



“A Comparative Study of School Curricula in Maharashtra- NCERT, CBSE, ICSE, and State Board”

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Abstract:

This research paper presents a comparative analysis of the school curricula implemented across various boards in Maharashtra—NCERT, CBSE, ICSE, and the Maharashtra State Board. The study investigates structural design, content depth, pedagogical approaches, learning outcomes, and evaluation methodologies. Drawing from curriculum documents, expert interviews, and secondary data analysis, the research identifies key similarities and differences that impact student learning, equity, and future readiness. The paper concludes with implications for policy, pedagogy, and further educational reforms in India are diverse schooling system.

Keywords:

School curricula, Maharashtra, CBSE, ICSE, NCERT, State Board, curriculum comparison, educational policy, pedagogy etc.

Introduction:

India's federal educational framework allows for a diverse range of school boards to operate with autonomy, reflecting the country's pluralistic and decentralized approach to governance. In Maharashtra, this diversity is particularly evident with the presence of four major school curricula: the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE), and the Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education

(MSBSHSE). Each of these boards operates under distinct administrative and pedagogical frameworks, which result in significant variations in curriculum design, content depth, learning outcomes, and evaluation strategies. The NCERT, functioning as an apex resource organization under the Ministry of Education, plays a pivotal role in shaping the national curriculum and serves as the academic backbone for CBSE schools. Its curriculum emphasizes conceptual clarity, learner-centered pedagogy, and alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (NCERT, *National Curriculum Framework* 2023). The CBSE follows the NCERT's framework but adapts it with a focus on national-level competitive examinations, practical integration, and continuous evaluation systems.

In contrast, the ICSE board, managed by the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations, adopts a more detailed, literature-rich, and interdisciplinary approach. It is often viewed as academically rigorous, particularly in language and humanities, and caters predominantly to urban, English-medium private schools (MHRD 2019). The MSBSHSE, operated by the Maharashtra state government, offers localized content in Marathi and English and plays a critical role in reaching rural and marginalized communities, though it has been critiqued for its traditional pedagogy and limited adaptability to national reforms (Kumar 2013). Given the growing emphasis on educational equity, global standards, and holistic learning, a comparative study of these curricula is essential to identify gaps, encourage harmonization, and ensure all students receive quality education regardless of the board.

Objectives of the Study:

- To analyze and compare the curriculum structure of NCERT, CBSE, ICSE, and the Maharashtra State Board.
- To evaluate the pedagogical and assessment strategies adopted by each board.
- To assess the implications of curricular differences on student learning and outcomes.
- To identify gaps and recommend improvements for better alignment and inclusivity in Maharashtra.

Review of Literature:

A significant body of research has examined the diversity and implications of multiple school curricula in India, particularly in the context of federal education governance. The

coexistence of NCERT, CBSE, ICSE, and various State Boards like the Maharashtra State Board presents both opportunities and challenges in ensuring uniform quality and equitable learning outcomes.

Krishna Kumar (2013), in his seminal work *What is Worth Teaching?*, critiques the content disparity among Indian school boards and argues for a more thoughtful, conceptual approach to curriculum planning. He points out that State Boards often adopt rote-learning techniques, whereas national boards such as CBSE are more inclined toward competency-based education. Similarly, Avijit Pathak (2011) emphasizes that school curricula are not just pedagogical frameworks but social instruments shaping class, culture, and opportunity, particularly visible in the stratification between ICSE (elite, English-medium) and State Board schools (public, vernacular-medium).

Govinda (2002) highlights that curriculum disparities affect access to higher education and employment, noting that CBSE and ICSE students have an advantage in competitive examinations due to broader exposure and updated syllabi. This is corroborated by MHRD's 2019 report, which recommends the harmonization of learning outcomes across boards for parity and mobility. It also underscores the role of NCERT in framing a national vision through the *National Curriculum Framework (NCF)*, recently updated in 2023 to reflect Sustainable Development Goals, learner-centric pedagogy, and digital integration (NCERT, 2023).

Thus, the literature reflects growing scholarly concern over inequality, lack of standardization, and the need for reforms aligning with NCF 2023. Yet, empirical comparative studies focusing specifically on Maharashtra's educational context remain limited, which this study seeks to address.

Research Methodology:

The study is qualitative in nature, supported by document analysis, expert interviews, and secondary data review.

- **Sources:** Syllabi, textbooks, annual reports, policy documents, educational research papers, and websites of respective boards.
- **Sampling:** Four boards (NCERT, CBSE, ICSE, MSBSHSE); standards VI to X.
- **Analysis Tool:** Comparative framework analyzing (i) curriculum design, (ii) subject content, (iii) pedagogy, (iv) assessment style, (v) inclusivity, and (vi) global readiness.

Overview of School Boards:

Board	Governing Body	Medium	Reach	Affiliation
NCERT	National Council under MoE	English, Hindi	Nationwide	Resource body, sets standard
CBSE	Central Board under MoE	English, Hindi	National/Global	Public and private
ICSE	Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE)	English	Elite, urban	Private
MSBSHSE	Maharashtra State Government	Marathi, English	Statewide	Public and private

Table 1: Overview of School Boards in Maharashtra

The table 1 provides a comparative overview of the administrative structure, language medium, geographic reach, and types of affiliations for the four main school boards functioning in Maharashtra. It sets the foundation for deeper curriculum comparison by highlighting systemic diversity.

Comparative Analysis:

Curriculum Design:

- **NCERT/CBSE:** Structured into learning outcomes; spiral progression; interdisciplinary.
- **ICSE:** Detailed and extensive syllabi; more emphasis on language, humanities, and application.
- **State Board (MSBSHSE):** Textbook-centric, concept-based, limited interdisciplinarity.

Aspect	NCERT	CBSE	ICSE	MSBSHSE
Flexibility	Moderate	Moderate	High	Low
Interdisciplinarity	Yes	Yes	Limited	Rare
Practical Integration	Moderate	High	Very High	Low

Table 2: Comparative Aspects of Curriculum Design

The table 2 outlines the comparative curriculum design features of the four boards in terms of flexibility, interdisciplinarity, and integration of practical knowledge. It shows that ICSE is more rigorous and application-based, while MSBSHSE is relatively static and traditional.

Subject Content Depth:

- **ICSE** tends to cover more advanced topics and encourages analytical thinking.
- **CBSE/NCERT** aligns with national competitive exams.
- **State Board** content is localized and relatively easier in comparison.

Pedagogical Approaches:

- **CBSE and ICSE** promote activity-based learning, projects, and digital tools.
- **NCERT** promotes constructivist methods (learning by doing).
- **MSBSHSE** remains largely traditional, with teacher-centered approaches.

Assessment Style:

- **ICSE:** Emphasizes written exams, internal assessments, and projects.
- **CBSE:** Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE), internal + external exams.
- **MSBSHSE:** Board exams dominate; less emphasis on internal evaluation.

Assessment	CBSE	ICSE	State Board
Internal Projects	30%	40%	20%
MCQ/Objective	Yes	Limited	Limited
Practical Exams	Yes	Extensive	Limited

Table 3: Assessment Practices Across School Boards

The table 3 compares assessment practices across CBSE, ICSE, and the State Board. It shows how CBSE and ICSE emphasize internal assessments and practicals, whereas the State Board relies heavily on external written exams with minimal internal evaluation components.

Inclusivity and Multilingualism:

- **State Board** offers regional languages and localized context.
- **CBSE/NCERT** provide bilingual content.
- **ICSE** focuses on English medium; lacks regional inclusion.

Global Readiness:

- **CBSE and ICSE** prepare students for global standards and foreign university admissions.
- **NCERT** is research-driven and aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **MSBSHSE** has limited global exposure.

6. Findings and Discussion

1. Uniformity vs Diversity:

NCERT and CBSE aim at national uniformity, while ICSE promotes depth and critical engagement. The State Board retains cultural and regional identity but lags in modernization.

2. Equity and Accessibility:

State Board schools cater to rural and underprivileged sections, while ICSE schools are urban, elite, and expensive.

3. Career Alignment:

CBSE students fare better in national competitive exams (NEET, JEE) due to curriculum alignment. ICSE students perform better in language arts and humanities. State Board students require bridge courses for parity in higher education.

4. Curricular Burden:

ICSE has a heavy syllabus, sometimes causing stress. CBSE strikes a moderate balance. The State Board is content-light but lacks competitive edge.

Implications and Recommendations

- **Policy Integration:**

State Boards must gradually align with national frameworks like NCF 2023 to ensure parity.

- **Teacher Training:**

Pedagogical reforms should focus on training teachers in digital, constructivist, and learner-centric methods.

- **Assessment Reform:**

Shift from rote-based to analytical assessment in State Boards.

- **Multilingual Materials:**

All boards should provide multilingual options and encourage regional inclusivity.

- **Curricular Collaboration:**

Boards can collaborate for shared resources, exchange programs, and hybrid model implementation.

Conclusion:

This comparative study of school curricula in Maharashtra reveals significant divergences in structure, pedagogy, and educational outcomes across NCERT, CBSE, ICSE, and the State Board. While each curriculum serves a unique socio-cultural and pedagogical purpose, there is a growing need for alignment to national and global educational standards. Equity, access, and excellence must go hand-in-hand to ensure every child in Maharashtra receives quality education, regardless of the board they are enrolled in.

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