ learning outcomes.

Apart from the above, there are several other considerations too. These considerations are often linked to societal expectations, which get reflected in the formulation of school subjects. What a child going to school is expected to learn? That there must be language and mathematical abilities in school curriculum. Scientific temper characterised by the spirit of enquiry and understanding of the social and natural environment are also considered to be the hallmarks of a modern human being. To add to these, understanding of diversity in geographical formations and people living in different parts of the country and the world, appreciation of the past with its achievements and pitfalls, and the use of technology and its implications are also necessary concomitants of modern life. Therefore, all of these provide considerable basis for organising school subjects.

The curriculum framework of 2005 made seminal departures while looking at the bases for organising school subjects. Noting that ‘no other task in educational planning is as complicated as organising a child’s day at school’, its overall thrust in this respect was to ‘let children be children, and allow them all to realise their potential’ by seeking to “relate classroom learning with children’s life outside”. Thus in the area of language the emphasis it laid on was for the syllabus to create “meaningful contexts for language acquisition”. In mathematics, it laid emphasis on reasoning and the grasping of the subject at every stage. In Environmental Studies, it asked the syllabus to be woven around six common themes that are close to the child’s life such as family and friends, food, shelter, water, travel, and everyday things that we do. In science, too, it asked the syllabus to focus on core
themes while integrating assessment into the learning process. In the social sciences, it asked for the syllabi to centre on activities and projects, “which would help learners to understand society and its institutions, change and development”. On the whole, while organising subject-wise syllabi, the curriculum asked for a decisive ‘shift from knowledge transmission to active participation of learner in the construction of knowledge’.

**Activity 1**

*Collect critical studies on all the four curriculum frameworks that are available in public domain and write an analytical essay on the considerations, which animated the said curriculum frameworks to recommend different schemes of studies.*

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**Check Your Progress 1**

**Note:**

a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with the ones that are given at the end of the unit.

1. How many curriculum frameworks have so far been developed in India? What have been their respective approaches towards making subject-wise syllabi?

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2. What considerations in your view should provide bases for organising school subjects?

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5.4 APPROPRIATENESS OF SUBJECTS IN CURRICULUM AT DIFFERENT STAGES

Across curricula the importance of teaching and learning of subjects from the learners’ perspective has been well recognised. This has been more so in case of the last two curriculum frameworks. The curriculum framework of 2000 manifestly admitted this with the words that ‘learners are not passive objects’ and then went on to add that for curriculum construction ‘an integrated approach for understanding the characteristics of learners seems appropriate and helpful’. The curriculum framework of 2005 too recognised the child ‘as a natural learner’ and knowledge ‘as the outcome of the child’s own activity’. Thus, what it expected the ‘formal processes of learning’ taking place in schools to do for children was largely to ‘open up possibilities of understanding and relating to the world’.

5.4.1 Stages of School Education - Primary, Upper Primary, Secondary and Higher Secondary

All the four curriculum frameworks that we have talked about have sought to define the stages of school education taking into consideration the physical, mental and emotional developments of children. Accordingly, they have also provided guidelines for organisation of content in different subject areas.

However, there has been some discordance so far as the primary education is concerned. As we have already pointed out, the curriculum framework of 1988 was the first to recognise the distinctiveness of the first two years of education of a child from the subsequent stages in terms of how to engage them constructively in the process of their own development in the overall context in which they are born and being educated, and labelled it as the ‘Pre-Primary Stage’. What followed from this recognition was the recommendation to not engage these children in any sort of formal teaching. But the curriculum framework of 2000 preferred to formally associate the term ‘education’ with this stage even while recognising its distinctiveness, and called the process ‘Early Childhood Education’. This departure was made with the recognition that children emerging out of a state of dependence and helplessness gradually attain independence and become curious learners during this stage. The curriculum framework of 2005 went a step forward in this direction. Noting that the early childhood stage is ‘the most critical period when the foundations are laid for life-long development’ and that negligence at this stage could sometimes lead to irreversible ‘negative consequences’, it required the process, which it called ‘Early Childhood Care and Education’, to provide adequate ‘care, opportunities and experiences’ to children to ensure their all-round development at this critical stage.

As for the other stages, there has been marked consistency among the curriculum frameworks with one exception. Until the formalisation of the 10+2 system, the word ‘school’ in India was generally taken to mean education up to class X. However, following the adoption of the National Policy on Education, 1986 two more years have been added to school education. These additional years taken together have since termed ed as the ‘Higher Secondary Stage’.

Such division of school education into ‘stages’, as we have pointed out earlier, has not been done for the sake of convenience. Rather, it has a developmental validity from the point of view of designing curriculum and teacher preparation. As the curriculum framework of 2005 states, ‘seen from a stage-wise perspective,
curriculum thinking and school organisation can overcome problems created by current preoccupation with ‘monograde’ classrooms as being the norm, with rigid application of age-based grouping of children, and class-wise teaching and learning objectives’. There is another reason too. As the same curriculum framework goes on to state, ‘Assessing children for what they have learnt could also then take place over a longer cycle of years spent in school, rather than as yearly requirement spelt out for each class, in hierarchical progression’.

With the above considerations in view, four broad stages of education at the school level stand out. These are: (i) Early Childhood Care and Education; (ii) Elementary Education; (iii) Secondary Education; and (iv) Higher Secondary Education.

Going by the criteria of appropriateness, the curriculum framework of 2005 suggested each of these stages to have the accompanying ‘scheme of study and assessment’ suitably organised on the basis of (a) the general aims of education, (b) the developmental stage of the children, (c) nature of knowledge in general and the curricular subject areas in particular, and (d) the socio-political context of the children. Accordingly, at the first stage, it recommended ‘playing, music, rhyming, art and other activities using local materials, along with opportunities for speaking, listening and expressing themselves, and informal interaction’ to be the ‘essential components’ of education. In addition, it pointed out that the language used at this stage should be the one, which ‘the child is familiar with the immediate environment’, while she could be comfortably introduced to a second language from Class I onwards in ‘an informal multilingual classroom’. At the second stage, it recommended education to be of ‘an integrated character, enabling children to acquire facility in language and expression and to grow in self-confidence as learners, both within and outside school’. At the next stage, it recommended the courses to aim at ‘creating an awareness of the various disciplines’ and thereby introduce the children to the ‘possibilities and scope of study in them’. As for the last stage, it sought ‘possibilities of choosing optional courses of study for exploring and understanding different areas of knowledge, both in relation to one’s interest and one’s future career’.

The above recommendations, on the whole, addressed the appropriateness of subject-wise curriculum organisation at all stages.

5.4.2 Making Selections of Content in Different Subject Areas and Designing the Syllabus

Having discussed the issue of appropriateness of organising curriculum for different stages of school education, it now becomes incumbent on us to take a closer look at subject-wise designing of syllabus and content selection. As in case of the first issue, in this instance, it would also be more instructive for us to look at the rationale for designing the syllabus than to look at the fine print of the ‘list of content’.

By a syllabus we generally mean only a list of content. But, like putting together a few words at random do not make a sentence, similarly putting together a few topics to make a list out of them do not make a syllabus. In other words, a syllabus needs to be a product of consistent thinking with each of its topics thematically linked to the other making the entire document an integral whole. So, first of all, what is more important is the approach towards conceiving the subject. From the point of view of the learners, what objectives are going to be met by
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studying that subject? And, from the points of view of the educators, what objectives are going to be achieved by outlining the syllabus in the given subject? The second task is to be mindful about the internal logic of the subject. As all of us know, every subject has its own disciplinary character with assorted methods of enquiry, presentation of facts, analytical framework, and inferential techniques. Thus, designing a syllabus needs to contend with all these factors. The third thing to be attentive about is the linearity of the scheme of study. This is necessary to ensure progression in study. The fourth dimension of a syllabus is about acquainting a learner about the scope of the subject. At a higher level, a learner can access the world of knowledge by studying a subject in all its vividness. At the school level, the learner needs to get a glimpse of such vividness to get over stereotypical notions of closed character of different subject areas. This is all the more necessary from the perspective of school education as very often learners make poor decisions about the choice of their subjects for study. This happens as they come under the influence of false notions about different subjects and what avenues such subjects can offer them for further study and knowledge acquisition. Many a times, this also happens because the set syllabi in different subject areas do not adequately make learners aware about the scope of those subjects. The fifth point to look for is about the quantum of content that can be covered in a particular class within the stipulated time period. In an overall scheme of study meant for general education, all subjects hold equal relevance and importance. Hence, there can only be a limited number of periods available to the teaching and learning of any particular subject during the school hours. The amount of course that can be covered within that available time period has, therefore, to be seriously taken into consideration. Finally, the overall design of the syllabus has also to factor in the stage-wise teaching and learning objectives. Here comes in the conceptual framework of the syllabus. Looking at the age-appropriateness of the learning cohort and the type of conceptual understanding that needs to be acquired at a given stage, the syllabus has to apportion the content laid out for study across stages.

Now, we can make a sense out of the above discussion if we take a look at how a syllabus is designed in practice. For this, it will suffice here to take one concrete example, say, History. Students may take up any other subject as per their choice as part of their project activity.

As we have already mentioned in Unit 4, noting that ‘learning has become a source of burden and stress on children and their parents’ the curriculum framework of 2005 proposed five guiding principles for curriculum development. One of those is ‘nurturing an overriding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country’. Based on this principle, the ‘National Focus Group Position Paper on Social Sciences’ proposed the teaching and learning of social sciences ‘to accommodate the multiple ways of imagining the Indian nation’. Hence, it recommended the teaching of Indian History to take place in ‘reference to developments in other parts of the world’ and not ‘in isolation’. Also, recognising the ‘pluralistic’ character of Indian society, it stated that ‘all regions and social groups (should) be able to relate to the textbooks’. As for the textbooks, it stated that these ‘should be seen as opening up avenues for further enquiry’ and that students should be encouraged to go beyond these to ‘further reading and observation’. It also recommended that ‘relevant local content should be part of the teaching-learning process, ideally transacted through activities drawing on local resources’. About content its recommendation was especially to focus on a ‘conceptual understanding’ rather than ‘lining up facts to be memorised for examinations’.
With these recommendations in mind, the syllabus makers in history for the upper primary, secondary and higher secondary stages selected content to especially promote understanding and foster both curiosity and capacity among learners for further investigation.

Accordingly, the History syllabus at the upper primary stage focused on Indian history. The scheme was devised in such a way that one chronological time span was covered in each class thereby covering the whole of Indian history, from its earliest times to the present in three years. Thus the syllabus detailed the contents belonging to ‘Ancient India’ in class VI, ‘Medieval India’ in class VII, and ‘Modern India’ in class VIII. The objectives for devising a syllabus like this were five-fold. They are:

i) to provide a general idea of the developments within each period of history while taking care to avoid an excess of detail that can burden textbooks;

ii) to give an idea of the way historians come to know about the past while introducing the learners to different types of sources and encouraging them to reflect on these sources critically;

iii) to create a sense of historical diversity by providing a broad overview while focussing simultaneously on a ‘case study’ of one region or a particular event;

iv) to introduce the learners to ‘time lines’ and ‘historical maps’ to help them situate the ‘case studies’ and also locate the developments of one region in relation to what was happening elsewhere; and

v) to encourage the learners to indulge in historically imagining what it was like to live in the society that was being discussed.

Now, in a graduating scheme, the syllabus makers at the secondary stage made an attempt to provide content about some of the diverse forces and developments, which have shaped the contemporary history of the world and that of India within that context. While doing so, one of their objectives was to make learners understand how developments in the West as well as in the colonies were quite significant in the making of the modern world. Through this the syllabus-makers wanted the learners to be introduced to such seminal ideas like liberty, democracy and freedom as well as anti-democratic ideas like fascism, racism and communalism. The second objective was to help learners reckon variation within the seemingly similar processes and phenomena of history through selection of such content that deal with how different social groups confront and shape economic and social changes in the modern world. The third objective was to enable learners to recognise how issues reflecting cultural and political changes are often linked to issues of identity and power. The fourth objective was to encourage learners to make sense of variety of sources and think of what they convey and why particular historical events are portrayed in particular ways in such sources. Like in the upperprimary stage, the fifth objective here was also to persuade learners to try and make interconnections between sets of information using ‘maps’ as well as ‘time lines’.

At the higher secondary stage, there was no further need to repeat ‘the chronologically ordered histories of India’. This had already been done at the upper primary stage. Therefore, at this stage, the syllabus-makers chose to select and organise content woven around significant themes of the ‘World’ and ‘Indian’ history. In doing so, their broader objective was to emphasise to young adult learners waiting to enter into the portals of higher education that history is a critical discipline, a process of enquiry, a way of knowing about the past, rather
than just a collection of facts. And, the particular objective was to enable learners to learn to relate and compare developments taking place in different situations, analyse inter-connections between similar processes located in different time zones and periods, and also discover the relationship between different methods of social enquiry as practiced within the frameworks of different social sciences.

Based on this carefully thought-out syllabus, the History textbooks for classes VI-XII were developed to advance the cause of activity-based teaching and learning in schools. Thus, the textbooks apart from cogently presenting broad narratives on selected content also provided appropriate illustrations that included time-lines, maps and other visual materials alongside important sources for learners to read and reflect upon. Besides, the textbooks also provided pedagogically innovative in-text and end-text questions to encourage critical thinking and formation of historical perspectives. Furthermore, the textbooks also provided indications for learners to go for further reading on any theme of their choice and do multiple activities for learning enrichment.

**Activity 2**

*Collect sample syllabi from different Boards in India and make a comparative study of them in relation to any subject of your specialisation or choice. Make special mention of your own assessment of each of the sample syllabi in the report of your study.*

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**Check Your Progress 2**

**Note:**

a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with the ones that are given at the end of the unit.

3. Discuss the considerations based on which a subject syllabus is drawn up for different stages of school education. Is it important to keep the learners’ perspective in mind while doing so? Why?

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4. What objectives have the syllabus-makers of History kept in mind while formulating the syllabi in history for different stages of school education? Are those objectives appropriate?

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5.5 ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND EVALUATORS IN THE FORMULATION OF SCHOOL SUBJECTS AND THEIR TRANSACTION

In this segment, we will focus our attention on the scholastic and the pedagogical underpinnings that go into the teaching and learning of school subjects and how these seek to address the various concerns of students, teachers and evaluators to make school education purposeful.

5.5.1 Teaching and Learning of Subjects – What for?

The imperatives of teaching and learning of various subjects at different stages of school education have been well laid out in the curriculum frameworks.

As for language, it has been widely recognised as the most essential subject, through which, one not only acquires knowledge but also organises thoughts and ideas for effective communication. In an Indian school, a child gets the opportunity to learn three languages. The objectives of teaching these languages include the competence to listen and understand the spoken word through making connections and drawing inferences in a non-linear fashion, read with comprehension, express effortlessly using analytical and creative faculties, write in a coherent manner having control over grammar and vocabulary, and engage in the scientific study of language and literature.

Alongside language, mathematics is another essential subject through which children acquire the competence to think and reason, pursue assumptions to their logical conclusion, and handle abstraction. Through the teaching and learning of this subject, they also develop the ability to address problems that come from the domains of natural and social sciences.

Similarly, the teaching and learning of science as a subject cannot but be emphasised in a school curriculum. Through it children acquire the ability to observe the physical and biological environment carefully, understand conceptual and mathematical models devised to explain physical phenomena, undertake controlled experiments used to arrive at principles, theories and laws governing the natural world, and progress towards newer observations, experiments and innovations.

The teaching and learning of social sciences in schools likewise brings to a child the perspectives and knowledge, which are essential for building a just, progressive and peaceful society. Besides, social sciences also equip children with methods of enquiry that are in many ways essential to creating in them critical moral and mental faculties.

The teaching and learning of health and physical education as a curricular subject in comparison to others has not been consistently emphasised across curriculums. However, with the recognition that health is a critical factor in the overall development of a child, its unconditional inclusion in the curriculum has lately been taken seriously. Accordingly, the subject has come to acquire a holistic character including elements of education in games and sports, yoga, and reproductive and sexual health. Its contribution in terms of enabling children to acquire awareness about their physical, emotional, mental and social development has been phenomenal.
5.5.2 Different Needs of Different Stake-holders – Students, Teachers, and Evaluators

The last two curriculum frameworks have unequivocally placed the learners at the centre of all teaching-learning activities in schools. This has been done in recognition of the fact that it is the learners, who actually construct their own knowledge. Thus, the subject-wise syllabi and various curricular materials including textbooks, which flowed from these curriculum frameworks, consciously adapted to the learner-centric pedagogical approach. This called for a change in the role that the teachers had hitherto been playing in the teaching-learning process. Now, instead of being the sole agency of curricular transaction, they were called upon to become facilitators of learning, which was expected to be done largely through debates, discussions, projects, and activities. The expectation in doing so was basically to make it easier for learners to organise their own learning experiences for construction of knowledge. Besides, there was also a broader objective to it. In a significant way, it restored the academic initiatives back into the hands of the teachers. They could now strategise in multiple ways to lead learners to discuss significant themes, debate issues, draw inferences, and finish off with innovative learning assessment. They were no longer expected to only transmit textual information to learners and assess their performance based on such information. This approach to teaching, learning and assessment also enabled innovative evaluation at the summative level. The constraints of asking questions strictly in conformity with the content given in the textbooks, awarding credits for best replication of such content in answer sheets, and leaving no space for logical thinking and creative response in the process thus made way for competency-based assessment. To put it in a nutshell, the three-pronged strategy, namely, setting out curricular objectives based on constructivist outlook in the subject-wise syllabi and aligning these with that of the delineation of content in the textbooks, facilitating, thereby, a thorough recasting of the teaching-learning process so far practiced in schools, and making learning assessment process-oriented for better appraisal of student performance and progress, addressed the diverse needs of all stakeholders, from students to teachers and evaluators, involved in school education in a much more holistic way.

**Activity 3**

Write an essay based on your reflection on the syllabi, textbooks and question papers of any subject-area of your choice from the point of view of how these have addressed the needs of students, teachers and evaluators and share your write-up with fellow students for their comments.

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5.6 ISSUES OF UNIFORM SYLLABUS VERSUS LOCALLY DESIGNED SYLLABUS

Finally, in this segment, we are going to discuss the desirability of having a uniform syllabus at all levels of school education vis-à-vis locally designed syllabus to suit diverse educational needs of a country as vast and complex as India. During the course of the discussion, we will also refer to experiences from other countries to situate the discussion on a broader context.

5.6.1 Concerns Addressed by a Syllabus

In Unit 4, we have already dealt with various issues that are associated with the development and implementation of the curriculum, syllabi, and textbooks. How critically these three are linked to each other has also been noted there. Therefore, it would suffice here to just remind ourselves that whereas ‘curriculum’ encompasses key educational goals and the manner in which these are to be achieved, ‘syllabus’ refers to the lists of contents of what is to be taught in different subject areas in conjunction with their learning objectives. This indicates the symbiotic relationship that exists between the two. Thus the concerns that are addressed by the syllabus are indeed addressed by the two taken together.

When it comes to the framing of a syllabus in a given subject, we either tend to take a convenient top-down or a radically bottom-up view. The top-down view generally concerns itself with questions like the efficacy of retaining the disciplinary character of the subject, the importance of giving primacy to the broader national issues and aspirations, and the necessity of giving coverage to significant global trends. As opposed to it, the bottom-up view concerns itself with the social,
economic and cultural milieu of the children, the salience of the issues that operate at the local level, and the need to organise the syllabus with reference to such milieu and issues.

On the face of it, the arguments on both sides appear impressive. The syllabus needs to, and indeed, addresses all such concerns. As we are aware, every subject taught at the school level draws its legitimacy and sustenance from the disciplinary character that it possesses. Thus, irrespective of the stage of education, the organisation of a syllabus has to be made in such a way that it retains the essential character of that discipline. This, however, does not mean that the rigour of the discipline will complicate the goal of education at that stage. Therefore, it becomes an abiding responsibility with the syllabus makers to strike a balance between the two. Similarly, while organising a syllabus it needs to be remembered that what is national is not necessarily exclusive of the local. Rather, what distinguishes the two is the scale of the social or natural phenomena that are sought to be dealt with. However, the syllabus has to be mindful of the graduating scheme of study so that it facilitates the learner’s progress from the understanding of the local to the national, connecting the two logically in the process. From the point of view of the syllabus the global trends are equally important. This is so, not merely because we are living in a very closely inter-connected world, but also because advancements taking place in the world of knowledge are increasingly becoming the outcomes of global studies and research. Thus, for meaningful participation in such efforts, curricular means need to be put in place from the very outset. The syllabus becomes a legitimate tool in doing so.

Apart from the above, the syllabus also addresses pedagogical concerns. As we are aware, often it is easier to outline themes for study. But, striking a balance between the local, the national and the global, or for that matter, retaining disciplinary character of a subject and simultaneously make it comprehensible at the stage for which it is meant, is quite a challenging task. Therefore, in order to do this, the syllabus has to take recourse to appropriate pedagogical strategy. To begin with, this is done by specifying learning objectives against every theme that is earmarked for study. Next ‘projects’ and ‘activities’ that would be helpful in realising the learning objectives are also specified. Finally, the syllabus indicates the evaluation strategies that are to be employed.

However, designing syllabus is a dynamic endeavour. There is no dearth of challenge for it to address. Here, we are going to discuss in some detail one such challenge.

5.6.2 Uniform Versus Locally Designed Syllabus

The debate in connection with the desirability of having a uniform syllabus as against a multiplicity of locally designed syllabi is somehow quite old in India. There are countries like the United States of America (USA), where locally designed syllabi have routine acceptance. Both India and the USA are large, culturally diverse, multi-ethnic societies. But the constitutional schemes in the two countries are different. Constitutionally the USA is a federal country. India, on the other hand, is a ‘Union of States’. Initially, education was a part of the ‘State List’ in the Indian constitutional scheme. Subsequently, it became a part of the ‘Concurrent List’. Besides, there is asymmetry in social and economic development across India. Universalisation of elementary education is yet to become a realised goal. Among schools there also exists wide disparity in the country. Against this backdrop, it is but natural to have this debate raging over decades.
With India trying to organise its education system on an even keel after independence, the first nation-wide curriculum framework adopted a clear posture in favour of uniformity. It stated: ‘For a vast country like ours with its diversity of languages, social customs, manners, mores and uneven economic development, the needs and demands of individuals and society will have differential pulls on the school curriculum, varying from one region to the other. For the sake of uniformity of standards and of national identity, therefore it is necessary to develop a common curriculum within a broad framework of acceptable principles and values.’ While there is no doubt that it was alive to the ‘special needs’ of different sections of the student population, yet its recommendations for meeting such needs were limited to providing ‘additional inputs’ for the talented, the backward, and those coming from non-formal channels”. The curriculum framework of 1988, more or less, maintained a similar posture. According to it, ‘the scope for flexibility in methodology and approach to transaction of curriculum’ should not be ‘used for introducing differential courses’ as this might ‘accentuate disparities in standards of education in different parts of the country’. The preparation of syllabi and textbooks at the district or school level was clearly a no-go zone. The curriculum framework of 2000 only slightly deviated from this line of argument. It stated: ‘International experiences have shown that neither the completely centralised approach nor the totally decentralised approach to curriculum development has really been successful. The countries which at one point of time had tried the decentralised approach to curriculum development subsequently reverted back to some kind of a nationally developed centralised curricular policy. In view of this global experience, the most suited workable model of school curriculum seems to be one that could be labelled as the product of coordinated decentralisation, meaning thereby that while the broad framework gets developed at the central level, it goes to the states for analysis and study in their own contexts’. However, despite talking about ‘coordinated decentralisation’ it did not articulate how this could be done.

Against this backdrop, the curriculum framework of 2005 took a clearer stand in favour of ‘decentralised curriculum development’. One argument on the basis of which it took this stand was the vexed issue of ‘curriculum load’. The other argument was in relation to the construed meaning of the term, ‘National Curriculum Framework’. In its view a national curriculum framework is only ‘a means of evolving a national system of education capable of responding to India’s diversity of geographical and cultural milieus while ensuring a common core of values along with academic components’ rather than ‘an instrument of uniformity’ as is being commonly supposed. Thus it recommended curricular choices to be made ‘with due regard to the child’s context’ ensuring flexibility and diversity of approaches. However, other than saying that ‘academic planning has to be done in a participative manner’ at the school level, it did not go beyond issues like village level mapping of educational needs, greater transparency and accountability of budget allocation and expenditure, school-level planning of academic calendar and activities, potential role of headmasters in providing academic leadership, and the necessity of creating a pool of resource persons at the village, cluster and block levels to provide support to schools in terms of ideas and practices and to assist in working them out.

In the mean time more than half the states in India have either adopted or adapted the syllabi and textbooks that have been developed centrally by the NCERT or the CBSE. Many states have also been assisted academically as well as financially
to develop their curriculum framework, syllabi and textbooks in line with the ones which have been centrally developed. Besides, the country as a whole has also moved towards having common syllabi in subjects like Science, Mathematics, Commerce and Economics to facilitate holding of common entrance examinations for entry into higher education in these areas.

Thus, from the practical standpoint at least the scale of the debate seems to have tilted towards uniform syllabus. However, in an era of multiple innovations and experiments, it cannot be anybody’s case that locally designed syllabus will have no place in the domain of school education.

**Activity 4**

Prepare a chart with for and against arguments on the desirability of having a ‘uniform syllabus’ versus ‘locally designed syllabi’. Share this chart with others in your class to get a comparative perspective.

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**Check Your Progress 4**

Note: 

a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with the ones that are given at the end of the unit.

7. What concerns does a syllabus address? Is it possible for a syllabus to address all concerns?

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8. What position has the NCF, 2005 taken in relation to having a ‘uniform syllabus’? Has its guideline in this regard been successful?

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After independence, the Government of India and the State Governments have taken several steps to bring in some degree of professionalism into the task of framing curriculum. Accordingly, institutions like the NCERT and the SCERTs have been set up. Four national curriculum frameworks have also been drawn up by now. These efforts have contributed towards developing a ‘national system of school education’ in the country. This system has been further bolstered by the development and implementation of a uniform ‘scheme of study’ across all stages. The National Curriculum Framework, 2005 has especially made this scheme of study more contemporaneous and relevant by bringing about substantial change in the way the school subjects have hitherto been organised. It particularly disavowed schemes such as the ‘Minimum Levels of Learning’ that reinforced the practice of rigidly adhering to year-end outcomes in terms of lessons learnt and in its place advocated a decisive ‘shift from knowledge transmission to active participation of learners in the construction of knowledge’. This stemmed from the recognition that child is a ‘natural learner’ and knowledge is ‘the outcome of the child’s own activity’. Thus, the four stages of school education were defined taking into consideration the physical, mental and emotional developments of children. In this context, the first two years of primary education received special attention of the curriculum frameworks of 2000 and 2005, which has now come to be recognised as the stage of Early Childhood Care and Education. However, all curriculum frameworks kept in mind the questions of appropriateness while issuing guidelines for development of subject-wise curriculum irrespective of the stage it was meant for. Accordingly, syllabi and textbooks came to be developed keeping these guidelines in view to cater to the needs of students, teachers and evaluators. However, the debate regarding the desirability of having a uniform syllabus as against locally designed syllabi is still raging at the moment though the scale seems to be tilted towards the former than the latter.

**5.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS**


**5.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

- So far, four curriculum frameworks have been developed in India. They are developed in the year 1975, 1988, 2000 and 2005. Last part of the question is self-exercise.
Subjects in School Curriculum

- Self-exercise.

- Taking into considerations of the physical, mental and emotional development of the children; engage the children constructively in learning in the process of their own development in the over all context in which they are born and being educated; helping children emerging out of a state of dependence and helplessness to gradually attain independence and become curious learners during various school stages, etc. Last part of the question is self exercise.

- To provide a general idea of the developments within each period of history while taking care to avoid an excess of detail that can burden textbooks; to give an idea of the way historians come to know about the past while introducing the learners to different types of sources and encouraging them to reflect on these sources critically; to create a sense of historical diversity by providing a broad overview while focussing simultaneously on a ‘case study’ of one region or a particular event; to introduce the learners to ‘time lines’ and ‘historical maps’ to help them situate the ‘case studies’ and also locate the developments of one region in relation to what was happening elsewhere; and to encourage the learners to indulge in historically imagining what it was like to live in the society that was being discussed.

- Language is the most essential subject, through which, one not only acquires knowledge but also organises thoughts and ideas for effective communication. Last part of the question is self exercise.

- Section 5.5.2 will help you to answer this question.

- A syllabus generally addresses the concerns like the efficacy of retaining the disciplinary character of the subject, the importance of giving primacy to the broader national issues and aspirations, and the necessity of giving coverage to significant global trends. It also concerns with the social, economic and cultural milieu of the children, the salience of the issues that operate at the local level, and the need to organise the syllabus with reference to such milieu and issues. Last part of the question is self exercise.

- Self-exercise.