



NCERT Rationalisation: Clearing Confusions

This editorial is based on [No Textbook Conspiracy](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 12/06/2023. It talks about the menace of disinformation spread around recent textbook rationalisation exercise taken up by the NCERT.

Prelims: [New Education Policy](#), [NCERT](#), Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, [National Curriculum Framework \(NCF\)](#)

Mains: NCERT - Rationale, Concerns raised by critics, response to criticism and way forward to avoid such controversies

Recently, the alarmist news was circulated that key concepts and segments, notably the theory of evolution and the periodic table, have been dropped from science textbooks by the [National Council of Educational Research and Training \(NCERT\)](#).

The usual suspects took to social media to declare the death of secularism and scientific temper in India. The story received widespread global attention, including from Al-Jazeera, Deutsche Welle and the noted scientific journal Nature.

What was particularly concerning, in this case, was the circulation of unverified information on social media, which was further amplified by mainstream media. From one news outlet to another, the story expanded, sowing disinformation and confusion.

This not only had an adverse impact on the reputation of the NCERT but also created scepticism about the country's education system. The government had already been working to dispel the negative image of the country's education system. No scientific theory is absolute — it can be contested. The latest debates that have questioned Darwin's theory of evolution need to also be a part of the curriculum.

What was the Criteria for Rationalisation?

The NCERT was tasked with the rationalisation of textbooks across all classes and subjects. The process accounted for five broad criteria:

- Overlaps with similar content in other subjects within the same class.
- Similar content in a lower or higher class
- The level of difficulty
- Easily available content that does not require much assistance from teachers and can be undertaken through self or peer-learning.
- Irrelevant content in the present context

What was the Rationale behind the Rationalisation Exercise?

The updating of textbooks is a regular process carried out by the NCERT, but one needs to understand these changes are not random. They are undertaken in specific contexts:

- **To Reflect the Changing Realities:** Some changes were made to reflect the changing realities — these include the incorporation of content related to information technology and computers.
- **In Accordance with the [New Education Policy](#):** The textbooks are revised in accordance with the reforms in the country's educational system. In this case, the **[National Education Policy \(NEP\) 2020](#)** is the torchlight — it “emphasises reducing the content load and providing opportunities for experiential learning with a creative mindset.”
- **The Pandemic Effect:** There was a colossal loss of teaching time during the pandemic which, in turn, led to loss of learning and increased the load on the students. This was also a concern expressed by the **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education**.
 - Therefore, the process of rationalisation was initiated to facilitate the “speedy recovery in the learning continuum and compensating time loss of students.”

What were the Concerns raised by the Critics?

- The exercise is **politically motivated** and aims to erase or distort certain aspects of India's history, culture, and diversity that do not align with the ruling establishment's ideology.
- The exercise is **at odds** with the progressive thrust of the **National Education Policy 2020**, which emphasises critical thinking, multidisciplinary learning, and respect for diversity.
- The exercise is **lacking transparency** and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, such as teachers, students, parents, academics, and civil society groups.
- The exercise is **unnecessary** and **ineffective** in addressing the learning losses caused by the **Covid-19** pandemic, which require classroom-level interventions and empowering teachers.
- The exercise has also raised concerns about the comprehensiveness and depth of the curriculum, as some significant chapters such as the [Periodic Table](#), [Darwin's theory of Evolution](#), and Fibre and Fabrics were deleted.

What is the Government's stance?

- The [periodic table](#) has “**not been removed** from school education curriculum” but instead reassigned to Unit 3 in the Class 11 textbook.
- [Darwin's theory of evolution](#) is covered in “great detail” in chapter six of the Class 12 textbook.
- The missing reference to [Maulana Azad](#) from the Class 11 Political Science textbook (Indian Constitution at Work) is not a part of the current process of rationalisation.
 - The reference was dropped from 2014-15.
 - Still, it ended up being linked with the larger controversy. So many leaders have not been mentioned in textbooks, even earlier.
- The discussions have missed another important point — these textbooks are for this year alone. Besides the larger synchronisation practice of textbooks to make them comply with the NEP 2020, the textbooks are supposed to be revised regularly by the **Textbook Development Committee** (constituted in 2005).
 - This committee is mandated to develop the syllabus in line with the 2005 **[National Curriculum Framework \(NCF\)](#)**.
 - Each proposed change is first sent to the Textbook Committee, which is tasked to analyse and recommend them.
- The critics argued that the deletion of some items was not included in the notification of the rationalisation. This has nothing to do with some conspiracy but is representative of the regular process of reprinting where minor deletions are not notified to avoid unnecessary confusion.
- Moreover, these are **not radical transformations** since reprinting textbooks to take care of the suggestions of stakeholders is a process that takes place every year.
- These decisions were taken by the expert panel. The rationalisation of textbooks is a need-based exercise to reduce content load because of the toll taken on the mental health of students during the pandemic.
 - The NCERT arrived at these decisions after consultation with “in-house” domain experts, as well as 25 external specialists.

What are Some Past Controversies regarding the Rationalisation exercise?

- In 1978-79, a controversy over revising the contents of history books dominated the political space during the tenure of Prime Minister [Morarji Desai](#).
- In 2006, during the UPA rule, a chapter on Sikhism had to be changed because of enormous controversy.
- Another controversial incident occurred in 2012, when the Shahi Imam of the Fatehpuri Mosque in Delhi, demanded the removal of two mediaeval paintings from history textbooks arguing that their inclusion violated Sharia law.

What should be the Way Forward?

- **Participatory and Evidence based exercise:** Ensure that the curriculum development and revision process is more participatory, transparent, and evidence-based.
 - This means that the NCERT should involve a diverse and representative group of experts, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders in the decision-making process, and share the rationale and evidence for any changes or deletions with the public.
- **Incorporate Feedbacks & Suggestions:** The NCERT should also consider the feedback and suggestions from the users of the textbooks and make revisions based on the latest research and best practices in education.
- **Focus on Extra Curriculars as well:** Extracurricular activities like sports should be added to the syllabus. Participating in sports not only helps to maintain physical fitness but also promotes social skills, teamwork, and leadership qualities.
 - It provides an opportunity for students to pursue their interests and passions outside of academics.

Conclusion:

Scrutiny should be lauded as long it is rooted in hard facts and evidence. Selective reading and mischaracterisation do not breed transparency or accountability but undermine them. Context and facts must be accounted for before any discussion is initiated. Learning about the menace of disinformation is an education in itself.

Drishti Mains Question:

Learning about the menace of disinformation is an education in itself. Discuss this statement in light of recent changes made in textbooks by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Which of the following provisions of the Constitution does India have a bearing on Education? (2012)

1. Directive Principles of State Policy
2. Rural and Urban Local Bodies
3. Fifth Schedule
4. Sixth Schedule
5. Seventh Schedule

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3, 4 and 5 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 5 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans- (d)

Mains

Q1. How have digital initiatives in India contributed to the functioning of the education system in the country? Elaborate on your answer. **(2020)**

Q2. Discuss the main objectives of Population Education and point out the measures to achieve them in India in detail. **(2021)**

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