IFIH's Survey on Cultural Content in School Education: a few highlights

(Survey partly sponsored by NCERT, full report submitted in July 2005)

presentation prepared by

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INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR INDIA'S HERITAGE

SURVEY ON INDIAN EDUCATION
(For Standards 9-12)

Notes for teachers:

1. Students' names and responses should be kept strictly confidential. The survey must be conducted spontaneously so that the students have an opportunity to express their personal views free from external pressure or parental influence.

2. This survey is not just a statistical study, its objectives are to understand what students expect from the education system, and to help design course material accordingly.

3. The survey can be conducted within a time span of one hour. Students can devote approximately one minute for multiple-choice questions and two minutes for others.

Notes for students:

1. Please fill up the box below. Be assured that your name will remain **STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**.

2. Please give us **YOUR** opinion, not what your teachers, parents or friends say.

3. Responses should be as brief and clear as possible.

4. Your response should not be based on isolated incidents at school or home. Think with a broad mind before you answer.

5. If you don't know how to answer a question, just leave it blank. This is **NOT** a test paper !

6. The panels titled, *"Did you know ?"* and *"Just a minute please !"* are interesting facts and quotes about Indian culture and heritage. They are **NOT** questions to be answered.

Name: .... Class: ....
School: .... City: ....
.... State: ....

1. Basic statistics of schools and students covered in the Survey

State	Number of schools	Percentage of schools	Number of students	Percentage of students
Andhra Pradesh	4	1.4%	193	1.8%
Arunachal Pradesh	13	4.7%	662	6.0%
Assam	3	1.1%	67	0.6%
Bihar	7	2.5%	105	1.0%
Chhattisgarh	3	1.1%	117	1.1%
Delhi	5	1.8%	458	4.2%
Goa	6	2.2%	241	2.2%
Gujarat	3	1.1%	144	1.3%
Haryana	6	2.2%	400	3.6%
Himachal Pradesh	10	3.6%	244	2.2%
Karnataka	40	14.4%	1206	10.9%
Kerala	7	2.5%	284	2.6%
Madhya Pradesh	6	2.2%	551	5.0%
Maharashtra	44	15.8%	2122	19.2%
Punjab	9	3.2%	388	3.5%
Rajasthan	15	5.4%	735	6.7%
Tamil Nadu	54	19.4%	1233	11.2%
Uttar Pradesh	14	5.0%	963	8.7%
Uttaranchal	2	0.7%	64	0.6%
West Bengal	27	9.7%	849	7.7%
Total	278	100%	11,026	100%

Medium-wise distribution of schools & students

Medium of instruction	Number of schools	Percentage of schools	Number of students	Percentage of students
Bengali	5	1.8%	250	2.3%
English	176	63.3%	7288	66.1%
Gujarati	2	0.7%	96	0.9%
Hindi	26	9.4%	1272	11.5%
Kannada	26	9.4%	380	3.4%
Malayalam	1	0.4%	32	0.3%
Marathi	32	11.5%	1448	13.1%
Tamil	10	3.6%	260	2.4%
Total:	278	100%	11,026	100%

Type-wise distribution of schools & students

Type of school	Number of schools	Percentage of schools	Number of students	Percentage of students
Government rural	25	9.0%	639	5.8%
Government urban	28	10.1%	948	8.6%
Private rural	32	11.5%	1424	12.9%
Private urban	193	69.4%	8015	72.7%
Total	278	100%	11,026	100%

Gender-wise and class-wise distribution of students

Students	class 9	class 10	class 11	class 12	Total	Percentage
Girl	1412	1200	1026	790	4428	40.2%
Boy	2392	1984	1249	904	6529	59.2%
Unclear	26	15	20	8	69	0.6%
Total	3830	3199	2295	1702	11026	100%
	34.7%	29.0%	20.8%	15.4%	100%	—

2. Findings on cultural education

❖ *Study of cultural education*

Indian students are keen to learn about Indian culture

➢ **Learning Indian culture**: 91% of all 11,026 students surveyed feel that they will benefit from learning elements of Indian culture.

➢ **In or out of curriculum**: 80% wish Indian culture to be part of extra-curricular activities, while 60% want it taught as part of the curriculum.

➢ **45% want it through both methods** (only 1.3% do not want to learn about it at all).

Aspects of Indian culture
that students would like to learn

- ➢ **Art**: 13% for music, 11% for dance, 9% for drawing and painting
- ➢ **Asanas and pranayama**: 9%
- ➢ **Physical games** (such as kabaddi): 9%
- ➢ **Meditation**: 8%

Indian arts

Students show a liking for:

➢ Bharata Natyam (22%)

➢ Carnatic and Hindustani music (17% & 14%)

➢ Over a third of students have little awareness of Indian art forms.

➢ **Only 37% report learning art as part of their regular curriculum**.

Asanas, pranayama & meditation

- ➢ 83% find the practices of yogasanas, pranayama and meditation helpful.
- ➢ 52% have learned some of them at school.
- ➢ 28% outside.

Indian texts

- ➢ 80% are familiar with the **Ramayana,**
- ➢ 72% with the **Mahabharata,**
- ➢ 33% with **Buddha**'s teachings,
- ➢ 29% with various saints.
- ➢ Only a third of students report having learned stories or teachings from **regional or tribal traditions**.

Language & Literature

➢ **Indian languages**: 51% feel that Indian languages (ancient or modern) should be learned, half of them for cultural reasons, the other half to promote national integration.

➢ **Literature from other States**: At the same time, only 21% remember having read any literature from another State.

Values

➢ Only 38% of the students feel that they learn some values at school;

➢ over 50% fail to mention any values.

➢ The values which students would most like to assimilate and practise (honesty, truthfulness, brotherhood and friendship, duty and dharma), are also those they feel they acquired from stimulating stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Panchatantra, etc.

Overall interest in Indian culture

In a study correlating 11 different questions, 83% of students show some degree of interest in Indian culture or in learning about it at school.

moderately interested 34.9%

poorly interested 14.0%

not interested at all 3.2%

interested 39.5%

very interested 8.4%
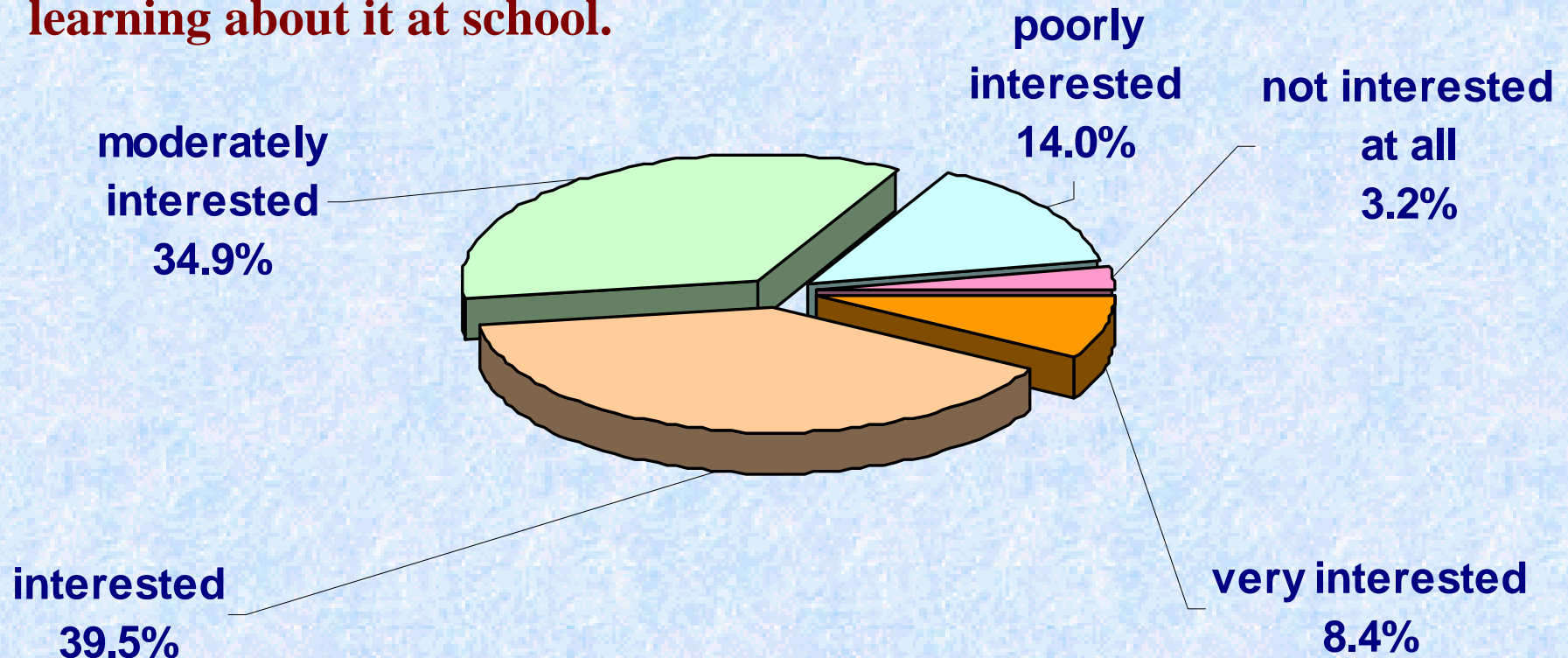
2. Findings on cultural education

❖ *Influence of variables*

Gender

➢ Girls are generally ahead of boys: overall, they appear more interested in Indian culture as well as more aware of it.

Medium - 1

➢ Indian-language students value Indian culture (including yoga and meditation) markedly more than their English-medium counterparts.

➢ They are also more eager to learn it, both as part of the curriculum (67% of them, against 45% English-medium students) and as extra-curricular activities (86% against 78%).

➢ 59% of them want culture through *both* methods, against only 38% for English-medium students.

Medium - 2

➢ Tamil-medium students are the most dissatisfied as regards the attention paid to Indian culture in their curriculum: 47%; Bengali-medium students: 31%; Marathi-medium students: 30%.

➢ Gujarati- and Bengali-medium students are those most interested in Indian culture, followed by Marathi, Tamil and Kannada. English- and Hindi-medium students score the lowest.

Medium - 3

➢ Tamil- and Hindi-medium students show very little interest in learning other Indian languages, and report the poorest awareness of literature from other States.

➢ Bengali- and Gujarati-medium students are the most interested in learning other Indian languages: the latter are in addition the most aware of literature from other States.

Class

➢ Moving from class 9 to class 12, the cultural content decreases, while students feel a growing need for it.

School type

➢ Private schools tend to have more cultural content than Government schools (this appears clearly also as regards the practice of yogasanas, pranayama and meditation). This may be why we find a higher demand among Govt. rural school students (70%) for Indian culture to be integrated in the curriculum.

➢ Rural schools, whether Govt. or private, rank higher than urban ones as regards traditional sports and games.

➢ Students of rural Govt. schools show far more interest in Indian culture (63 on a scale of 100), followed by their counterparts from private urban schools (57). Students of Govt. urban schools seem the least interested (54).

3. Findings on the educational system

❖ *Study of the educational system*

Student satisfaction

➢ Half of the students find the educational system deficient in some respect.

➢ Among their chief criticisms, the lack of Indian culture comes first (17% of those who expressed a criticism), followed by the lack of practical applicability (14%), and lack of values (11%).

Mother tongue vs. English

➢ 47% of the students feel that the mother-tongue medium is the best to facilitate understanding (against 24% who favour English).

➢ This feeling is especially strong in Govt. schools (63%), and among students studying in Bengali, Kannada, Tamil and Gujarati.

➢ **Even among English-medium students, 40% favour the mother-tongue medium.**

➢ 13% of students cannot read their mother tongue, and 18% cannot write in it.

- **Competition**: Even though 64% of the students find competition beneficial, 43% feel that the **examination system** is stressful.
- **Book load**: 62% find the load of textbooks they are made to carry to school unnecessary and excessive.
- **Role of parents**: While the majority seem satisfied with the role of their parents in their education, 35% report being under pressure to get marks.

➢ **Physical training**: 70% of the students find physical training a pleasant change, but 31% of them find it insufficient. Most schools have some physical activity once a week, but many have it once a month or even less.

➢ **Eco-awareness**: About half of the students report participating in the planting of saplings or cleanup programmes, but only 26% have been taken on visits to Nature spots. 67% desire a green area in or around their school.

3. Findings on
the educational system

❖ *Influence of variables
on the educational system*

Scale of overall satisfaction

very dissatisfied 7.6%

very satisfied 8.4%

dissatisfied 22.9%

satisfied 33.2%

average 27.9%
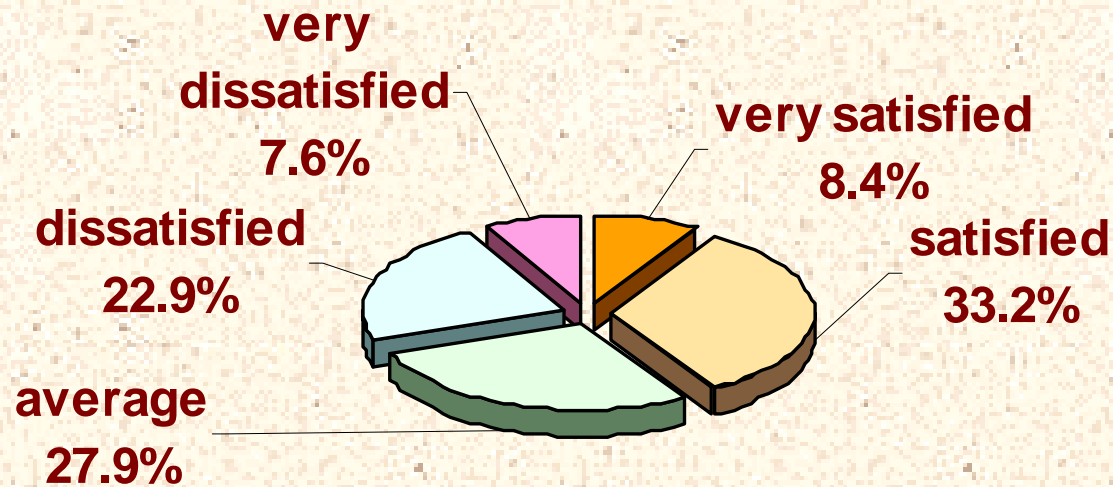
Our study of a "satisfaction" pattern, correlating 15 different questions, concluded that only 42% of all students could be said to be really satisfied with the quality of school education.

Medium

➢ Students of Govt. schools, especially in urban areas, are more dissatisfied than those of private schools.

➢ They also feel much less happy than private-school students about the level of teachers' interaction with them, the amount of physical training, and the space given to art in education.

Class

➢ The higher the class, the lesser the happiness with the content of education, the teaching methods, the examination system, the book load, or the amount of time devoted to sports.

➢ The higher the class, the fewer students who find that their education promotes all-round growth. Our pattern study confirmed a steady decrease in satisfaction from class to class: class 9 scores 54 on a scale of 100, while class 12 scores 49.

Medium

➤ English-medium students find the examination system much more stressful than do Indian-language medium students.

➤ They are also the students who complain the most about book load.

➤ English-medium schools give much less room to Nature-related activities than do Indian-language medium ones.

➤ Kannada-medium students are the most satisfied with their education, followed closely by Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi. At the other end, **Bengali-medium students were ranked as the least satisfied, followed by English-medium and Tamil-medium students**.

Expression & articulation

➢ **Students of Govt. rural schools are the most capable of expressing their thoughts**, not only overall but also in respect to the more challenging questions. **Private urban school students come a distant second.**

➢ Students in **Tamil and Gujarati are well ahead of others,** including English-medium students, in the ability to articulate their thoughts.

➢ Students are prone to give excessively positive responses to individual questions. Over a third of all students contradicted themselves at least once as regards satisfaction with the system.

4. Suggestions from the students on the educational system

➢ **Reduction of the syllabus**: 30% of the students who express themselves ask for the syllabus to be reduced: "Large quantity but little quality." Cutting down the size of the syllabus is the first step to be taken if room is to be made for quality. Unfortunately, in recent years, the overall national trend has rather been the opposite, adding ceaselessly to the number and size of topics to be learned.

➢ **A less mechanical pedagogy**: 17% of them feel that examinations test only their memory. Among those who express themselves, many complain in strong terms about a pedagogy which, they feel, brings no stimulation to thinking.

➤ **A practical-oriented pedagogy**: Many students ask for a more practical, less bookish or theoretical orientation or a playway method of teaching (each by 16% of those who make a suggestion), also for more sports (7%). A detailed study of such demands concludes that **65% of all students** make them in one form or another. (The demand is stronger in the higher classes and in Govt. schools.) Some students complain that their education is unrelated to their life and environment. Specific suggestions include **innovative methods of teaching** making use of audiovisual material and computers, **more sports and physical activities, visits to places,** industries, Nature spots….

➤ **Quality of the teacher**: many students comment on the poor level of qualification of their teachers, asking that the teacher should provide explanations based on practical examples instead of mechanically repeating the textbook. The students also ask for human qualities such as patience, understanding, cheerfulness, etc.

➢ **Examinations**: 24% of students suggest either doing away with exams altogether, replacing them with daily evaluation, or making them more flexible in terms of subjects and timing, or else making sure that exams test the child's real talent and understanding, including practicals, not merely his or her capacity to "mug up" the textbook.

➢ **Book load**: Well over half of the students come up with sensible suggestions on how to reduce the highly excessive load of textbooks they have to carry to school: books should remain at school, education should be less "bookish", or computerized, etc.

5. A few quotations from the students…

Would you prefer Indian culture to be taught at school as part of the curriculum? Why?

➢ Indian culture develops the mind-body-and soul of an individual. But our existing system of education develops only the mind. This makes the person more like a machine.

➢ Yes, because loss of culture is loss of identity.

➢ Until we know of our culture, it will be very difficult to progress.

➢ Yes, propagation of culture is the purpose of education.

➢ Yes, India is our motherland, one should know about his/her mother.

Will it help if subjects are taught in your mother tongue? Why?

➢ Yes, because the understanding and thinking capacity grow.

➢ Yes, the contents will go deep in our mind & heart.

➢ Yes, it is very sweet like mother.

Will learning Indian languages (ancient or modern) help? In what manner?

➢ Yes, it will help to feel the people of India.

➢ Yes. For instance Sanskrit incorporates very good values in us. It develops the heart and makes us more human.

➢ Yes, the facts in the Vedas & Upanishads can be understood. I feel they can revolutionize the existing society & can eradicate many superstitions.

What values do you think students assimilate through the present system?

➢ Not to admit the truth and if one admits, will be punished severely.

➢ Students do not assimilate values, they gather qualities like selfishness, self-centeredness, which they call values.

➢ Value of hard work, importance of money, that exams are the only thing in life.

Mention some values which you have acquired through stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Panchatantra, etc.

➢ They help us about how to face problems and how to get out of it.

➢ We have to be the people of high thinking.

➢ Today's technological knowledge produces machines but ancient texts produce an ethical man.

Is there any aspect which you feel the present system lacks?

➢ The present system does not allow a student to think on a subject deeply.

➢ Lacks the teacher who could speak well in English because if they don't speak well how can we speak well?

➢ The present system lacks true devotion to education.

➢ Development of inner values.

➢ It lacks true spirit of learning.

➢ Lacks the welfare of the students; most of the people teach only for the sake of money and not to enlighten us.

➢ Burden of such heavy books and copies makes us patients of spondylitis at a tender age. Excess homework stops us from playing.

Can you think of any specific change that would make life at school more interesting?

➢ Making a school more friendly & not like an army camp.

➢ The present system must be changed to a system in which children will understand what they learn and why they learn it.

➢ More practicals, learning by doing should be the motto.

➢ Reducing the class strength, suspending cruel & stone-hearted teachers from school, not transferring good & experienced teachers.

➢ A specific change which we always want is the smiling face of our teachers.

➢ Erase the dependency on tuition system after school.

Any teaching method which will make the subjects more interesting and entertaining?

➢ By engaging the students not just going on to explain.

➢ Teachers should not stick to textbooks.

➢ Adding a little bit of humour and creativity.

➢ Education with practical work will make a difference.

➢ When you hear something it may not be very interesting but if you do it you will find it more interesting.

➢ Every subject should be related to our own life so that the value of the subject can be understand.

➢ Giving education in the form of stories.

➢ Teaching shouldn't be confined to four walls of classroom.

➢ Please understand the qualities of students.

If the examination system is stressful, how can we make it less so?

➢ Don't scare the children before exams.

➢ Not checking the memory of the student but the talent.

➢ By removing the word "Fail".

➢ We should not study the whole day, we have to play sometimes.

➢ Memorising should be discouraged and more importance must be attached to reasoning and understanding.

Is competition beneficial or harmful in your opinion?

➢ Beneficial to us, but at the cost of friendships.

➢ Competition is helpful to an extent. But care must be taken that one who lags behind is not left back forever.

➢ Harmful. Makes the child believe: if you want to study more, understand less.

Can you suggest other ways to evaluate a student's abilities?

➢ By giving him work to do like to make charts, models etc. which shows his interest, ability, creativity and liking towards the subject.

➢ Extra-curricular activities should be given due recognition.

➢ To have tests for your inborn talents, not for what you memorize without understanding.

Can you suggest ways to reduce the book load?

➢ Instead of mugging up all the chapters we should learn through experiments and nature.

➢ Appoint such teachers who can teach us without the use of books.

➢ By reducing the useless books.

➢ Books should be kept within the school.

➢ Bookish education should be reduced.

How could your parents help you to transform education into a lively and interesting experience?

- ➢ Advise the children to enjoy school life instead of asking them to get 90%.
- ➢ By allowing us to join those fields in which we are interested.
- ➢ Spend more time with children.
- ➢ To protest against the prevailing system.

If your classrooms were located amidst natural surroundings, what effect would it have on you?

➤ We should be taught in open as we are a part of Nature and learn to control ourselves in all situations.

➤ Present system lacks the contact of children with Nature.

What skills would you like to learn?

➢ Want to learn puppetry, as it will let us give some smiles on poor faces.

6. Conclusion

❖ The still prevalent notion that education can be designed without the active participation of the students is a relic of the nineteenth century. In any sincere effort to modernize education, to make those twelve years of schooling a more fulfilling and meaningful period in a child's life, students should not be seen as passive recipients.

❖ The students' voice is a genuine one and deserves to be heard. Going through their expressions, one cannot but be struck by their depth and maturity. The students should be accepted as active participants in their own education. No reform of the educational system is likely to ever succeed otherwise.