

Meaning and Nature of School Subject

Meaning of School Subjects

A school subject is a subject or a field of study as well as a branch of knowledge that is taught and researched at the school, college or university level. School subject refers to an area of knowledge that is studied in school. It can be called a learning tool or the criteria by which we learn. More precisely, subjects are the parts into which learning can be divided. It is a field or sphere of knowledge in which the learner has chosen to specialize. It can sometimes be used synonymously with the term 'discipline' and can be referred to as a systematic instruction given to the students in a particular area of learning that follows specific code of conduct.

Humanist educators argue that school subjects are created to provide students with intrinsically rewarding experiences that contribute to the pursuit of self-actualization, personal growth, and individual freedom. School subjects, therefore, need to be formulated according to the interest, attitudes, and developmental stages of individual student & they need to derive content from a wide range of sources such as personal experiences, human activities, and community cultures and wisdoms. Disciplinary knowledge might or might not be useful for the formation of school subjects. From the perspective of social efficiency, school subjects are constructed for the primary purpose of maintaining and enhancing economic and social productivity by equipping future citizens with the requisite knowledge, skills, and capital & the formation of school subjects, therefore, are justified with close reference to the needs of occupation, profession, and vocation. Specialized and applied -fields (e.g., engineering, accounting, and marketing,) among others, therefore, are the primary sources from which the contents of school subjects are derived. School subjects are created to provide students with meaningful learning experiences that might lead to emancipation and engender social agency. The formation of school subjects is based upon an examination of social contents, social issues, and futures, with the intention of helping individuals reconstruct their own analyses, standpoints, and actions. Like humanistic educators, social reconstructionist believe that schools subjects derive contents from a wide range of sources.

Definition for School Subject

A school subject can be defined as a branch of knowledge or a body of knowledge that is being provided to its learner. According to Zongyi Deng, a school subject refers to an area of learning within the school curriculum that constitutes an institutionally defined field of knowledge and practice for teaching and learning.

A school subject constitutes an organizing framework that gives meaning and shape to curriculum content, teaching, and learning activities. School Subjects is defined as an 'area of knowledge that is studied in school'. - Britannica Encyclopaedia.

'A school subject is an area of learning within the school curriculum that constitutes an institutionally defined field of knowledge and practice for teaching and learning.' - Deng, Z.

School subjects are human constructions in response to social, economic, cultural, political, and educational realities and needs. They are uniquely purpose-built educational enterprises, designed with and through educational imagination towards educative ends.

A school subject is an area of learning within the school curriculum that constitutes an institutionally defined field of knowledge and practice for teaching and learning. School subjects can be traditional academic subjects, such as mathematics, history, geography, physics, chemistry and economics. Academic school subjects, such as mathematics, chemistry, geography, history, and economics, are to be compulsorily taught to the students. The content of these academic subjects needs to be worked with and transformed by the teachers in such a way that it is appropriate for classroom teaching. Constructing a school subject involves the selection and arrangement of content of knowledge, skills and the transformation of that content for school and classroom use. This is in accordance with respect to both societal expectations and activities of teaching.

Nature of School Subjects

Grossman and Stokowski defined three features of school subjects. They are:

1. School subjects differ in their status they have in school and larger community. Craft, physical education are considered less important than science and mathematics.
2. Sequence is perceived as important in school subjects where certain knowledge and skills have to be learnt before proceeding to new learning. For example, the basic calculations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division are to be taught before teaching fractions.
3. The scope of the subject refers to the different disciplinary areas included in the subjects that can be broad or restricted. An example of broad-based subject is physical science which includes physics and chemistry. Social science includes history, geography, economics, and civics.

Now we shall analyse the above definitions and understand the nature of school subjects.

A School subject:

ÉIs also called as a learning tool.

ÉServes as criteria by which we learn.

ÉIs used synonymously with the term 'discipline'.

ÉRefers to a particular area of leaning.

ÉHas a specific code of conduct.

ÉAims to give intrinsically rewarding experience to students.

ÉContributes for self-actualization, personal growth and individual freedom.

ÉNeeds to be formulated according to the needs of students.

ÉDerives content from a wide range of sources.

ÉIs constructed from the perspective of social efficiency.

ÉAims to maintain and enhance the social productivity.

ÉHas close reference to the needs of occupation, profession, and vocation.



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ÉA school subject is an area of learning within the school curriculum.

É Involves the selection and arrangement of content of knowledge, skills and the transformation of that content.

Thus, a school subject is the result of institutional selection, organization, and framing content for social, economic, cultural, curricular and pedagogic purposes. A school subject constitutes an organizing framework that gives meaning and shape to curriculum content, teaching, and learning activities. School subjects are distinctive, purpose-built enterprises, constructed in response to different social, cultural, and political demands and challenges, and towards educational aims. Thus a school subject contains content, and translating content for educational purposes.