



BRIDGING GAPS IN HISTORY EDUCATION

**A National Survey on History Education in Indian Schools
2026**



Conducted by

**THE FOUNDATION FOR INDIAN
HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESEARCH**



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About the Organisation

The Foundation for Indian Historical and Cultural Research (FIHCR) is a Bengaluru-based non-profit, apolitical organisation dedicated to reviving and promoting India's historical and cultural legacy through research and education. The YUVA program of FIHCR targets India's vibrant young demographic to foster a deep appreciation for the nation's rich history, culture and heritage. It focuses on age group of six to eighteen years to create awareness and sustained interest in India's lesser-known facets and the unsung warriors and leaders who have significantly contributed to its legacy.

About This Report

This report presents the findings of a survey on history education in Indian schools, conducted by the Foundation for Indian Historical and Cultural Research (FIHCR). The study brings together textbook analysis with the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents to examine what is taught in history classrooms, how it is taught, and how learners experience it. It identifies key gaps among the aspirations of NEP 2020, textbook content, and classroom practice, and offers recommendations to make history education more engaging, inclusive, inquiry-driven, and relevant for students.



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HISTORY EDUCATION IN INDIA

What students learn, how they learn it, and what needs to change

22 Schools	2100 Students	55 Teachers	4 States	12 Focus Group Discussions	5 Boards
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Introduction And Rationale

This report presents a comprehensive, **mixed-method** survey of history education in **India**, combining textbook content analysis with the perspectives of **2,100 students**, **55 teachers**, and 45 students and 35 parents across **12 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**. Conducted across **Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra**, and spanning the **CBSE, ICSE, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh State Boards** for **Classes VI–IX**, the study examines what students are taught, their classroom experience, and the extent to which curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment align with the aspirations set out in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

History, when taught meaningfully, builds **critical thinking, ethical reflection, and civic consciousness**, enabling learners to interpret change over time, weigh evidence, and situate the present within broader social and cultural processes. Yet across India, the subject is too often experienced as **content-heavy, examination-driven, and textbook-centric**, with students struggling to move beyond memorisation toward genuine historical reasoning. **NEP 2020** and **NCF 2023** call for **competency-based, inclusive, and experiential learning**, but there has been **little systematic evidence** on whether this vision is actually reflected in textbooks and classrooms.

This study was designed to investigate that gap, addressing **three specific shortfalls** in the existing evidence base:

- Lack of board-wise comparative analysis of historical thinking in textbooks.
- Limited linkage between textbook design and actual classroom practice.
- Insufficient evaluation of how far NEP 2020 has actually been implemented in history education



NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** sets out the broad vision and aspirations for transforming education in India, with an emphasis on holistic and multidisciplinary learning, critical thinking, experiential learning, and greater integration of Indian knowledge and traditions. The **National Curriculum Framework (NCF)** translates these broader policy aspirations into guidance for curriculum design, pedagogy, learning standards, and assessment.

Objectives

The study is built around two broad objectives:

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The survey examines the curriculum across the five major school boards surveyed, evaluating the balance of **World, Indian, and Regional History**, the presence of **historical thinking**, and the presentation of **Indian Knowledge Systems**. It also seeks to understand how history education is experienced and perceived by key stakeholders by examining **students' perceptions, teachers' perspectives, and parents' expectations**.

GAP ANALYSIS

The survey examines the extent of alignment between **NEP 2020's intent, textbook content, and classroom practices**, identifying areas where gaps may exist between policy aspirations and their implementation. Based on these findings, the analysis seeks to **recommend improvements to strengthen the alignment between policy, curriculum, and classroom practice**.



Stakeholders of the Study

The study identifies students, teachers, and parents as the key stakeholders in history education. Their perspectives provide complementary insights into how History is learned, taught, perceived, and valued, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of curriculum and classroom practices.

STUDENTS

Students are the primary learners of the history curriculum. Their perspectives provide insights into their interest in and perceptions of History, challenges in learning the subject, engagement with textbook content, and experiences of different classroom teaching methods and activities.

TEACHERS

Teachers play a central role in translating the prescribed curriculum into classroom practice. Their perspectives provide insights into pedagogical approaches and student engagement, experiences with the syllabus and textbook content, classroom constraints, and the training, resources, and professional support required for effective History teaching.

PARENTS

Parents provide important insights into how History is perceived and valued beyond the classroom. Their perspectives help understand their expectations regarding History education, observations of their children's engagement with the subject and teaching practices, and perceptions of its academic relevance and related career pathways.



Methodology

A **mixed-method design** combined quantitative surveys with qualitative FGDs and a structured textbook content analysis, allowing the findings to be triangulated for validity.

Student survey: A multiple-choice questionnaire (14 questions) was administered to 2,100 students in Classes VII–X, who reported on their experience of the preceding year's (Classes VI–IX) syllabus.

Teacher survey: A mixed questionnaire (multiple-choice and open-ended) administered to 55 teachers from the same schools. The questionnaire contains 58 main questions. These are organised across five substantive sections: Perceptions of History (10), Exploring the History Curriculum (13), Exploring Ways of Engaging with History (12), Demographic Details (13) and Professional Development (10).

Focus Group Discussions: 12 FGDs in total — six with students (45 total participants) and six with parents (35 total participants), two each in Karnataka, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh. Maharashtra was not represented in the qualitative data collection.

Content Analysis: A structured coding rubric was designed and applied to Grade VI–IX History/Social Science textbooks across CBSE, ICSE, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh Boards for the academic year 2024–25. For NCERT textbooks, the analysis covered the new editions prescribed for Grades VI and VII, while Grades VIII and IX were analysed using the older editions. The analysis examined the balance of World, Indian, and Regional History, and the presence of historical-thinking elements such as chronology, causation, and source use.

A methodological caveat is worth noting: given the higher representation of CBSE schools and a very limited teacher response from Maharashtra (one teacher), board-level comparisons, particularly for Maharashtra and Karnataka, should be read as indicative rather than statistically representative, and would benefit from a larger, stratified sample in future research.



Key Findings

Historical thinking is present but unevenly scaffolded

- **CBSE** performs strongest in integrating historical thinking, especially causation, chronology, and multiple perspectives.
- **ICSE** textbooks favour a concise, point-wise presentation, prioritising content coverage over pedagogical depth.
- **NCERT** and **Maharashtra** textbooks stand out for their rich visuals, colourful layouts, and engaging activities.
- **Karnataka** and **Uttar Pradesh** textbooks are more descriptive and traditional, with fewer activity-based learning elements.

Indian Knowledge Systems remain implicit, not explicit

- Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) are present across boards but are rarely presented as a distinct knowledge system, despite NEP 2020's emphasis.
- **NCERT** and the **Uttar Pradesh Board** include limited and fragmented IKS content, largely confined to ancient and early agrarian history.
- **ICSE** provides moderate IKS exposure in the lower grades, but this declines in higher classes.
- **Karnataka** and **Maharashtra** show stronger alignment with IKS through their regional focus, though the content remains embedded rather than explicitly identified as IKS.

Curriculum imbalance across World, Indian and Regional History

- Indian history dominates the curriculum across most boards, accounting for 70–81% of history chapters, while world history remains limited (4–24%).
- **CBSE** focuses primarily on Indian history in Classes VI–VIII, introducing more substantial world history only from Class IX. **ICSE** offers the most consistent global-history exposure.
- The **Uttar Pradesh Board** is the most Indian-history-centric, while **Maharashtra** also prioritises Indian and regional history with very little world history.
- Regional history, which is linked to higher student interest, is prominently represented only in **Karnataka** (30%) and **Maharashtra** (27%).



Board	Total Chapters	World History	Indian History	Regional / Local History
CBSE (NCERT)	33	8 (24%)	23 (70%)	2 (6%)
ICSE (CISCE)	28	6 (21%)	19 (68%)	3 (11%)
Karnataka Board	46	8 (22%)	22 (48%)	14 (30%)
UP Board (SCERT)	42	6 (14%)	34 (81%)	2 (5%)
Maharashtra Board	48	2 (4%)	33 (69%)	13 (27%)

Table: Board-wise Distribution of World, Indian, and Regional History (Classes VI–IX Combined)

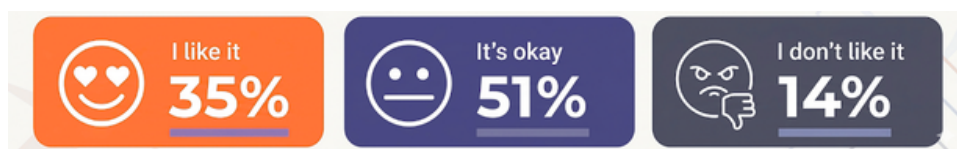
Representation of women and marginalised communities is limited

- Women leaders, tribal communities, and everyday lives receive limited representation across all school boards.
- These themes are usually confined to sidebars or brief mentions, rather than being treated as central historical narratives.
- Together, they account for less than 15% of chapters across all curricula.
- Parents and students in the FGDs independently highlighted this lack of representation as a significant concern.

STUDENTS

Student interest is largely neutral:

- 51% describe History as “okay”
- 35% enjoy History
- 14% dislike History
- Minimal gender differences



Board-wise variation exists:

- Karnataka: highest student interest — 60%
- Maharashtra: lowest student interest — 26%
- ICSE: highest levels of neutrality and dislike.

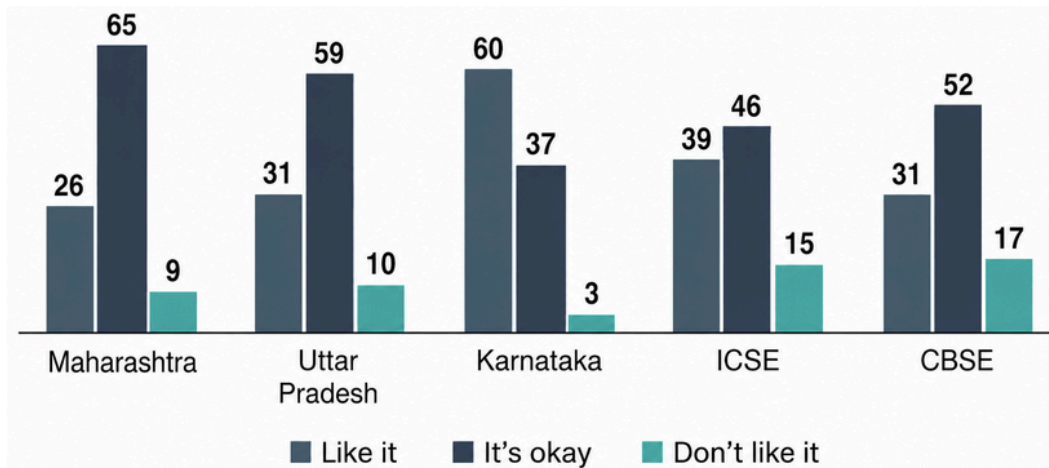


Fig. Board-wise Distribution (%) of Students' liking towards History.

Learning becomes less engaging over time:

Interest peaks in Class VII and declines in higher grades as textbooks become denser and more exam-oriented; 71% primarily associate history with memorising dates.

Storytelling engages students, but memorisation is the biggest challenge:

Students enjoy narratives and links between past and present, yet struggle with memorising dates, names, and lengthy chapters.

“There are too many battles and too many names”

“We learn everything only for exams; later we forget.”

Experiential learning improves engagement:

Students exposed to historical sites show greater interest in History.

- 74% have visited historical sites with their families
- Only 21% have experienced a school-organised field trip

TEACHERS

Teachers are highly motivated, but gaps remain in historical-thinking pedagogy:

- 92% enjoy teaching History
- 33% clearly understand historical-thinking skills
- 36% consistently promote analytical learning

Limited teacher training is a major challenge:

- 66% received no subject-specific training
- 34% underwent formal professional development in History teaching



Curriculum and exam pressures restrict pedagogy:

Overloaded syllabi, limited classroom time, and exam-oriented teaching reduce opportunities for inquiry-based learning.

A perception gap exists between teachers and students:

- 35% of teachers believe that most students enjoy History
- 35% of students actually report liking History
- Career awareness remains limited, with History-related careers discussed only occasionally in most classrooms

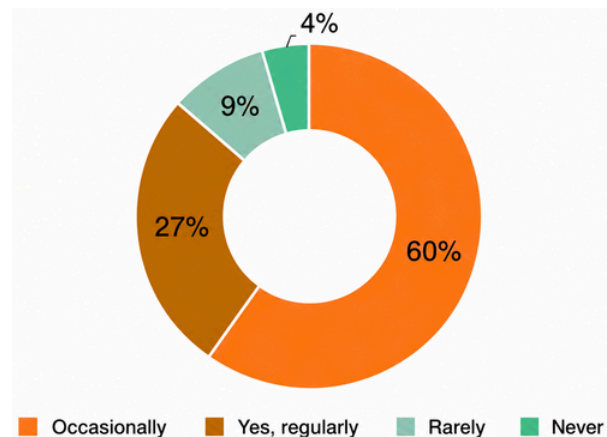


Fig. How often do teachers discuss history related careers in class (%)

Resource limitations affect learning:

- Only 38% of teachers have access to archival or primary-source materials
- Limited access encourages reliance on textbooks and external digital platforms for supplementary learning

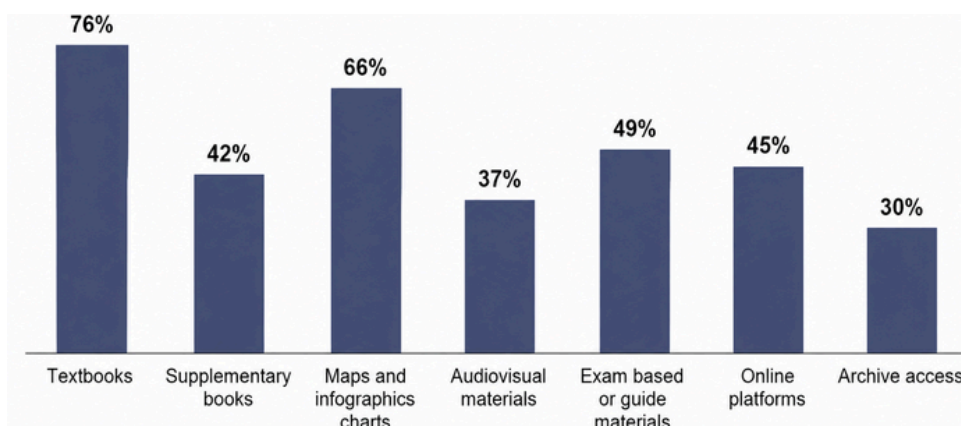


Fig. Teaching resources available to teachers (%)

PARENTS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Parents value history for the cultural grounding, values, and moral understanding it provides.

Upper-grade textbooks are viewed as too text-heavy and insufficiently engaging, reducing student interest.

“The Class 8 NCERT book is so plain, with long paragraphs with no highlights.”

-a parent from Uttar Pradesh



“I find it hard to help because I myself don’t remember the History I studied.”

-a parent from Delhi

“The newer books in Class 6 are better with pictures and activities.”

-a parent from Karnataka

Representation remains limited:

Parents highlighted the lack of women, regional histories, marginalised communities, and everyday life, echoing the curriculum analysis.

Teaching methods influence engagement:

Parents believe storytelling, visuals, and digital tools enhance learning, while reading-heavy and dictation-based approaches diminish interest.

Parents from-

Bengaluru: “My child loved History last year because the teacher used mind maps and stories. Now the new teacher gives only dictation.”

Delhi: “She learns more from YouTube videos than from the textbook.”

UP: “Only a few women like Rani Lakshmibai are shown. Our daughters don’t see real women’s stories.”

A strong STEM bias shapes subject choices:

Clearer career pathways in science and technology overshadow humanities, highlighting the need for greater awareness of history-related careers.

“PTMs only talk about math and science-nobody cares about History marks.”

-a parent from Delhi



Triangulation: Convergent Themes

Bringing together the survey, FGD, and content-analysis findings, several themes converge consistently across regions and boards:

The memorisation trap: Across all stakeholders, history is experienced as recall-driven and exam-oriented; the dominant barrier is not the content itself but the pressure to reproduce dates, names, and events verbatim.

Curriculum imbalance: Indian history dominates almost universally, world history is minimal, and regional history, despite its demonstrated link to interest, is inconsistently integrated.

Teacher capacity gap: High intrinsic enjoyment of the subject among teachers is not matched by consistent understanding or use of historical-thinking pedagogy.

Declining interest by grade: Engagement peaks in Class VII and falls steadily thereafter as textbooks become denser and STEM career pathways gain prominence.

Field exposure gap: Strong evidence links experiential learning to interest, yet school-organised exposure remains rare.

Overall, the evidence points to the fact that history education is widely perceived as content-heavy, textbook-centric, and exam-driven, with uneven development of historical-thinking skills among both students and teachers. It is reinforced by assessment design and syllabus load rather than by any lack of interest in the subject.



Gap Analysis and Recommendation

The study identifies critical gaps across five areas: Perceptions, Curriculum & Content, Pedagogy, Assessment, and Professional Development, and proposes targeted, largely resource-light reforms within each.

PERCEPTION

Gap: Teachers emphasise history's civic importance, but students perceive it as text-heavy, disconnected from contemporary relevance, and lacking clear career pathways, reinforced by parental preference for STEM.

Recommendation: Make history more relevant through inquiry-based learning, include "Why This Matters Today" sections, introduce structured career-awareness modules, and strengthen parental engagement.

CURRICULUM & CONTENT

Gap: History curricula remain imbalanced, with limited regional and world history, weak emphasis on historical thinking, and insufficient representation of women, marginalised communities, and Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS).

Recommendation: Adopt a more balanced curriculum, explicitly scaffold historical thinking skills, integrate regional and world perspectives, and strengthen the visibility of women, marginalised communities, and IKS across grades.

PEDAGOGY

Gap: Classroom teaching remains lecture-based, with limited participatory, experiential learning and insufficient use of digital and heritage-based resources.

Recommendation: Integrate role-plays, debates, source-analysis, and inquiry activities into every unit, supported by digital resources and at least two structured heritage visits annually.

ASSESSMENT

Gap: Assessments continue to prioritise memorisation and date-based recall over conceptual understanding and historical reasoning.

Recommendation: Shift towards reasoning-based assessments that emphasise source interpretation, comparison, timelines, causation, and evidence-based analysis, supported by student-friendly question banks.



Professional Development

Gap: Most teachers lack subject-specific training in history, limiting the effective teaching of historical thinking and inclusive narratives.

Recommendation: Strengthen annual professional development training through existing platforms (DIKSHA), supported by ready-to-use teaching resources such as lesson plans, storytelling scripts, maps, and timelines.

Conclusion

History education in India has the potential to build critical, empathetic, and informed citizens, but this potential remains only partially realised. Uneven textbook design, examination-driven pedagogy, systemic classroom constraints, and limited teacher preparation together explain why enthusiasm for the subject, evident among both students and teachers, has not yet translated into consistent, inquiry-driven learning. The reforms outlined above are designed to be practical and largely achievable within existing institutional structures. They aim to move history education from content accumulation toward inquiry-driven, conceptually grounded learning that builds reasoning, civic understanding, and future readiness for students across every board and region studied.

WITH GRATITUDE



Bhavish Aggarwal
Founder & Chairman - OLA



Rajalakshmi Aggarwal
Chairperson - OLA Foundation



Devesh Varma
Head, OLA Foundation

We extend our gratitude to all whose support and guidance continue to strengthen our efforts to revive, preserve, and promote India's rich historical and cultural heritage

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