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## **“CHALLENGES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING OF SOCIAL SCIENCE –THE DUAL PERSPECTIVE”**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper presents an overview of prevailing pedagogic practices of social science in India. It also offers an understanding of the obstacles in achieving an effective system of student-teacher interaction in actual humanities classroom which appear as hindrance in the achievement of optimal results. In this study, interview technique is used as qualitative research method and utilized as a means of data collection. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with the teachers as well as the students in the humanities study group. This provided us with the dual perspective on the issue, both from the teachers as well as the student point of view. The analysis of teachers' interview revealed that the teaching of social science is a reflection of teacher's own biases and beliefs; dominated by deficit model of thinking and learning. Against this backdrop the paper tries to find a solution to the problem associated with the issue of objectivity in teaching Social Science. The student interviews on the other hand proved as a resource to find the problems faced by them in understanding the various themes dealt by the teachers in the classroom. Hence, the dual perspective has helped us in understanding the problem from both the sides. This study tries to find the gaps that exist between the knowledge imparted by the teachers and the understanding developed by the students in this process.*

### **Keywords**

Dual Perspective, Interview, Humanities

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## 1. Introduction

Social Science is a stream whose relevance & importance as a subject of study has always been questioned the world over. The survey reports clearly indicate the growing demand for the Humanities subjects hence there lays a big responsibility on the shoulders of the Humanities teachers to keep the trend going. The current research aims at -

- Identifying the challenges in teaching and learning of social science.
- Finding out solutions to overcome the challenges.

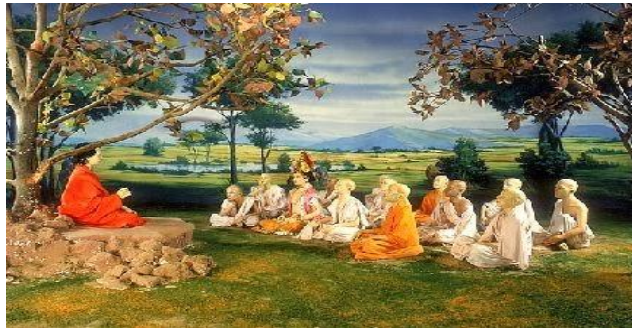
Hence, an attempt has been made through this paper to be a part of the actual classroom situation and find the dual perspective on the problem. Dual perspective refers to the perspective of the teachers as a knowledge giver and the perspective of a learner as an acquirer of knowledge. The idea behind finding the dual perspective was to reach the root cause of the problems faced by teachers in delivering the content on the one hand and also to understand the perspective of learner on the actual learning in the process. Hence, a research work based on the actual class room surveys of different schools in Delhi in the humanities stream along with the discussion and interviews conducted with teachers and students (NEPS AND G.D.Goenka Public School Campus, 2018). It also includes the data and survey reports of the Government of India (Department of School Education & Literacy, Annual Report 2015-16).

Various problems have been discovered in the process of teaching and learning for example

**Table 1:** Based on interviews conducted in NEPS, New Delhi, 2018

	<b>Teacher's Perspective</b>	<b>Learner's perspective</b>
1.	Responsibility of teaching History, Political Science, Geography and Economics on one teacher makes it difficult to handle.	Major difficulty is till secondary level as all the different social science subjects are clubbed under one single paper which makes it very complicated to understand.
2.	Large classroom size makes teaching difficult as an effective teaching cannot take place without catering to the personal needs of individual learners.	They find it difficult to relate the content to the current events which makes the subject appear impractical.
3.	Time management is a major challenge as the content to be delivered in a specified time is too vast.	Lack of use of modern technology and audio-visual while teaching makes the subject appear dull.

## 2. The Historical Background of Indian Education System



**Figure 1:** *Depiction of a traditional Indian Gurukul*

The Education System which evolved in ancient India is known as the Vedic system. The importance of education was well recognized in India, ‘Swadeshe pujiyate raja, vidwan sarvatra pujiyate’, which means “A king is honoured only in his own country, but one who is learned is honoured throughout the world.” The ultimate aim of education in ancient India was not knowledge, as preparation for life in this world or for life beyond, but for complete realization of self. The Gurukul system fostered a bond between the Guru & the Shishya and established a teacher centric system in which the pupil was subjected to a rigid discipline and was under certain obligations towards his teacher. The world’s first university was established in Takshila in 700 BC and the University of Nalanda was built in the 4th century BC, a great achievement and contribution of ancient India in the field of education.

## 3. Recent Trends

In the last twenty years, the educational scenario in India has seen major changes (Joshi Kireet, 2000) & new concepts such as

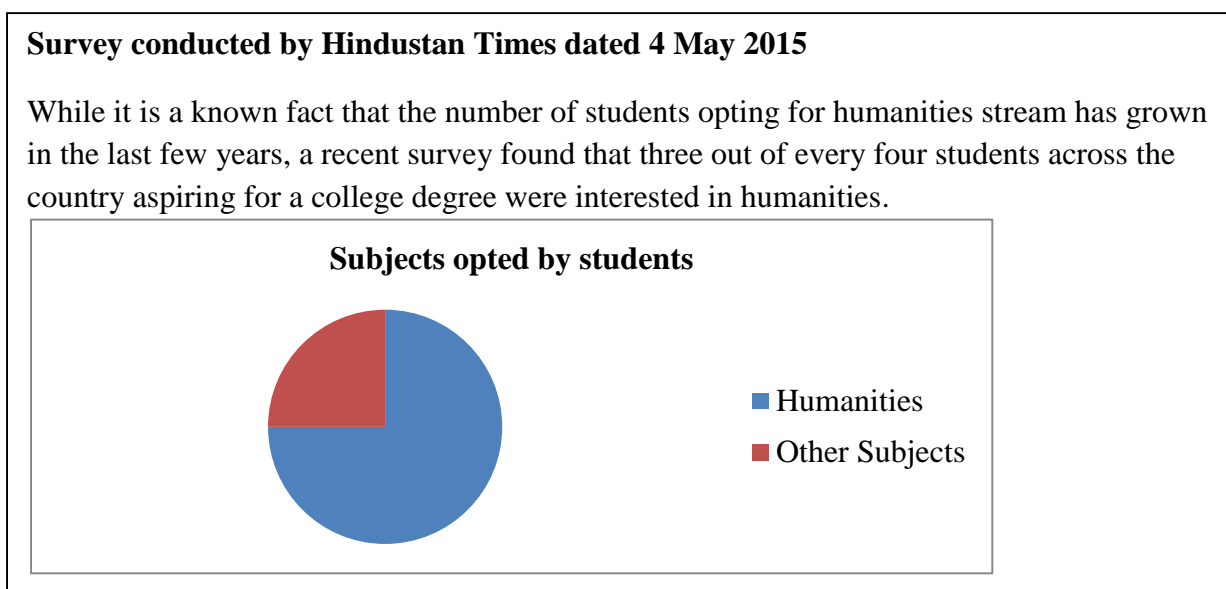
- ❖ Rights-based approach to elementary education
- ❖ Student entitlement
- ❖ Shift in emphasis from literacy and basic education to secondary, higher, technical and professional education, the endeavour to extend universalization to secondary education,
- ❖ To reshape the higher education scenario.
- ❖ A new impetus to skill development through vocational education in the context of the emergence of new technologies in a rapidly expanding economy in a globalised environment
- ❖ Need for innovative ways of student financing
- ❖ Addressing challenges of globalization and liberalization,
- ❖ Recognition of multi-disciplinary & inter-disciplinary nature of learning and knowledge,

- ❖ Efficient use of public resources and encouraging ways of enhancing private investment & funding.

### 3.1 Increasing importance of Social Science

Social science is a stream whose relevance & importance as a subject of study has always been questioned the world over. But the recent trend reflects an increasing number of students opting for social science subjects at the secondary and graduation level (Pednekar Puja, 2018). Most interestingly the students with analytical and critical thinking are opting for Humanities as the subject of specialisation.

**Table 2:** Based on a survey conducted by Hindustan Times (a daily) in 2015



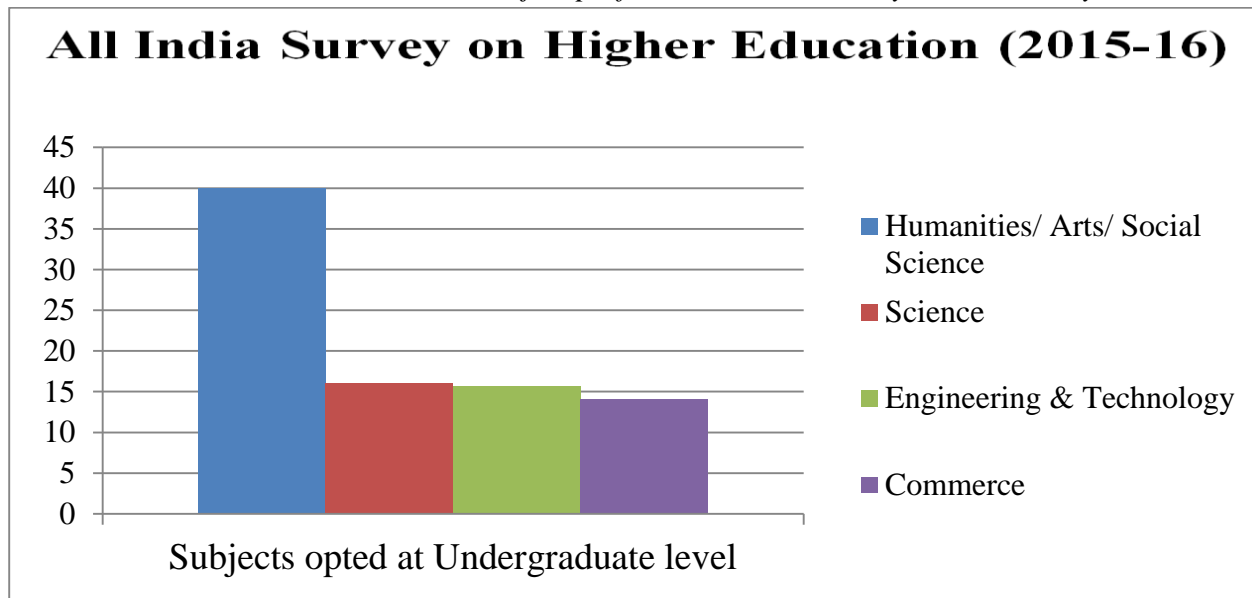
Out of the 36,000 students who responded to the survey from over nine cities, 74% of students were interested in pursuing humanities. Interestingly, science with Biology had only 11% takers, Science with Maths had 9% and Commerce could garner the interest of 6% students.

### 3.2 Inference

This would mean that problem related to dullness of the subject lies somewhere at the middle school level and not at the Higher Education level (Anca T, 2018). Hence a survey was conducted over 5000 students of different schools in Delhi and it was found that students liked the subject only partially at the middle and secondary level. As the child crosses secondary level & enters into Senior Secondary stage the Social Science subjects start appealing to the learners as now they get a fair choice to select the specialised area within the social science that they are really interested in studying. As per the All India Survey on Higher Education (2015-16) conducted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development 'Maximum number of Students are enrolled in

B.A. programme' followed by B.Sc. and B.Com. programme. At Undergraduate level the highest number (40%) of students is enrolled in Arts/Humanities/Social Sciences courses followed by Science (16%), Engineering and Technology (15.6%) and Commerce (14.1%).

**Table 3:** Shows the trends in subject preference. Conducted by HRD Ministry, India



The survey reports clearly indicate the growing demand for the Humanities subjects hence there lays a big responsibility on the shoulders of the Humanities teachers to keep the trend going. Teaching and learning of social science is a complex process (Patil Asha Ramagonda, 2017) which needs to be handled with utmost care otherwise the results could be highly disappointing.

#### 4. The Dual Perspective

In this direction the current research work has made an attempt to study the actual classroom situations and interact with the teachers as well as students in order to get the dual perspective on the challenges in teaching and learning of social science. A group of eight teachers and 300 students were interviewed in various schools of Delhi in order to find the problems related to teaching and learning of social science. Listed below is the set of questions and the responses on them by teachers and students (NEPS and G.D.Goenka Public School, 2018) which helped in getting the dual perspective on the issue-

Let us first deal with the teachers concern areas. The highlights of the interview are listed below-

##### 4.1 Teachers Perspective

###### 1. Are you satisfied with the input you give for a particular class?

To this question six teachers came up with 'yes' as the reply. Two of them were not satisfied with the inputs for their class. This means that the teachers exist with a notion that they

are giving their best to the classroom which is a big hindrance in their growth, dynamism and adaptation to changing times. Hence, the biggest need of the hour is to make the teachers understand that we as teachers have to be continuous learners in order to keep pace with the changing times and deliver the best to our students as per their requirements.

I believe that the institution should involve the teaching faculty in management of teaching in the classroom and allow them to experiment with the learners without the fear of results. A kind of trust on the staff is an essential requirement for developing the confidence in the teacher that he/she is the master of the subject who she is handling and has to keep innovating and experimenting with her teaching style and find out what works best for her and her learners. Just as every learner is unique similarly each teacher is unique in delivering her class hence no set rules could be applied on the teaching style.

## **2. What is the biggest challenge you face while teaching?**

For the teacher of History the biggest challenge was to make the children understand the importance of studying History (Vashisht Rajesh Kumar, 2000) as the students often come up with a question that History deals with past events so why do we need to dig the past and create images about people in the present? What good it is to keep fighting in present on the issues that happened in the past? Why not forget the past and live in the present?

To this the teacher came up with an explanation that there is no other subject other than History that can be considered a total subject. It is History which offers a complete understanding of any development in the world. For a given period of time it deals with the political, social, economic, intellectual, religious, scientific, architectural and cultural developments that occurred the world over. All other subjects deal with only a particular aspect and hence offer a very limited knowledge whereas History gives an overview of all. Hence a student of History will be more aware, and intellectually more thoughtful as compared to others. This explanation appealed to many students.

I believe that one of the major goals for social studies teacher should be "to help develop citizens who have the commitment and the skills needed to help close the gap between the democratic ideals of our nation and societal realities". That goal, stated in various forms, has long been advocated by social studies educators (Murat KEÇE, 2014). For example, the National Commission on Social Studies in the schools (1979) concluded that the ultimate goal of social studies was not "to advance the frontiers of knowledge nor to produce social scientists" (267) but rather "to engage students in analyzing and attempting to resolve the social issues confronting them" (267). Also, the National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools (1989) choose as one of its goals, the development of "critical attitudes and analytical perspectives appropriate to the

analysis of the human condition" (65). As a further commitment to that goal, the NCSS (1994) described effective social studies programs as those that "prepare young people to identify, understand, and work to solve problems facing our diverse nation in an increasingly interdependent world" (159). Clearly, there is a nexus between social studies education and a desire to improve the human condition for all the nation's citizenry, but especially for those who have had limited access to the nation's political and economic resources.

### **3. How far do you think you are able to connect with your students as per the level required for the best understanding of the subject?**

Six out of Eight teachers believed that they had a good connect with the students. This appears to be a good report as it means that majority of the teachers are able to connect to the students, understand their individual needs and deliver as per their requirement. It is a known fact that each learner is unique and has a distinct style of grasping the content delivered in the class. Hence if a teacher has a good connect with the students it means that she understands the unique learning styles of the learners. But this is only one side of the coin, when the students were asked about the same we found that some of them were not satisfied with the delivery of teachers in the classroom as the teacher could not reach their level. A detailed analysis of the situation made us understand that sometimes external factors also play a role in the teacher's delivery in the classroom. An ideal classroom should have a teacher student ratio of 1: 20 but practically such classrooms are very rare as majority of the classrooms that exist in India offer a ratio of 1:40. Such classrooms are not suitable for establishing a good connect with the students as it is difficult for a teacher to establish one on one contact with each learner of the class. In such a class a teacher could have personal contact with many but not all the students hence there would always be some students who would remain neglected and develop a feeling of non-connectedness with the class. So in the given situation it is creditable on the part of the teacher to have a personal understanding of the needs of the majority of individual learners. It is the responsibility of the institution to provide an ideal environment in order to achieve optimal results. The entire system has to operate in a desirable manner if we want to achieve the best teacher- student delivery. Teacher is only one of the many other factors which go in creating an ideal classroom. The dual perspective helps to give a better understanding of the classroom operations as it gives a critical view of both the student and the teacher in actual classroom condition.

### **4. Are you apt with the latest technology in teaching?**

In the electronic world of today almost everyone has the basic knowledge of the technology required in their work areas but an honest survey shows that if we apply technology to classrooms

most of the teachers are aware and using basic PPT's and ICT aids for effective teaching but are unaware of higher and latest versions of software and its usage in the teaching process (Siddiqui Mujibul Hasan, 2004). The institution expects the teachers to have knowledge of these aids and appreciates those who use it but no sincere attempts are made to impart the training to those who are unaware of these aids. The education system in India specifically school education is such that teachers are engaged in multiple tasks not related to teaching learning which kills the productivity in them and leaves no time for their personal enhancement. The Government has taken initiative in checking this but strict enforcement of these laws is needed along with a regular surprise visits to the schools in order to get the picture of real classroom situations.

### **5. Are you aware of the latest research in your field?**

This question brought the most disheartening result as it is one of the most essential requirements for the successful delivery in the class. Six out of eight teachers were not updated with the latest research in their field. It is very saddening to state that the most essential requirement for an effective classroom is missing from the scene. The teacher will be unable to solve the queries of the learners satisfactorily and give the best to the class as they themselves are not updated with the latest. A sincere attempt should be made in this direction by both the teachers and the organisation to provide such opportunities which would help the teachers grow as academicians and deliver the best to their students. Instead of involving the teachers in too much of paper and office work the teacher's time should be utilised in imparting sessions on latest research in their subjects. Encouragement for attending the seminars and conferences should be provided by the institution. This will raise the quality of education and enhance the knowledge of the learners (Ajitoni, S. O. & Gbadamosi, T. V. (2012).

The research will remain one sided if learner's or student's perspective is not added to it. Hence an attempt is made to understand the student's perspective on the level of learning and actual knowledge gained by them in the classroom. A group of Humanities students were interviewed for this purpose. Findings of the research are listed below in the form questions and their reply by the selected group of students-

#### **4.2 Student's Perspective**

##### **1. Do you find Humanities subjects worth studying?**

A research conducted to this effect pointed out that the subject being a combination of History, Political Science, Economics and Geography at the secondary level appeared too vast and complicated to understand at the higher secondary level as they all are included in one paper of social science. Contrary to this majority of the students at senior secondary level replied with a



positive answer. They had chosen Humanities as their first preference. They believed that the Humanities stream is the only stream which develops the skills of analytical and critical thinking in a learner so a truly intellectual person would enjoy studying Humanities subjects rather than Science or Commerce. We do need to understand that some students select Humanities not because it was their first preference but because no other option was available to them. Humanities are the easily available stream for all those who could not manage to get science or commerce stream. This has made people form an opinion about Humanities to be a choice of looser.

## **2. What are the problems you face in understanding the concepts?**

The problems that the students reported are varied and subject specific. Hence a brief overview of these problems can be best understood in the following manner.

A general problem faced by the students of History is related to placing the events of a region in a chronological order and relating them to the world events. This refers to dating the events and finding the developments that occurred in the world at a particular point of time. Students often find it difficult to integrate the events that occurred at the same time in different parts of the world. Understanding the connectivity and relation of world events is a challenge which has to be overcome by the students in order to establish a connection and link between the world developments. So the teachers should try to simplify the things by introducing any historical period by showing its location on the world map and writing the major developments that happened in different parts of the world on the spaces created on the map itself.

Political Science students find the subject interesting and easy to understand but they face the problem of relating the events to current world issues or problems. The Political Science text book mentions the events and the facts related to it but do not give the latest information on the recent developments related to a particular event. The questionnaire pattern expects the students to have the knowledge of the latest but students sometimes feel that they lack latest information on many topics. Hence, an attempt should be made to revise the edition of the book at frequent intervals and provide some add on handouts for the expected additional knowledge as per the new world developments. Although the teacher makes an attempt to give extra information on various topics but due to time constraint it is practically not possible to go in depth of each topic and she also doesn't know how much detail is to be provided.

Psychology students have a very different problem. For these children the first encounter with this subject is at the senior secondary level but the teacher assumes that the student is already aware of the terminology used in the text-books. The subject includes many technical terms which go unexplained due to these pre conceived notions of the teacher that students are already aware of these terms. Some students are extrovert and do not hesitate to ask about the meanings but just as

all fingers are not the same so are the students. So for all those introvert students certain basic terms remain unsolved lifelong.

### **3. Are you satisfied by the way the content is delivered?**

The response was a mixed response as all learners are unique and have their own ways of understanding the concepts. Those who were fast learners mostly the response was positive but for the slow learners it was difficult to grasp all concepts as the teacher could not establish that personal connect with all the students and understand and handle their problems individually. Somewhere the teacher's inability to handle all the contents satisfactorily due to her lack of confidence and knowledge in all areas of social science also appeared as an obstacle. Also lack of technological skills which could be used to create a better impact of the content delivery resulted in the student's discontent (Gbadamosi, T.V. (2018).

## **5. Conclusion**

Learning from the 'dual perspective', conducted on a group of students and teachers, bring out certain facts very clearly that for a teacher to be successful in her content delivery she should be an active and consistent learner so that she is able to relate the present to the past and generate curiosity among the learners (Sevreni T, 2012). She should be updated with the latest technology so that she can use it for delivering her class in the best possible manner, for example the use of audio-visual aids is a must in the given circumstances in order to be more connected to the students. Basic and key terminology should be repeatedly used and explained in order to impart a meaningful knowledge to the learners. The curriculum should be planned very systematically and chronologically in order to avoid any chances of confusion on any topic.

**The challenges that are generally faced in delivering the subject can be listed as:**

### **1. Subject Utility**

The popular perception of social science is that it is a non-utility subject. As a result, low self-esteem governs the classroom-transaction process, with both teachers and students feeling uninterested in comprehending its contents (William T. Owens, 1998). It is essential to reinstate the importance of the social sciences by not only highlighting their increasing relevance for jobs in the rapidly expanding service sector, but also by pointing to their indispensability in laying the foundations of an analytical and creative mind.

### **2. Quality teachers**

For Social Science subjects considered as dry content subjects the teacher plays a crucial role. A teacher should be well qualified and trained to deal with the content in an interesting manner highlighting the relevance of the content which she is delivering. Most of the time students

lose interest in the subject due to the improper ways of the delivery of the content (Sevreni.T). Hence the quality of teachers should be of prime concern of any institute. This could be ensured by encouraging teachers to spend time on research work and attend seminars or conferences, to keep themselves updated about the latest trends in their subject, which most of the institutions do not encourage as they involve the teachers in so many clerical jobs in order to save their running cost.

### **3. Class Size**

Administration operates from the profit maximisation point of view as a result we usually find over crowded classes in India. Such a classroom does not yield good results as the student-teacher ratio is large. Social Science is a subject which requires continuous interaction between the teacher and the taught. If the class size is large the discussion and interaction with all the students becomes practically impossible. Those students who are not an active participant in the discussion tend to lose interest in the topic and find themselves disconnected with the class. Size of the class is a big challenge to be overcome by the teachers as they have to deliver their best within the framework provided by the institution.

### **4. Time Management**

Teachers face the challenge of meeting the deadline to complete the curriculum. The Social Science curriculum is so vast that the teachers face a tough time to make both ends meet. A proper planning and systematic teaching schedule should be prepared by the teachers in order to avoid this challenge. In a country like India which is culturally so diverse with several holidays distributed throughout the academic year and some unforeseen holidays the curriculum planning sometimes goes at a toss. So the teachers need to plan keeping in mind the unexpected obstacles.

### **5. Technology Usage**

Many teachers are not very efficient in using ICT in their classes. They are not trained to handle the classroom technologically (Siddiqui Mujibul Hasan, 2004). This results into ineffective classroom teaching as the current generation is technology savvy and understands the concepts well when taught with the help of PPT's and visuals.

### **6. Physical fitness**

This is a crucial but often neglected element in the success of a class delivery. Most of the institutions overburden the teachers with useless and duplicate paperwork due to which very little time is left for class preparations. Hence the quality of classroom delivery suffers. The institutions expect the teachers to be active while delivering the content but hardly pays any attention to their physical fitness. There are numerous duties assigned to a person which leaves very little time for having proper meal or relax during the working hours. Exhausted teachers cannot be physically or mentally prepared to deliver their class content in the best possible manner. There should be proper

planning on the part of the authorities to arrange meditation or yoga classes for staff and provide proper meal during working hours so that the teachers are mentally and physically strong enough to give strength to their students as well as the institution. This appears to be cost consuming but surely a little care of the staff will improve the standards of the institution to a high level.

Hence, we find that there are various limitations in achieving the best desired results. This research work has been conducted on the basis of interviews in the city of Delhi hence it gives a limited overview but an attempt has been made to incorporate government and newspaper surveys and research conducted on an all India basis. Many questions have still remained unanswered like

How far does the government keep a check on the quality of teaching in private institutions? Are the teaching institutions actually preparing a socially alert and active citizen?

Does the institution create a biased and stereotyped image of the humanities subjects?

Why do the humanities teachers and students suffer from low self-esteem?

We need to find the answers to all these questions in order to give social science its desired place.

**Table 4:** *List of suggestions to overcome challenges in teaching and learning of social science*

#### **STEPS SUGGESTED TO OVERCOME THESE CHALLENGES**

- 1. Teachers should introspect into their ways of teaching.
- 2. Teachers should be provided with regular and meaningful training sessions.
- 3. They should be assisted to integrate new technology to their class room.
- 4. Field visits related to the topics should be planned.
- 5. Continuous teacher evaluation should be done.
- 6. Awards for teachers using innovative ways or experimenting with their teaching styles.
- 7. Personalised relationship and bonding between Parent- Teacher-Student should be developed.
- 8. Proper health care and physical fitness of teachers should be taken care of by the authorities.
- 9. Special Educators for children facing any special learning disability.

conducive for creating a good learning environment. The teaching institutes should take care of their staff members and provide them with such opportunities which would help them to grow and improve as facilitators for their students.

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