

What Challenges Do the Primary School Teachers Face in Implementing the Single National Curriculum (SNC): Findings from a Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The Single National Curriculum is a sincere endeavor in terms of content, approach to instruction, and evaluation to give Pakistanis a united and fair opportunity to acquire high-quality education with equality. This study aims to explore the challenges that Punjab's private and public primary school teachers have faced in implementing the Single National Curriculum, identify the barriers to Single National Curriculum deployment and offer solutions to help schools adopt Single National Curriculum successfully. To collect data from participants on their knowledge, beliefs and experiences, this study used a design based on qualitative research. The study purposively included sixteen primary school teachers who had firsthand experience in implementing and instructing the SNC. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather qualitative data to study the breadth and depth of the phenomena of challenges to the Single National Curriculum practices. The data were transcribed, coded and categorized to identify themes emerging out of the participants' experiences which include the availability of infrastructure in schools, teachers' training, and emphasis on Islamic Education. The study has implications for designing strategies to implement SNC effectively in public and private primary schools.

Keywords: SNC, curriculum change, infrastructure, Islamic education, teacher training, primary school.

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Introduction

Since its independence, Pakistan underwent a long period without a curriculum structure. Pakistan created the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), which establishes fundamental parameters for creating a national curriculum. All of the curricular requirements on which the national curriculum would be built are covered in this curriculum framework. A national curriculum framework, a standardized curriculum, or recommendations for curricula have been constructed in many countries with a national structure. This group of countries includes nations such as India, Nepal, China, Russia, Malaysia, Iraq, Nigeria, Australia, and Germany among several others. The Federal Ministry of Education of the United States of America has established uniformity for several necessary courses. Both France and the UK employ uniform curricula across the country. The majority of Muslim countries have a uniform curriculum for all of their schools. The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, and Indonesia are among them.

A common core curriculum has been established by more than 95 governments across the globe. In Pakistan, four distinct systems of instruction and testing: formal education in public schools, private schools, Deeni Madaris, and non-formal education were in place. Because each one of these systems of education had a different curriculum and evaluation method, resulting in significant disparities and disadvantages in our education system. Uniformity in curriculum and standards has thus become a significant reason for concern. The 18th Constitutional Amendment, which devolved responsibility of education to the provinces, included the elimination of the Concurrent Legislative List, adding still another level of uniformity among the numerous provinces and regions. Due to this, demand for uniform standards and curricula was raised both nationally and internationally.

Three national policy texts that had been incorporated into the curriculum were the Pakistani Constitution, the National Education Policy, and Vision 2025. This framework covered all other related topics relating to learning in schools, including the steps, schedule, elements, and specifications for creating or revising curriculum. It outlined the philosophical underpinnings for the curriculum, knowledge, comprehension, abilities, values, and attitudes that students should develop to achieve learning outcomes in the key learning domains at a certain level. It also offered a thorough set of curricular strategy guidelines for the development of subject curricula, instructional delivery strategies, student achievement testing, and teacher professional development, as well as suggestions for structural changes required for the successful execution of the curriculum.

The Single National Curriculum is an unbiased public education system in terms of content, teaching strategy, and assessment. Giving Pakistanis everywhere a fair and equal chance to receive high-quality education is a sincere effort. The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Government of Pakistan, implemented a consistent curriculum and teaching approach to eliminate educational gaps across the country. The current administration introduced and put into effect the Single National Curriculum at the primary level throughout Pakistan after making an unceasing effort. Except for Sindh, all Pakistani provinces' primary schools now follow the same national curriculum. Yet, the government has shown its devotion and optimism about implementing SNC for middle and high classes nationwide in the upcoming years.

We must wait for the Single National Curriculum project to succeed and provide results before deciding whether it is a viable and compelling means of plugging gaps in the nation's educational standards and SLOs. The government had provided the public schools with textbooks that adhere to new, broader benchmarks, standards and SLOs that were established through a Single National Curriculum. Private schools were allowed to choose their curricula; however, those curricula must only be based on the standards, benchmarks and SLO's provided by the Pakistani government. The main objectives of Single National Curriculum implementation across the country included producing coming generations with universal principles in addition to offering every child an equal and equitable opportunity to get a high-quality education. It is universally believed that the main objective of curricula is to instill moral, social, and universal values in Pakistani pupils through themes and subthemes such as problem-solving, equality, compassion, and socioeconomic unity (Humaira Irfan, 2021).

Only primary schools in Punjab, both public and private, embraced the Single National Curriculum as of August 2021, as instructed by the Government of Punjab and the Government of Pakistani respectively. To introduce teachers to the Single National Curriculum, its standards/benchmarks, and the teaching techniques necessary to teach Single National Curriculum, the Government of Punjab also held online training sessions for primary school teachers and private school instructors for about five days. Several social groups including public and private educational institutions praised this proposal as a way to get around obstacles to providing high-quality education to everyone in society equally and without discrimination. Because of their worries about the Single National Curriculum, some societal groups also condemned the Single National Curriculum at the time.

Purpose of the Study

Since its founding, Pakistan experienced numerous changes to its educational policy and curriculum. To address the educational inequities of the nation, educational innovation, and curriculum reform remained urgently needed. Single National Curriculum represented progress in this area. The creation and implementation of a Single National Curriculum are considered crucial nationwide for a variety of reasons, including the growing desire for uniform curricula for all socioeconomic groups throughout the nation. Also, this is a factor that affects the lifestyle and academic requirements of nearly 220 million Pakistanis. This is a relatively understudied issue that is closely related to the socioeconomic development of Pakistan as well as the lives and standards of life of its citizens. Any project's development and execution present challenges. A significant challenge is putting the unified national curriculum into full effect throughout Pakistan. It is no less than a milestone to implement a Single National Curriculum in all of the nation's schools, which have a range of infrastructures, mediums, languages, nationalities, and social backgrounds. The issues with SNC's implementation stage will be the main subject of this study. This study will outline some practical answers to the issues that various schools have encountered when implementing a Single National Curriculum.

Research Questions

- How does the availability of infrastructure in schools influence the implementation of the Single National Curriculum in Primary Schools?
- How does teacher training help improve the implementation process of the Single National Curriculum in primary schools?
- What challenges emerge during the implementation process of the Single National Curriculum?

Research Methodology

To collect information from participants on their knowledge, beliefs, and experiences, this study used a qualitative research approach. The "interpretive paradigm" of qualitative research places a strong emphasis on the meanings and experiences of the study participants. The relevance people attribute to their experiences, settings, and surroundings is explained through qualitative study (Merriam, 2009). The most effective method for learning how different people examines a phenomenon or problem is a qualitative research strategy. This qualitative study focused on the phenomenon of human experience while examining teachers' perspectives on SNC in primary schools. A small,

carefully chosen group of participants who may offer a "rich account" of the event are typically involved in qualitative research, according to studies (Creswell, 2002).

Participants

To find out how the phenomenon (the perceptions on challenges of SNC in primary school classrooms) was observed and understood among a knowledgeable group of educators who were available and willing to share their experiences reflectively, primary school-level teachers were chosen using purposive sampling. Identifying and choosing examples with a richness of information and making the most of the constrained capacity available are two goals of the commonly used method of "purposive sampling" employed in qualitative research (Patton, 1990). A smaller sample size wouldn't allow for a complete analysis of the phenomenon being studied; hence the sample size of 16 people is consistent with qualitative sampling (Creswell, 2012). The names of the participants' schools and school districts were withheld from the findings to preserve their privacy. A letter was given to each participant as a means of identification.

Data Collection

Instead of using questionnaires or polls to get data, semi-structured interviews were used to gather qualitative information to study the breadth and depth of the phenomena of challenges to Single National Curriculum practices. To ensure that the same information was acquired from each participant, the researchers developed an interview guide using open-ended questions before speaking with the participants. The interview procedure made interviewing a range of participants more systematic and accessible by specifying the topic to be covered in advance (Patton, 1990).

The open-ended questions were written so that respondents could react in any way they wanted and express their thoughts and points of view in their own words. The interview revealed information about how different Single National Curriculum approaches were seen by the teachers in terms of how they affected professional development, teaching methods, and execution. To check that the questions were correctly posed, the researchers audiotaped the interview using a recording device with the participant's permission or took field notes. Every interview lasted between 42 and 63 minutes and was conducted in private. Follow-up questions were utilized to shed more light on the responses given. The confidentiality of all interviews, notes, and written materials was guaranteed to the participants by the researcher.

Analysis of Interviews

The data was transcribed then it was categorized and looked through. The informational material underwent a content examination. According to Cohen et al. (2007), the definition of information evaluation includes "coding, categorizing" (creating meaningful categories into which the units of analysis - utterances, expressions, paragraphs, etc. - can be positioned), "trying to compare" (subgroups and creating a culture among both of them), and "summarizing" - trying to synthesize the theories developed from the text (p. 476). To gain a comprehensive understanding of each aspect of the study, themes, and subthemes for each area were developed individually. The results of the study given below provide information about the themes of both domains.

Results of the Study

Infrastructure in Schools

The majority of the participants expressed that this theme was the area that required concentration and resources from the government. Availability and maintenance of infrastructure especially in public schools remained a matter of concern over the years with persistent challenges. As far sufficiency of buildings in primary schools is concerned, a moderate number of participants declared that schools at the primary level especially in the public sector lacked buildings to implement the Single National Curriculum. Participants B, C, E, F, G, I, J, and K stated that most of the primary schools in Punjab had the required number of buildings for the implementation of the Single National Curriculum. According to all of them, private schools needed to focus on their buildings for the implementation of a Single National Curriculum as they had insufficient and congested buildings in which the Single National Curriculum could not be implemented in its true letter and spirit. Participants A, D, H, L, M, N and O were of the view that there were many single or two-room schools where implementation could be a big challenge for school staff and administration.

For the implementation of the Single National Curriculum, primary schools of both the public and private sector were required to be equipped with the latest classroom equipment like multimedia, etc. Participants A, B, D, F, H and O affirmed that primary schools of the public and private sectors were introduced to the concept of equipped classrooms on a smaller scale till the time of implementation of the Single National Curriculum. The government did not pay much attention to this matter because this could have caused the government to provide additional financial resources which the government was not ready to allocate because of the economic condition of the country.

The remaining participants C, E, G, I, J, K, L, M and N were of the view that primary schools of both sectors lacked the latest equipment required for the implementation of the Single National Curriculum.

Only five participants A, D, E, G and L asserted that teachers of the public and private sectors were using educational technology to better cater to the requirements of the Single National Curriculum. All other participants revealed that it was required that schools and teachers of both sectors could easily access educational technology to inculcate their teaching responsibility with grace and ease. Moreover, the availability of educational technology in primary schools could have improved the involvement of students in learning resulting in better educational transformation. Some primary sections of the private sector took educational technology seriously and equipped their schools with the latest educational technology for the implementation of the Single National Curriculum. They also convinced their teachers to upgrade their teaching abilities through the use of technology with the help of educational apps and other education-related software developed by their private publishers.

According to data provided by a majority of participants, Activity Based Learning (ABL) and Play Based Learning (PBL) facilities were lacking in both public and private sectors. Only a few schools were following Activity Based Learning (ABL) and Play Based Learning (PBL) to engage their students in the learning process while most of the other schools were relying on traditional teaching methods.

Teachers' Training

An overwhelming majority of participants in this study asserted that no education system could succeed without qualified and professional teachers. Like any other education system, the Single National Curriculum also required school teachers to be well-aware and professionally trained to cater to the requirements of the newly inculcated curriculum. Participants B, C, D, F, H, K and L declared that teachers in our public sector education system were recruited with high academic standards during past years. High academic standards meant newly recruited teachers were good at the language ability required for the Single National Curriculum. On the other hand, teachers recruited earlier in the education department had low academic qualifications and owing to this low language ability. Moreover, teachers of the private education sector especially at the junior wing needed more academic and professional training.

An education system around the world requires professional teachers to impart quality education to learners. Our education system also had professional teachers who obtained the required abilities to deliver educational goals effectively. Several participants exclaimed that our educational system had numerous professionally sound teachers.

Participants A, C, D, E, G, I, K, L and M expressed that our teachers had academic and professional requirements to teach Single National Curriculum effectively. The majority of teachers had already acquired professional qualifications as a part of their recruitment process. Teachers were said by the education department to acquire essential professional education and teaching skills by completing degrees offered by different institutions across the country. Contrary to that, participants B, F, H, J, N and O stated that our teachers were required to equip themselves with the latest educational methodologies so that we might have competent teachers around the world.

As a normal practice for the launch of any project, the government plans to develop training modules also for the smooth implementation and management of the project. As for the case of the Single National Curriculum was concerned, the Government of Pakistan decided to provide SNC Training to teachers of both public and private sectors. Participants A, B, D, G, H and I asserted that public sector teachers were made bound to attend online training sessions named SNC Training. While the private sector teachers were asked to attend SNC Training sessions voluntarily. Despite some problems in delivering training related to the Single National Curriculum, almost all the teachers of the public sector and a small number of teachers from the private sector attended this training. Other participants of the study were of the view that being online, SNC Training proved to be ineffective. First of all, this training session served to be passive as there was no interaction between the trainers and the trainees. This caused the effectiveness of the training to be minimized and ineffective. Secondly, a post-training test session was also conducted online which was not taken very seriously by the attendants and was attempted with online help from others. Thirdly, only public sector teachers were made bound to attend online training sessions by order while private sector teachers participated as per their own will which caused SNC Training to be less effective in catering needs of participants.

Emphasis on Islamic Education

Pakistan came into existence with the Islamic ideology that Muslims of the subcontinent had a unique identity of their own based on the cultural, religious, social and daily life affairs of the nation. As Islam was considered a primary building block of the foundations of our nation, Islam and Islamic teachings had great weightage in the compilation of national curriculums of the nation. As for the Single National Curriculum is concerned, a great emphasis was given to Islamic education and several reforms were introduced in this regard. An overwhelming majority of the participants i.e. A, C, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N and O asserted that many improvements were made to introduce improved textbooks with an inclusion of Islam-focused lessons and life achievements of Muslim heroes. This was aimed at introducing our generations to the beautiful Muslim legacy by inculcating them with the mannerisms, humor, kindness, generosity, modesty and valor of their Muslim heroes.

The teaching of the Quran and its translation remained a top priority of the people of Pakistan as it was believed that the people of Pakistan that Quran and Islam are a complete code of life provided undoubtedly a sense of mannerism and humanism. Almost all the participants remarked that the inclusion of the Nazra Quran and its translation were direly needed and desired concepts of this nation which were introduced in the form of the Single National Curriculum. Participants A, B, C, D, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N and O revealed that focusing on the teaching of the Nazra Quran and its translation to our students would not only help them build their characters but also make them a strong peaceful nation of the world. According to many of the participants, the teaching of a complete translation of the Quran to the students of matric level would prove to be a revolutionary step in our education system. It should have been introduced much earlier.

Several participants believed and expressed that the Single National Curriculum (SNC) of Pakistan aimed to provide a unified and standardized education system for all students across the country, and it included teachings from the Quran and Sunnah as part of the curriculum. From first grade to the 12th grade, studying the Quran was required as part of the Single National Curriculum. The fundamental tenets of Islam, such as prophethood, the Day of Judgment, and Tawheed (the Oneness of God), were taught throughout the curriculum. The goal of teaching the pupils Arabic language and grammar was to prepare them to read and comprehend the Quran. The study of Hadith, or the sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H., was also a part of the Single National Curriculum. The nomenclature, categorization, and methodology of Hadith were among the fundamentals of Hadith sciences that were addressed in the curriculum.

Participants B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, K, M, N, and O revealed that the study of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) biography or seerah, was required in every grade level from the first to the twelve under the Single National Curriculum. The life story, teachings, and relationships with many communities of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) would be imparted to the students. In addition, the Single National Curriculum placed a strong emphasis on teaching Islamic values and ethics, such as patience, reconciliation, equality, truthfulness, and empathy. Through a Single National Curriculum, the students would be encouraged to cultivate these values in their everyday lives. In order to prepare students for the difficulties of the twenty-first century, the Single National Curriculum was designed to offer a complete education that could integrate Islamic teachings with contemporary topics like science, mathematics, and social studies.

Findings of the Study

The overwhelming majority of the respondents concurred with most subject matter experts and educational professionals when they stated that the new Single National Curriculum may enhance social cohesion and national integration among the regions, based on the findings of the aforementioned observations. Several survey participants reflected that the Single National Curriculum offered an equal opportunity for social mobility. In the same vein, a large portion of the participants reflected that under the new Single National Curriculum, every child will have an equal opportunity to acquire a top-notch education. Many participants indicated that the new Single National Curriculum promoted the elimination of discrepancies in educational material between the various channels. Similarly, the other participants realized that the Single National Curriculum supported minorities' efforts to preserve their economic, cultural and religious traditions. According to pedagogical experts, the Single National Curriculum also fostered sociological and cultural solidarity among the nation's regions. According to a resounding majority of the participants, the new Single National Curriculum actively fostered cohesion by imparting knowledge of Pakistani culture.

Pakistan was founded on the Islamic belief that Muslims in the subcontinent had a distinct identity based on national concerns and cultural, religious, and social practices. Islam and Islamic teachings were given a lot of consideration when putting together the national curricula of the country since they were seen as the fundamental pillars of our nation. Teaching our future generations, the mannerisms, humor, kindness, generosity, humility, and courage of their Muslim heroes, was intended to introduce them to the magnificent Muslim legacy. People in Pakistan continued to place a high premium on the teaching of the Quran and its translation because they thought that Islam and the Quran, which are both codes of life, surely gave a feeling of mannerism and humanism. Several participants shared their belief that the Single National Curriculum (SNC) of Pakistan contained lessons from the Quran and Sunnah as part of the curriculum and sought to offer a uniform and consistent education system for all students throughout the nation. From grades one through twelve, the study of the Quran was a required topic under the Single National Curriculum. The academic curriculum covered some of the core beliefs of Islam, including the omniscience of God, the Prophethood, and the Day of Resurrection.

Preparing them to read and understand the Quran was the aim of the Arabic language and grammar training. Learners could explore Hadith, or the prophetic words and acts of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, from sixth to twelfth grade. The course curriculum included Hadith designation, categorization, and methodology. The Single National Curriculum placed special emphasis on promoting Islamic principles and characteristics

like acceptance, reconciliation, generosity, integrity, and righteousness. Learners are going to be motivated to live by these ideas through the Single National Curriculum. To prepare students for the difficulties of the twenty-first century, the Single National Curriculum was designed to offer a complete education that could blend Islamic teachings with contemporary topics like physics, mathematics, and social sciences.

Conclusion

In light of the country's multilingual domains, various policies, cultures, and the overarching objective of the English language, the Single National Curriculum was to implant in students national, moral, artistic, sociological and global principles. The curriculum strongly emphasizes lifelong learning and the continual formation of students into global citizens equipped to fulfill their crucial role in promoting accessibility and peace in the globe. The single National Curriculum focused on increasing the threshold for literacy and competence through a thorough approach to teaching English. To strengthen their grasp of language instruction, critical thinking and autonomy to gain lasting attitudinal change among learners, SNC teachers, especially English instructors, need substantial training. The Single National Curriculum aimed to use widely available software programs and educational technology to enhance prospective students' written and spoken communication abilities. As a last point, it is important to note that SNC was embraced as a new curricular modification in practically all sectors of Pakistani education (public and private).

The majority of the research participants and other education experts agreed that the Single National Curriculum has the potential to break through the nation's educational barriers. The effectiveness of using the same medium of instruction for all social groups has increased, and Pakistan's educational systems have taken the Single National Curriculum extremely seriously because they believe it has great potential to improve not only our educational system but also our society. The Single National Curriculum has been fully implemented in all public sector schools. Every public school has received new, updated textbooks that were published and printed under the direction of the Punjab Textbook Board based on Single National Curriculum benchmarks and SLOs. Public schools are attempting to teach SNC following the guidelines established by Punjab's education department, but many changes and improvements are still required. On the other hand, several private schools have adopted curricula that are based on SLOs and benchmarks taught through the Single National Curriculum. The majority of private school systems employ curricula created and printed by independent publishers. However, some private schools are not adhering to the directives issued by the relevant agencies for SNC

implementation. To ensure that the Single National Curriculum is carried out in letter and spirit, strict action should be taken against such schools.

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