

Problems of Geography Teaching in Indian Schools : Some Reflections

- *Bidhan Gantait*, Research Scholar, Department of Teacher Education, School of Education,
Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, Bihar

Abstract :

Geography is one of the prime school subjects across the school stages. Geography learning provides an understanding of people, place, environment and their interrelationships. Geography learning answers where people live, how they live, why they are there, etc., with advanced perspectives and understanding of the world in which we live together. Geography learning at school stages helps to understand how weather, climate, atmosphere, biosphere, landforms, ocean, etc. changes over space and over time. Geography at school stages helps to understand how people are distributed over the spaces and their different cultures, settlements, economy, etc. Geography is a practical-based school subject. Geography at the school level significantly develops knowledge, values and skills in geography. However, nurturing the knowledge and developing values and skills in geography is not upto the mark. Geography learning across the school stages is based on rote memorization. Geography teachers are used traditional teaching methods to transact the geography contents. Geography learning requires proper use of resources such as maps, atlases, globes, models, charts and so on for proper understanding the geographical facts and phenomena. Geography teaching in India across the school stages faced many problems. In this context, this paper addresses the problems of the teaching-learning process of geography across the school stages of India. The findings

of the paper highlighted the major problems related to geography teachers, methods of geography teaching, infrastructure and resources, geography curriculum, geography textbook skill development. Adaptation of activity-based pedagogy like laboratory-based activities and fieldwork addresses the many problems of geography teaching. If teachers use the activity-based pedagogy, there are numerous benefits for students, such as avoiding rote learning, developing skills in geography, making geography lessons more interesting, integrating new tools and technologies in geography teaching, providing special attention to geography as a practical subject, maximizing the use of the geography laboratory resources, etc.

Keywords: Geography, Teaching, School, India

Introduction :

Geography is a comprehensive and diverse subject that provides an understanding about people, place and environment and their interrelationships. Geography is the study of the relationship between the Earth and its people (International, 1982). The term 'geo-graphy' literally means to graph the Earth. Geography learning helps to understand the complex problems around us, such as resource scarcity, climate changes, migration, population explosion, etc. Geography learning is essential at school stages not only to help understand the world in which we live but also to help learners become responsible global citizens. Geography learn-

ing helps to understand how we are interconnected through the place, location, regions, etc. Geography learning helps to understand the people and spatial aspects associated with them. Geography is the study of spatial variations on the Earth's surface as well as human interactions with their surroundings (Americana, 1994). Geography learning helps to understand the changes over time and over places. Geography is a practical-based subject that provides the opportunity to develop knowledge, values and skills in geography. Geography learning at school stages provides scope to discover and explore the geographical facts, phenomena, etc., to develop skills in geography. Geography learning provides the opportunity to explore new tools like Geographic Information System (GIS), Google Earth, Google Maps, etc. Those tools help the learners to view, understand, interpret, and visualize the data and information in many ways. According to Chorley and Haggett (1970), we will understand the importance of geography as we use remote sensing and communication technology to create databases about the Earth and its environment. Studying geography creates awareness about spatial information among learners. Geography learning provides spatial information from the regional level to the global level. Learning geography most importantly helps to understand the historical and current events, whether political, social, economic, etc. Geography learning at school levels provides different visual representations like maps, pictures, charts, graphs, etc., developing skills among the learners. Maps are an important tool in geography learning; by studying maps, learners retrieve different information such as locat-

ing the continents, oceans, countries, places, measuring the distance from one place to another, direction, etc., which fosters the spatial thinking skill and map skill. So, geography learning is an essential subject across the school stages. However, geography learning at school becomes tedious and less interesting subjects across the school boards and across the school stages. It is required to understand the problem of geography teaching across the Indian school boards.

Geography in the School Curriculum :

Geography holds a prime place in school education. Across the school boards, geography learning varies from one stage of learning to another stage of learning. In most Indian school boards, geography is an integrated discipline within environmental studies at the primary school stage. In most Indian school boards, geography is a compulsory subject under social science at the upper primary and secondary school stages. In most of the higher secondary school boards of India, geography is an elective/optional subject like other subjects, i.e., economics, history, philosophy, political science, etc. However, few schools provide geography as an elective/optional subject.

Major Problems Related to Geography Teaching :

Geography is a significant school subject across the school boards of India. It is found that geography teaching faces numerous problems across India's school stages. The central aim of this study is to identify the problems of geography teaching. This section describes the major problems related to geography teaching, such dimensions as geography teachers, methods of teaching geography, infrastructure

and resources, geography syllabus, geography textbook etc.

Geography teachers :

Geography is part of environmental studies at the primary stage and geography is a unit under social sciences at the upper primary and secondary stages. Topics of geography upto secondary stage taught by social science teacher. Sometimes, one social science teacher who may not be a graduate in geography but usually taught geography under social sciences. Alam (2009) remarks that in many cases, it is taught by an untrained geography graduate or trained non-geographer graduate. Generally, in the absence of geography teachers, social studies teachers specializing in history, political science or economics are asked to teach geography. In both cases, learners suffer. On the other hand, teachers use traditional teaching-learning methods. Geography is not a subject that can be understood through the lecture of the teacher; rather, the subject requires skills and competencies to describe geographical phenomena and interactions with humans. It is important to note that teaching geography necessitates the development of specialized skills such as scale construction, drawing, map reading and interpretation, and fieldwork, among other things. Geography learning at school stage has both theoretical and practical contents. Teacher who taught geography at school stage treated geography as a theoretical subject like history. Practical contents of geography learning become even more marginalized in school curricula without trained geography teachers. Fatima (2016) states that teachers thought geography is a theoretical subject and ignored the scientific and applied aspects of geography learning.

Methods of geography teaching :

One of the goals of geography teaching is to prepare children to be global citizens and develop skills in geography. However, geography teaching focuses on the lecture method to describe the facts, information, and phenomena and leads to the rote memorization of concepts. Geography teaching becomes a simple task for a teacher to describe whatever is written in the textbook rather than realizing to students why these concepts are important, how it is related to us, etc. This practice leads to rote learning rather than understanding the concepts. Inamdar (2014) states that most students cannot grasp the basic principles of geography and cannot apply them in their daily lives because teachers use the lecture method most while teaching. Teaching-learning method of geography encourages rote learning. One of the major reasons is lecture teaching rather than activity-based teaching-learning. Activities in geography teaching-learning are the form of demonstrations, laboratory-based activities, project works, field study, seminar presentations, etc. Geography teaching should include classroom instruction, laboratory exercises, demonstrations, assignments, symposiums, seminars, public addresses, study tours, and social work for the application of geography for social use, as well as debates, quizzes, and projects at all levels of study (Sing, 2020). Geography at school stage studies the features, relief, drainage, natural vegetation, distribution of population, economic status of the population, means of communication, etc., which exist in the real world. To study the real world through direct observation and sense, collect information from fields. Fieldwork in geography is the heart of

geography learning. Learners can understand the geographical topic when they are acquainted with the real world rather than listen to the teacher's lectures. Teachers should frame fieldwork in teaching-learning of geography that helps the learner understand the concepts rather than rote memorization. Similarly regional method, problem-based learning, project based learning, etc are the activity based teaching learning methods which helps to reduce the practices of rote learning.

Infrastructures and resources :

Geography is a practical subject requiring proper resources to understand the lesson. Geography learning without maps, atlases, globes, models, specimens of rocks and minerals, charts, etc. is not meaningful. Present-day geography learning largely depends upon the use of Geographic Information System (GIS), Global Positioning System (GPS), Remote Sensing (RS), etc., to understand the complex concepts of geography. These tools also make it easier to understand the concept of geography learning. Geography laboratory resources not only help in geography teaching but also help students spend their spare time understanding the concepts of geography. When learners work with materials during each lesson and spare time, they become more familiar with them. Learners' level of abstraction of the concepts and ideas will drastically reduce if not completely eliminated (Aderogba, 2012). Learners demonstrate, experiment, observe instruments, collect readings from instruments, etc. helps to understand the concepts and develop skills in geography. Less use of instruments and resources in the geography laboratory makes geography learning tedious and emphasize rote

memorization. So, the availability of resources and proper arrangement of resources in the geography laboratory/classroom is important for effective teaching-learning and developing skills in geography.

Geography curriculum :

Geography has not gained widespread popularity among students because of the poor geography curriculum across the school boards. Sing (2009) remarks that, especially at school and senior secondary levels, the geography curriculum is poor and therefore unable to attract many students. Geographical contents in school include both physical geography and human geography. However, three main branches of geography are generally taught in school, i.e., regional, systematic and practical geography. After the National Curriculum Framework 2005, regional geography gets less attention in the school syllabus. Alam (2009) stated that regional geography was totally removed by NCF 2005 rather than improving the teaching-learning of regional geography. Practical Geography introduces only in higher secondary classes. There is no geography practical upto the secondary stage. Geography practical classes at higher secondary are separated from the theoretical contents. Geography practical classes are conducted separately from theoretical classes. Students are more focused on practical classes because theoretical classes are lecture-based and not integrated with practical classes, and the allotted time for practical classes is generally more than the theoretical classes. So, the geography syllabus should integrate practical geography with theoretical contents during the teaching-learning process. Proper integration of theory and practical ge-

ography provides meaningful and purposeful learning. Laboratory-based activities and fieldwork in the school stage are completely ignored and/or ill-planned. So, integration of laboratory-based activities and fieldwork with geography practical is needed, which provides a better understanding of theoretical content.

Geography textbook :

The textbook is one of the exclusive learning resources. Geography learning relies on facts, information, phenomena etc. So, geography textbooks in schools are important teaching-learning material. Students get ample opportunity for self-learning through geography textbooks. Improvement of geography teaching largely depends upon the quality of geography textbooks. Quality geography textbooks provide a fair chance for self-learning to social science teachers who are not experts in geography or graduated in other than geography. Geography textbooks demand the inclusion of relevant information in a corrected and updated form. Misinformation and incorrect facts and information misguided students and confused the teacher. Quality geography textbook depends upon the description of concepts, examples, activities, exercise, simplicity and clarity in facts and information presented in chapters, coverage of prescribed syllabus, attractive visuals, relevant data, etc. The growing interest in geography heavily relies on adequate information and the presentation of geography textbooks. The presentation of concepts, examples, facts, and activities in the geography textbook generate the interest of readers. Alam (2017) suggested that “geography textbooks for schools should be developed in such a way that they provide not only sufficient information

and stimulate readers’ interests but also easy to understand and thought-provoking. Being a visual discipline, illustrations and spatial representation should be made more reflexive attractive and meaningful.” Traditional knowledge, and local geographical terms may make geography textbooks more learners friendly.

Skills development in geography :

At the school level, skill development in geography is equally important as the development of knowledge and values in geography. Present-day skill development through the teaching-learning process of geography is highly realized. Geography is a practical based subject that provides many opportunities to develop skills in geography. At the school level, teachers use traditional teaching methods that provide no opportunity to develop skills in geography. A series of activities provide the opportunity to develop geography skills and conceptual understanding. Geography teaching largely concentrates on developing knowledge. Skill development in geography is significantly ignored at the school level. Major problems in geography teaching identified by Banerjee (2006) are that rote learning is intensified, which provides less attention to practical skill development. The teaching-learning process of geography is a large emphasis on rote learning for passing the examination as a result, skill development is marginalized at the school level. In the 21st century, skill development in geography is the major concern through its teaching-learning process. However, skill development in Indian schools is marginalized.

Discussion :

Teaching-learning process largely depends upon the competency, knowledge and qualifi-

cation of teachers. Geography learning at the school stages requires a competent, knowledgeable and qualified geography teacher. 'Anyone can teach geography' assumption must be discarded with necessary correction in the coming national curriculum framework and geography must be taught by a well-trained geography teacher (Sing, 2020). The teaching-learning process of geography should be away from the traditional teaching method. Pauw and Beneker (2015) suggested that geography teachers should unlearn conventional teacher-centered teaching methods and become more responsive to high-quality input, guidance and support. Activity-based teaching-learning processes like laboratory-based activities provide ample opportunity to develop knowledge and skills in geography. Integration of several activities in the teaching-learning process supports students in developing skills (Boud, 2010). Activity-based pedagogy should be introduced so that students are less dependent on rote memorization of geographical concepts. Teachers should organize activities according to the resources available in school, such as optimum use of geography laboratory materials, equipment, apparatus, specimens, models, maps, etc. Design the activity based on the time available in the school, such as conducting small activities and geography class should be conducted in the geography laboratory. GIS, virtual globe, virtual maps, etc. make geography learning more interesting and stimulating to learners. Atrvinli (2010) encouraged to use GIS in geography lessons to make the learners active. Geography teachers should design activities according to the nature of the geography curriculum, such as teachers should integrate theoretical content

and practical content in geography. This integration provides meaningful learning and takes less time to understand the theoretical contents. So, the responsibility of a geography teacher is more on preparing lessons rather than investing time in the lecture in the classroom. Inside the classroom, the teacher should be a passive/facilitator, but in planning the lesson should be an active and innovative/creative agent. Maps, globes, atlases, models, barometers, thermometers, survey instruments, charts, etc. are prime tools for geography teaching. The geography laboratory should equip with these important basic resources for teaching geography. The use of modern tools like GIS, Google Maps, Google Earth, GeoMapApp, etc. required a computer with internet connectivity. The geography laboratory should equip with a computer, internet, latest technology, GIS software, etc., for geography teaching. Without proper instruments, practical subjects like geography become a tedious and rote-based subject and away from skill development in geography. The geography syllabus should be reformed according to the practical based subject. The geography syllabus at the school level should include regional geography. Skill development should get a prime place in the geography syllabus. Theoretical contents should be integrated with practical contents. A geography textbook should include relevant contents, examples, activities and exercises. Chapters of the textbook should be simple and clearly describe the facts and information, cover the prescribed syllabus, be attractive in visuals and include relevant data. Geography textbooks should be free from linguistic error, i.e., grammar, spelling, etc. Geography learning majorly swiped the devel-

opment of skills through teaching-learning of geography. Skill development is essential besides the development of knowledge and values, but it is ignored. Banerjee (2006) remarks that at the school level, practical skill development is out of reach. So, the teacher should use activity-based pedagogy like laboratory-based activities in geography to develop skills in geography. In laboratory-based activities learners observe, demonstrate and perform experiments with instruments, models, charts, etc. that develop skills in geography.

Conclusion :

Geography teaching mainly focuses on traditional teaching methods like the lecture method. Learners become passive listeners during the teaching-learning process. Doubt and questions of the learners remain unexplored and unanswered. The teaching-learning process is not nurtured creativity among learners. As a result, learners are less interested in geography learning. Teachers are hurry to complete the syllabus before the examination. So, teachers

are not provided the extra information and or use activity-based pedagogy in teaching-learning geography. Geographical content across the school stages is more practical oriented and provides great scope to develop geography skills among school learners. Skill development in geography is very important at the school level but is marginalized at the school level. If teachers use the activity-based pedagogy, there are numerous benefits for students, such as avoiding rote learning, developing skills in geography, making geography lessons more interesting, integrating new tools and technologies in geography teaching, giving special attention as a practical subject, maximizing the use of the geography laboratory resources, etc. So, integration of activity-based pedagogy is highly realized in geography teaching. In this context, it is necessary to adopt a comprehensive and efficient activity-based pedagogy like laboratory-based activities and fieldwork to attain all major problems related to geography teaching.

References :

1. Aderogba, K. A. (2012). Laboratories and sustainable teaching and learning about senior secondary school (SSS) geography in Nigeria. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 2(4), 55–64. Retrieved from <https://www.richtmann.org/journal/index.php/jesr/article/view/11910>
2. Alam, S. (2009). The State of Geography in Indian School: Reflection and action. In R. S. Singh (Ed.), *Indian Geography in the 21st Century: The Young Geographers Agenda* (pp. 84–107). Cambridge Scholars Publisher.
3. Alam, S. (2017). A note on the quality of geography text books for secondary schools in India. *The Geographer*, 64(1), 88–97. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317427286>
4. Americana, E. (1994). International edition. Grolier Incorporated.

5. Artvinli, E. (2010). The contribution of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to geography education and secondary school students' attitudes related to GIS. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 10(3), 1277-1292.
6. Banerjee, B. K. (2006). Geography education in Indian schools. *Internationale Schulbuchforschung*, 28(3), 283-292. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43056742>
7. Boud, D. (2010). Assessment for developing practice. In J. Higgs, D. Fish, I. Goulter, J. Reid, & F. Trede (Eds.), *Education for Future Practice* (pp. 251-262). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. doi: 10.1163/9789460913204_023
8. Chorley, R. J., & Haggett, P. (1970). *Frontiers in geographical teaching*.
9. Fatýma, M. (2016). Perceptions of geography as a discipline among students of different academic levels in Pakistan. *RIGEO*, 6(1), 67–85. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/589985>
10. Inamdar, R. (2014). *Problems in Geography Teaching* (1st ed.). Laxmi Book Publication.
11. International, W. B. C. (1982). *The world book encyclopaedia* (Vol. 1): World Book-Childcraft International.
12. Pauw, I., & Beneker, T. (2015). A futures perspective in Dutch geography education. *Futures*, 66, 96-105. doi: 10.1016/j.futures.2015.01.001
13. Singh, C. S. (2020). Geography education in India: A case study of Manipur. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Cycle Research*, 12(10), 1310–1327. Retrieved from <http://www.jicrjournal.com/gallery/142-jicr-october-3386.pdf>
14. Singh, R. S. (2009). Identity and image of indian geography: The people's perspective. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 33(3), 375–391. doi: 10.1080/03098260902734984.

★★★