

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE ON SINGLE NATIONAL CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The government of Pakistan has adopted a single national curriculum policy aiming to standardize teaching and learning across all schools. The rationale is that a unified curriculum will coordinate social and national activities by enabling the same educational system for all individuals regarding pedagogy, language, assessment, and curricular content. Additionally, a consistent curriculum is envisaged as a fundamental building block for the education system, providing guidelines for implementation. However, according to the perceptions of primary school teachers in Lahore, the policy faces challenges in terms of practical realization. This qualitative interview-based study of 10 teachers examines their insights regarding rolling out the single curriculum and the impediments faced. Findings indicate that while a common curriculum constitutes a necessary foundation for reform, successful change requires holistic upgrades encompassing continuous curriculum revisions responding to contextual needs, improved infrastructure, and robust systems for monitoring implementation. Changing the curriculum alone may prove insufficient to achieve quality enhancement aims without accompanying upgrades in broader structural issues. The study advises policymakers and stakeholders that research is needed to investigate diverse aspects and complexities associated with large-scale curriculum reform to inform planning and decision-making. As this study explores a limited scope, further work should examine the perspectives of different stakeholders across various regions to enable nuanced understandings, especially considering Pakistan's cultural and socioeconomic diversity. Monitoring ongoing outcomes of the curriculum change is also vital for enabling data-driven improvements in responding to emergent challenges.

Keywords: Single national curriculum, qualitative study, primary education, curriculum implementation, education policy, teacher perspectives

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan's educational landscape has historically been fragmented across public, private, madrasa, Urdu-medium, and English-medium school systems, cementing inequalities and divisions in society. To promote national cohesion and address disparities, the government formulated a Single National Curriculum (SNC), seeking to standardize curricula and textbooks across schools (Naqvi, M. (2021). However, effective implementation remains questionable, given the complexities of reform across Pakistan's culturally diverse contexts. By

establishing and promoting the agenda of a single national curriculum, Pakistan's current administration has taken a noteworthy step toward reforming the nation's educational system. This would help to bring the nation's youth together. More opposition will likely be to embracing this SNC agenda than initially appears. Therefore, it may not be as straightforward as it first appears to unify all school systems around a single curriculum. All students have a fair and equitable chance to receive a high-quality education, and SNC is significant for

everyone.

The curriculum gives educational institutions a framework for choosing the subjects to teach and sets of measurable objectives. To achieve the goals of national unity mentioned earlier, schools must ensure the consistency and standardization of the educational system. It is a technique for developing a learning process to set national goals. It aids in altering students' knowledge, skills, and capacities for the new modern world (Moore, 2014). The fact that different strata of society in Pakistan are offered a choice of curricula has kept society divided and prevented us from rising as one powerful nation. A united nation is urgently needed; SNC is expected to help achieve that goal.

Curricula are intended to develop the overall development of all individuals (Egan, 2003), to ensure the finest conditions for development and growth in a worthwhile, kid-friendly, and inclusive setting where they are free to decide and behave in a safe, educated, and healthy environment (Akker, 2004). Early childhood care and education curricula should include Islamic-inspired material on social and moral development so that students can develop into decent citizens (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002). Early Childhood Care and Education offer a supportive learning environment where children can explore, think, imagine, inquire about, and experiment because they can generate novel ideas and obtain novel solutions (Siraj-Blatchford & Engdahl, 2009). Early childhood care and education aims to help youngsters become more mobile, oriented, and skilled in their surroundings. Similarly, it raises awareness of the value of cleanliness, health, and safety. Additionally, it emphasizes the growth of the imagination's capacity for expression and the expression of thoughts, feelings, observations, and creativity.

Additionally, it fosters innovative thinking in students. (Henderson, 2004). The fundamental job by which we can improve students' functional language is reading and writing skills. Reading and writing talents will enhance cognitive capacities and language capabilities (Siraj-Blatchford & Engdahl, 2009). Developing emotional control in learners at an early age is crucial. At this age, kids must have pleasant experiences. It's crucial to make children feel important, take charge, pay attention to them, and care for them to develop a healthy sense of self

(Schweinhart et al., 2002). Curriculum development is a practical aspect of an educational activity (Goodson, 2013). It offers a solid curriculum plan and examples of activities, instructional resources, and suitable learning environments. Based on the guidelines, schools can select the textbooks of their choice. Based on social and economic changes in the environment, learning experiences, and teaching materials, teachers can adjust them to match the requirements of their pupils. (Muzaffar & Javaid, 2018). It means that the curriculum will alter the overall pattern of educational activities (Priestley, 2011) while other elements of education, i.e., teachers, school, and curriculum, are the basic change agents in the educational process (Voogt & Pelgrum, 2005). So, the teachers' educational and organizational structure influence the development (Brady & Kennedy, 2013) and curriculum implementation (Roehrig et al., 2007).

Objectives of the Study

- To explore the teachers' perception of the effective implementation of a single national curriculum at the primary level.
- To explore the problems primary school teachers face while implementing a single national curriculum.

Research Questions

1. What is the primary teachers' perception of the effective implementation of a single national curriculum at the primary level?
2. What are the problems primary school teachers face while implementing a single national curriculum?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Shaukat (2021) critically evaluated the government's proposal for a Single National Curriculum. Accordingly, teaching new material to children without first giving them the essential scaffolding of prior topic knowledge is challenging, which results in cognitive dissonance during the learning process. This makes a grasp of children's psychology imperative. After learning this, she developed an interest in learning the opinions of other academics from public and private universities regarding the Single National Curriculum. The results of this study indicate that government teachers find it difficult to

implement a Single National Curriculum in every classroom at once; as a result, they advise implementing it gradually, beginning with early childhood education. Private school teachers could think their students are far more famous than public school students. Public education has developed into a tool for nation-building in response to challenges with collective creativity, cooperation, and critical thought because it emphasizes constructing an identity. Pakistani education saw the implementation of its first curriculum framework in 2018 with the launch of the new national curriculum framework. Until now, the curriculum was developed and created using certain subject curriculum criteria (Rubab et al., 2023).

Curriculum development is a periodic and dynamic process. It is standard procedure to use pilot testing before introducing a new curriculum. After that, they are assessed while being used, and recommendations for modifications are made before the following development phase. Since instructors play such a crucial role in the educational system, any changes to the curriculum must first be tested in real classrooms before being made available to all students nationally. As a result, to prepare students for the challenges of a globalized educational system, success, and economic growth, the educational system must alter its curriculum, address all of the problems, and establish a learning society that maximizes each person's creative and intellectual capacity (Smith & Yu, 2018).

The new framework promotes unity and national ideology to counteract the decentralization of education to the provinces and related divisions. Before recently being moved to the federal level, province governments oversaw the development and implementation of the curriculum. Greater national cohesion and standardized education are made feasible by the implementation of SNC. The discrepancy between curricula and learning requirements encouraged the creation of a uniform national curriculum (Panjwani & Chaudhary, 2022). Co-curricular activities, worldwide effective learning, educational standards, infrastructures, texts, assessment tools, and instructional strategies are all included in the curriculum. The curriculum must be up-to-date and compliant with all requirements to equip society for worldwide shifts. This implies that changing the curriculum is

inevitable (Bari, 2021).

One new strategy for enacting educational reform will be mastering a single national curriculum (Qudsia Kalsoom, 2019). Teachers are essential to advancing and carrying out all lofty objectives of a unified national curriculum (Lashari et al., 2021). The government and advisory officials are not considering the teaching staff's advice while making policy decisions. Nonetheless, the government's stated goals for the Single National Curriculum should be implemented to uphold the idea of "one country, one curriculum."

In the Pakistani context, there are few studies regarding curriculum. A study by Jamil et al. (2020) explored a qualitative content analysis of education policy and secondary school science curriculum documents regarding critical thinking skills. In the same way, Pakistani national identity, curriculum reform, and citizenship education textbooks were explored through teachers' perspectives (Muhammad, 2019). Qualitative content analysis of curriculum policy documents regarding social justice and cultural identity in Pakistani education was explored.

In addition, further evaluation studies will assess the SNC's credibility. With the introduction of the Single National Curriculum, it is necessary to create and preserve a suitable connection between a national policy directed by the government and professional practice shaped by educators. The Single National Curriculum is working hard to achieve this goal. It is reasonable to anticipate that professional perspectives from educators will influence government policy during the dynamic process of curriculum construction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study examined how primary school teachers felt about a single national curriculum. This research employed a phenomenological method and a qualitative research design. The population for the current study was all primary school teachers in Lahore. To accomplish the study, a sample of 10 teachers was drawn from the three primary schools using a purposive sampling technique (Neuman, 2014). Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information and capture their views about the phenomenon. The interviews were conducted in the local Urdu language, and audio was recorded,

transcribed, and translated into English. A code was provided to each participant so they could stay anonymous. Subsequently, the researcher employed manual thematic analysis to understand the data. The readers may learn more about primary school teachers' opinions of the Single National Curriculum from the in-depth explanation of interview findings and the themes presented with direct quotes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Most participants believed the current dialogue in print and electronic media projects several key perceptions—or misperceptions. The first is that the SNC is being imposed on the 4 Provinces by the Federal Centre. This notion ignores the fact that the Federal Centre lacks the capacity and jurisdiction to forcibly impose the SNC on any province, especially in light of the 18th Constitutional Amendment 2010. Most participants pursued new methodologies to make learning more effective and efficient. One of the participants was of view in the following words: *“There is still no consensus regarding the medium of instruction for Classes I through V. The problem of reaching consensus on this issue is unavoidably hard in a highly multilingual society and in which Urdu and English both have a remarkable influence and attractiveness”* (Participant 1)

Most of the participants were pleased to say that there is a strong, almost overwhelming demand for the use of English as the preferred language, if not a guarantee for further advancement in education and employment, even though international research shows that a child absorbed best when imparted education in the mother tongue during the first few years of school. One participant said, *“The goal of SNC is to raise awareness of the Urdu language's significance and worth in our country. They should be comfortable speaking in their language. Teachers have a crucial role in curriculum creation and should be involved to ensure the best interests of pupils”* (Participant 2).

There is currently a phenomenon where children in a single classroom in many sections of Karachi speak four or five distinct mother tongues, with Pakistan being the country in South Asia with the fastest rate of urbanization. The Federal Centre and the Provinces should be given the final say on this matter, which may be the best course of action. At

the danger of allowing the current situation to remain. However, with the hope of diversity and unification, not uniformity! —will develop into a hospitable combination. A participant added: *“Although it will take time to resolve the current problems, the SNC may turn out to be the greatest educational innovation of the twenty-first century. For now, however, this is not the case”* (Participant-3). Similarly, another participant said, *“While it would take time, SNC hopes to promote equity and uniformity”* (Participant 4).

It is recommended that policymakers reevaluate and adjust their designs to improve outcomes in the future. Participants think the Urdu language is the primary distinction between the two courses. They argue that teaching many subjects in Urdu is bad because our economy and business are interconnected with other nations, and we must adopt the English language over time.

Although not all institutions implement it, they believe the single national curriculum is a good move. One participant added that *“not all disciplines should be taught in Urdu, just Islamiyat and Urdu should, as doing so will prevent students from learning scientific terminology in the sciences and have ramifications down the road”* (Participant 3).

Most of the participants believe that SNC aims to raise national awareness of the significance and worth of the Urdu language. They ought to feel at ease speaking in their native tongue. They also believe that teachers should be involved in curriculum development since they are the ones who know what is best for the children. Teachers are crucial to the development of curricula.

Teachers reported that they had observed that students were not at ease. They felt overloaded with information. It was not the best approach, as one of the participants was viewed as *“We are not in a position to accept restrictions; instead, we must constantly improve it and introduce fresh approaches and plans to modernize Pakistan's educational system”* (Participant 5).

One of the participants believes that *“Pakistan will become more uniform under SNC. But because it's a new method, it will take some time”*(Participant 6).

Participants believe the new curriculum is more challenging, but things may get easier. Participants' understanding of the goals and purpose of the Single National Curriculum is sufficient. The participant

thinks that because the prior curriculum was so mainstream and straightforward, the public sector is having more issues with the new curriculum's material. The pupils feel overburdened by the amount of content and are not at ease with SNC. One participant believed that *"SNC will offer uniformity to Pakistan's education system, but it will take time as pupils become acquainted with the subject"* (Participant 7).

Similarly, another participant reported, *"Pakistan is not the right place to impose restrictions; instead, curriculum designers and policymakers should constantly improve the material for improved outcomes"* (Interview, Participant-8).

No doubt, the SNC can bring uniformity to Pakistan. The former curriculum, particularly in the private sector, was based on fiction rather than truth, especially in social studies; it is now enough for primary school. One participant agreed, *"In the future, SNC will bring education to the next level"* (Interview, Participant 10).

Few participants believe SNC will provide consistency to Pakistan in the upcoming years. They feel that upgrading educational materials and infrastructure is necessary to meet 21st-century needs. One participant added, *"The Single National Curriculum aims to unite all communities and eliminate prejudice between middle and upper classes. Teachers play a crucial role in curriculum development because they are closely connected to students and the information they teach"* (Participant 9).

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, formulating and implementing an SNC that empowers the country to overcome historical disparities and dichotomies and face the uncertain future with confidence and cohesion should be made possible in the twenty-first century as the momentum of change increases in all spheres. This study suggests that the stakeholders set up teacher training sessions to give them a thorough understanding of the Single National Curriculum and survey teachers regarding their participation in curriculum development since they view it as extremely small and significant. The study's findings advise stakeholders and policymakers that changing the curriculum alone would not be sufficient to advance Pakistan.

DISCUSSION

It is difficult to bring together opinions opposed to fundamental problems and to create consensus between the Federal Centre and the four Provinces and Regions and across institutions within the five broad sectors of one Federation, four Provinces, and Regions. For instance, there are differences between the civil and military realms of education, public and private (further separated into high-fee and low-fee institutions), traditional systems, and various religious madrasah systems (Khan, 2018). The national curriculum is a uniform set of objectives and standards designed to address challenges in the education system. SNC is a system that ensures uniform education throughout the state and country (Kalsoom, 2019). A uniform national curriculum can improve teacher preparation, enroll all unenrolled children, and identify educational inequities. (Creswell, 2019). The government's intention to develop a national curriculum is a positive step. The initiative's choice to embrace SNC will improve education systems and advancements (Tareen & Samreen, 2022). The inclusion of spaces for adaptive skills, motor skills, and vocational skills to participate in work activities was advised for SNC. For improved outcomes, the curriculum itself needs to be updated frequently, and infrastructure and a system are needed to put it into practice (Lashari et al., 2021). Numerous other facets of the Single National Curriculum exist, including the handful covered in this study. Therefore, it is advised that more research be done to examine various facets of the Single National Curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementing a single national curriculum is problematic due to class tensions in education, including distinctions between secular and religious education and private and public schools. The administration may confront obstacles in developing a national curriculum in public schools and creating a blueprint for existing education. New educational ideas, curriculum modifications, SNC implementation, and educated instructors tremendously impact education reform. Based on the result, there should be a strong monitoring system for instruction and management. Teachers must be qualified and trained to achieve educational objectives. Pakistan faces a shortage of qualified and

well-trained teachers. A successful curriculum and education reform need qualified teachers. It is also recommended to consider various aspects of a single national curriculum, e.g., curriculum changes and their implementation, educational strategies, teacher training, etc.

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