Perceptions on the Single National Curriculum for English as a Second Language for Primary Grades

Dr. Maroof Bin Rauf
Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Karachi
maro_of@yahoo.com

Dr. Alia Ayub
Associate professor, Education department, SBKWU, Quetta
aliaaslam2288@gmail.com

Bushra Batool
Lecturer, Institute of Education & Research, University of Balochistan, Quetta
batoolbushra@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study's purpose is to interpret the SNC's goal of teaching English as a second language in primary grades across the country. The study is qualitative and uses content analysis to explore SNC's creative aspects. The curriculum clearly aims to improve students' communication skills in English as a second language and make them confident speakers. Along with this, curriculum intent to instill ethical, social, and universal values in Pakistani students through themes and subthemes such as harmony and community solidarity, ideology, religious pluralism, compassion, justice, and dispute resolution to achieve sustainable development goal - SDG 4. SNC is also compared with the Cambridge Curriculum of English as a second language and is found aligned in terms of curriculum approach and skill development however; this paper proposes the professional development of the teachers in the form of pre service and post service workshops for language development and teaching pedagogies of the teachers. This paper also identified the need of print and digital teaching resources to address the need of the teachers and learners. The SNC's vision can only be accomplished if the suggested assessment technique is used, hence revamping the examination system should be prioritized.

Introduction

Pakistan is a country that is multilingual, intercultural, and pluralistic. Following in the footsteps of British Colonialism in the Indo-Pak subcontinent, the Pakistani government established schools with various mediums of instruction, such as English medium schools (EMS), Urdu medium schools (UMS), and Vernacular medium schools (VMS), resulting in an unreasonable and unequal classification in the country (Irfan, The postgraduate students and the university teachers' perceptions of the gap between policy and practice of English medium of instruction (EMI)atHigher Education in Pakistan, 2017) (Irfan, The policy and practice of English medium of instruction (EMI), 2018). The present government of Pakistan has chosen to implement the Single National Curriculum (SNC) in Pakistani schools in order to alleviate social injustice and economic disparities. The United Nations (UN) published a vision of the world in 2030 in 2015, proposing 17 targets to change the world. Sustainable development goals (SDGs) are a set of goals with a timeline for the world's sustainable development by 2030. They cover a wide range of topics. Providing quality education is the focus of the fourth objective, also known as SDG 4. SDG 4's main goals are to increase the number of people with relevant skills, eradicate all discrimination, achieve universal literacy and numeracy, and grow global citizenships under the umbrella of providing a quality education, free primary and secondary education, equal access to pre-primary and accessible technical, vocational, and higher education to increase the number of people with relevant skills, eliminate all discrimination, achieve universal literacy and numeracy, and develop global citizenships. Pakistan aims to achieve the targets of SDG 4 by Single National Curriculum (SNG) with the vision of one system of education for all.

A carefully planned curriculum is important for providing high-quality teaching and learning opportunities. The content, goals, and structure of learning are commonly referred to as the school curriculum (Walker 2003). Inside cultures, the curriculum thus reflects both a legacy from the past as well as hopes and anxieties about the future (Williamson 2013, p. 2). The classic concern about the curriculum is that what should students learn and what should teachers teach, and why (Tyler 1949). A curriculum reflects educational policies of a country, plans, goals, and priorities of an educational system (Hoang, et al., 2020). It is a text, strategy, or blueprint for an instructional guide that is used for teaching and learning and to achieve a specific goal (Carless, 1997). Since there are so many differences between theory and reality, experts alone are insufficient to design a curriculum (Haider, 2016). Involving practitioners in the curriculum planning process aids in making the best choices. In many countries around the world, one of the most pressing concerns is how to prepare children and young people for potential social challenges, as well as the role of education in providing the necessary skills and competencies (Anastasiades, Vitalaki, & Gertzakis, 2008). Social transformations happen quickly, but educational processes, such as curriculum creation, take a long time. This tension in timescale for transition is a major challenge because society already has a need for new skills and competencies, while the students joining the school system now will be leaving in 10–15 years

and entering the job market. So, how do we develop learning that is tailored to the needs of twenty-first-century societies?

SNC for Pakistan was formulated under the supervision of ministry of federal education and professional training on September 25, 2015 (UN 2015B) to provide fair and equitable opportunities for all children to receive a high-quality education. Experts from the public and private sectors, madrassahs, all federations, and Cambridge University UK, LUMS, and AKU IED were also consulted for the project. Multiple Comparative studies were performed prior to the start of SNC development in order to match SNC with international standards. These include comparisons of Pakistani and Singaporean curricula, as well as the Cambridge Curriculum. Learner levels in Pakistan are compared to those in Singapore, Malaysia/Indonesia, and the United Kingdom. The SNC incorporated all of the results.

Curriculum development is an ongoing process that is revised and redesigned in light of the outcomes of formative assessments (Howard, 2007). Curriculum emphasizes understanding, abilities, and a positive mindset for a child's holistic growth. Skills needed to survive and advance in the twenty-first century must be developed in stages. These abilities are formally established in educational institutions all over the world. A curriculum is developed by curriculum specialists who can envision potential needs and demands to help learners improve these skills (Erstad & Voogt, 2018). SNG's vision is for all students to have access to a single educational system that includes a shared curriculum, medium of instruction, and evaluation framework. The SNG's goals include giving all students a fair opportunity and a high-quality education so that they can succeed in their professional lives after they graduate. The aim of SNG is to achieve social harmony and holistic learning for students. Multiple examination boards, each with their own curriculum, are currently operating in Pakistan. Various federal and regional boards, as well as the Aga Khan University Examination Board and the Cambridge Assessment International Education Board, are among them.

CAT International Curriculum: Cambridge Assessment International Education, a unit of the University of Cambridge, claims to prepare students for life by fostering educated curiosity, enthusiasm, inquiry and a lifelong love of learning. The Cambridge curriculum has a major impact on students' learning outcomes (Hasanah, 2019). Every year, nearly a million Cambridge students from 10,000 schools in 160 countries prepare for their future with an international education from Cambridge International (UCLES September 2020).

Cambridge Primary ESL Curriculum Framework : Cambridge Primary English claims to empowers students in their use of the English language and fosters a lifelong love of reading, writing, and speaking. It improves English communication skills that students can use in daily circumstances and in school. It also provides learners with transferable language skills for analyzing, creating, and collaborating on spoken and written texts. Learners' overall academic, artistic, and social growth is aided by the reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills gained through Cambridge Primary English (UCLES September 2020).

National Curriculum

Since a curriculum is widely regarded as a "foundation of the entire education system," many countries strive to keep their curricula current and relevant on a regular basis (Stanley & McCoshen, 2012). According to Simon Field et al. (2007), educational system should focus on three important domains i.e. design of the educational system, implementation of the curriculum and resourcing and funding. As a result, the design of a nation 's educational system is crucial in both resolving educational inequities and portraying the country's existing picture of educational equity issues. Curriculum governance levels currently differ by region, with power held by either the central government or a local government authority (NIER, 1999). Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that a country's curriculum policies reflect its inherent cultural, economic, political, and social characteristics. For example, in 2008, Slovakia implemented reforms that decentralised the country's curriculum design to the school level, resulting in around 50–60% of the curriculum now being managed locally. As a result, the programme can be customised to suit local demands and needs, as well as allow the best use of local resources, even though it must also meet certain national criteria (Stanley and McCoshen 2012). There is a national standard curriculum in India up to high school, which is currently being revised to provide more local complexity (Gohain 2020). In 1992, the Republic of Korea's core curriculum was revised for the sixth time, giving regional and school levels more versatility (UNESCO-IBE 2011). Certain countries, such as France, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Vietnam, China, Japan, Thailand and Lao PDR, have recorded strong centralized curriculum creation processes while allowing teachers, colleges, and local authorities varying degrees of curriculum implementation autonomy (NIER, 1999). Teachers in Australia And New Zealand will create their own content within a curriculum structure that has been created centrally (NIER, 1999).

Single National Curriculum for English as a second language

According to the 2018 National Educational Policy Framework (MoFEPT), Pakistan will have a multilingual policy, with English as a second language being taught. With this in mind, the National Curriculum for English Language 2006 was revised in stages to bring it up to date with evolving demands from both local and global requirements. The first review took place in Islamabad the capital city of Pakistan in 2017 with the aim of modernizing the curriculum in the capital city's schools. A subsequent review was undertaken in 2019 in accordance with the current government's vision for the creation of SNC for all educational streams in the country.

Following these rigorous rounds of analysis, two main areas for change were identified: pedagogical methods and evaluation procedures. Need of teachers to be equipped with the necessary skills to fully use textbooks and other tools when focusing on improving students' language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing are highlighted. According to the analysis done from the previous curriculum it was noticed that the previous assessment procedures did not place a strong emphasis on the earlier in this thread integrated skills; as a result, the curriculum's impact on the quality were revisited to close this gap. Certain values were highlighted in the curriculum under the themes and sub-themes in accordance with the SDG 4.

Under the diverse social contexts of diverse parts of Pakistan, the curriculum emphasizes the planning of creative and student-centered events to inculcate community engagement, sustainable growth, gender equality, respect for cultural, languages, and beliefs, combating extremism, avoiding social evils, and perpetuating sports and adventure in the learners.

Problem Statement

The aim of the Single National Curriculum for English Grades I-V is to help students build and improve five skills. Oral communication skills, reading and critical thinking skills, formal and lexical language expectations, writing skills, and appropriate ethical and social growth are all included. The intention of this study is to look at the level of competencies acquired by the SNG after using the English Grade I-V curriculum and compare it to the CAIE's English Grade I-V curriculum. SNG claims to provide high-quality education to all Pakistani students; however, this study will look at whether students who are taught using the CAIE curriculum will have a higher or lower compass. This research compares the SNG English as a Second Language programme with the Cambridge Assessment International Education curriculum for English as a Second Language in the Primary Grades. This contrast will help us to see how far the two curricula overlap and where they differ. This study will also provide requirements for determining the required level of teacher competency for teaching the curriculum. This study will also concentrate on areas that will help students become more confident English as a second language speakers.

Research questions

1. What are the SNC of Pakistan's primary English curriculum objectives?

2. What is the result of the comparative analysis of the primary English curriculum?

3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Pakistan's SNG English primary?

Research Methodology

This was a qualitative research. Primary method of data collection and interpretation was document analysis. A systematic technique for analyzing or assessing records, both printed and electronic content, is known as document analysis (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis, like all qualitative research approaches, necessitates the examination and interpretation of data in order to extract meaning, attain enlightenment, and build scientific expertise. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). On the basis of goals, competencies, pedagogies, and assessment, a document review was conducted to equate the Cambridge Assessment International Examination of English as a second language for primary level with the SNC of English for primary level. A thorough analysis of both documents was conducted, followed by the development of a vital structure for each curriculum separately. These critical mechanisms were used to compare curriculums and develop an empirical perspective on the SNC.

Discussion and Conclusion

Different curriculums have been established in light of existing educational policies since Pakistan's founding. The new curriculum, which is already in use in the country's two provinces, was created with the aim of giving all students in the same age group equal learning opportunities. It discusses material that is identical, as well as the same medium of instruction and evaluation framework. Pakistan's educational system is complex, with public schools, private schools claiming to have an international standard of education, bungalow private schools with minimal funding, private schools combining religious and secular education under one roof, and madrassahs. This diversity is not in terms of school culture, funding, or medium of instructions, but rather in terms of the curriculum they follow, the ideology they adhere to, and the teaching faculty's level of competence. Along with all of this, various schools use different assessment boards, resulting in a final product that is often somewhat different in terms of students with different competency level and graduates with completely different thinking and approach of life.

The SNC for primary school English suggests that English be taught as a language rather than a subject. The emphasis of teaching all four basic skills, reading, writing, listening, and speaking, is depicted in this document. It places a greater emphasis on communicative skills like listening and speaking. Along with teaching formal and phonological elements of language, the curriculum seeks to improve critical thinking skills too. The curriculum also seeks to assist students in establishing relevant ethical, social, and moral obligations by using various themes associated with the SDG 4. Teachers must incorporate, clarify, and reinforce through practical activities in order to meet the SLOs for specific levels of skills. SNC also gives teachers specific instructions about how to use collaborative pedagogical techniques to perform engaging lessons. It also includes instructions for assessing all four skills. For the first time, listening speaking assessments are now included in the curriculum, which were not included in the 2006 national curriculum framework. Via some insightful themes, themes focused on community, embracing diversity, equality, and other aspects to improve social, moral, economic, and science growth are added in.

The document's vision emphasizes that English language is an important skill that is a prerequisite for individual development, international communication and making better career choice. (p.8). National Education Policy Framework (2018) intends to implement multilingual policy with an intensive focus on English as a second language (ESL). Intent of SNC English for primary level is found to develop the language skills of the learners to learn English as a second language. Listening and speaking skills are given due importance by adding the rubrics for assessing these skills. Assumption of the curriculum is to develop confident speakers of international language by improving their communication skills.

Progression matrix is a well-developed tool for charting out a strategic plan for pupils' advancement in the document. It is created on clear, agreed values, goals, and principles that place learners at the centre of the curriculum and acknowledge their position as global citizens.

Every student can benefit from fascinating chances for their intellectual, physical, emotional, social, scientific, aesthetic, and creative development.

Teachers are the major stakeholder of the curriculum as they facilitate students to achieve the learning outcome by aligning their objectives with the school curriculum. To achieve these objectives correct teaching pedagogy and instructional designs are needed. SNC English Primary level claims that most of the English teachers in Pakistan lacks language proficiency majorly in oral communication. It is recommended to provide synthetic phonics training. To facilitate students learning pre service and in-service workshops are suggested so they can be trained to be critical thinkers who are self-directed, reflective, and analytical, and who are willing to modify and enhance existing material for the skilled based teaching.

Document also provides guidelines for the textbook developers and for writing teachers' guide. 5 stage process of developing both the documents are i. Planning ii. Material writing iii. Editing iv. Reviewing v. Pilot-Testing and Revision Planning. A detailed checklist is also designed for textbook writers, teachers and reviewers.

The curriculum's underlying rationale is to develop tolerance, increase awareness about the environment and willingness to make sustainable life choices. (p.8) The document also pinpoints that aims of English curriculum are "Education for Sustainable Development" (ESD) and "Global Citizen Education" (GCE) (p.3). However, there is scarcely any description about the historical status of English in Pakistan, English as an international language (EIL), English as a global language (EGL) and English as a lingua franca (EFL).

The SNC asserts that it has adopted a holistic approach and is multidimensional, incorporating phonology, grammar, lexis, discourse, language functions, and skills in order to produce high literacy and competency in the English language. It did not, however, include a section on the consistent usage of "Standard Englishes" such as Standard American English and Standard British English, particularly in terms of pronunciation and spelling. This phenomenon causes learners to make mistakes and become perplexed.

Without some well-known English authors and literature, the English language would be incomplete. Incorporating some classic age-appropriate literature fosters language ownership and aids vocabulary development. In the SNC, literature has gone vanished.

In a nutshell, the document is a work of art. Visible challenges are in its implementation phase. With completely decentralized curriculum and assessment bringing everyone on same page for the centralized curriculum and assessment will take perseverance and little longer time. Unfortunately, the pandemic has already robbed the opportunity to start implementation in the other provinces.
Teacher's professional development is a major task to do. Teaching SNC required the similar standard of the teaching faculty across the board. Although the SNC is providing the brief details about the pedagogies but these are not enough. Thorough professional development is

needed as the curriculum also talk about transforming teaching pedagogies and the methodological approach of the curriculum is heading towards the student-centered classrooms. One of the major goals of SNC is same assessment system for all. This can only be achieved by changing the perspective of the assessment. Curriculum designed followed in SNC encouraged changes in our examination system. Examination boards working under federal and provincial government need to raise their benchmark to compete with the Cambridge Board Assessments. Both of these principles aim to enable learners of all ages to become active participants in creating a world that is fair, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, and sustainable. Certain values were highlighted in the curriculum under the themes and sub-themes for different classes in accordance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4.71, including global citizenship, sustainable development, gender equality, diversity of cultures, languages, and religions, countering terrorism, and avoiding social evils (plagiarism, falsification, aggression, and dissent).

Conclusion

After in depth study, Single National Curriculum for teaching English as a second language is found student centered, competency based to promote active learning. Themes and Sub themes decided are aligned with the SDG Goal 4.7 Education for Sustainable Development. SNC fosters knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required by citizens to lead productive lives, make informed decisions and assume active roles locally and globally in facing and resolving global challenges. This curriculum will make learners independent learners and prepare them for the life. It will develop higher order thinking and make them critical thinkers. Innovative teaching pedagogy will make learning experiences meaningful for learners. By making a conscious effort in teachers training vision of the SNC can be achieved.

Recommendation

➢ Professional Development for teachers are must to conduct as pre service and in-service, focusing on enhancing their language skills and teaching pedagogy for language teaching.
➢ Development of teachers' teaching guide with suggested teaching pedagogies and language concepts is suggested to be used by the teachers as a referring document all the time.
➢ Digital resources for students and teachers are suggested to be developed for listening and speaking skills.
➢ It is also suggested to add in the document for the standard of English that will be used that is American or British English to avoid confusion in spellings and pronunciation.
➢ Contribution from the teachers is suggested to be taken in the phase of evaluation. That can be incorporated as a feedback.

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