

Single National Curriculum

Critical Analysis & Policy Recommendations

Amjad Nazeer

Asad Khan



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Preamble

That Pakistan's public system of education is in need of a major repair is hardly disputed. It has been in a state of continuous decline for decades in spite of many policy actions and reform agendas. In fact, it is in the state of a serious crisis, and the poor education the students get poses a grave threat to the future of the nation. Both official and private surveys show year after year how those children who are fortunate enough to be in schools lack adequate skills of literacy and numeracy.

Many hopes were pinned with the new government taking charge in 2018, especially with the promises made in the National Education Policy Framework, 2018. The Framework promised the policy thrust in four priority areas: (a) putting out-of-school children in school; (b) enhancing quality of education; (c) removing educational apartheid by bridging gap between the prevalent class-based education systems; and (d) placing emphasis on technical and vocational education. Over three

years and a half have passed without any progress in any of the four priority areas. Instead, in bringing uniform system of education, the government moved in a different and an apparently fruitless and retrogressive direction by producing a Single National Curriculum (SNC), a move that generated an unprecedented amount of debate in the country. The enormity of comments reflects the fact that SNC was affecting almost all the sectors of education – public, private, low-fee, elite, madrassas, etc. The debate is still continuing because what has come forth is only a small part of the new curriculum, and much more is yet to come. Barring a few voices of support, most of the commentaries have been deeply critical of SNC on various grounds, which are laid out in detail in this book by IDRAC.

SNC is, in fact, a derogation of the promise of the Framework to remove apartheid in the provision of education, replacing it with a uniform education system, meaning thereby raising the standard of learning and educational facilities to the same level as in the best schools. But this would have involved huge investment in public education. It is a fact

that Pakistan's public education is a severely starved sector, being allocated a mere 2 percent or less of the Gross Domestic Product. The promised uniform education system would have required at least two to three times as many resources. Since that was not possible, and since something cheap needed to be done, the result therefore is the SNC. And what has come out as SNC is in essence *madrassization* of schools. No school curriculum in Pakistan's 75-year history had as much religious content as SNC. Some of its architects may take pride in this achievement, but they have no idea how much harm their product is going to inflict on the future of the nation.

To balance the heavy incursion of Islamiat in nearly all the subjects, the architects of SNC take pride in introducing religious studies curricula for minority religions in the country for the first time. It seems that the minority faith students and their parents are happy over this development. It would save them the contrived alternative course on ethics, which, anyway, appeared modeled on Islamic ethical principles. Nevertheless, the actual teaching of this course is likely to face several logistical

problems. Yet, the National Curriculum Council (NCC) feels very proud in adding these courses in school syllabus, not realizing that enhancing religious studies in schools makes it more difficult to avoid communal and sectarian divisiveness. Besides, it becomes difficult to promote critical thinking in students also.

In discussing serious pedagogical issues with the curriculum (at least the part announced and implemented so far) and the textbooks published officially, this book not only includes opinions expressed by commentators in various publications but also responses of government officials too. Since the avowed hallmark of the new scheme is its uniform application to the three schooling systems – public, elite private and Islamic seminaries (madrassas) – the book, as a first, examines this particular aspect carefully and without any bias through a survey of schools, teachers and parents. Where needed, the book highlights the issues with historical background as well, including a chapter on ‘the state of education’ in the country.

Since the implementation of SNC on the elite English medium private schools would have lowered the learning standards in them, it was very strongly resisted by them. As a result, the Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training relented, and insisted that “SNC should be taken as the floor, not as the ceiling”, meaning that it defines ‘the minimum’ that all the private schools must accept, but they can be free to prepare their students for any higher standard foreign curricula and examinations. In saying so the Ministry failed to realize how much this statement militated against their very own promise of removing educational apartheid.

The central merit of the book is the survey it has conducted on the various aspects of SNC debated in the electronic media, newspapers and in social media. The weakness of the survey is the lopsidedness of the sample: overwhelming coverage of Punjab, very little of Baluchistan, nearly zero in Sindh, and total absence of opinions from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. As a result, many would perhaps look skeptically at the conclusions drawn from the survey. Yet it was important to gain a sense of

perceptions among concerned citizens, officials, teachers and students about the development.

The second year of SNC will see formulation of curricula for the middle school, which has its own significance because of the added disciplines of history and geography. In the times before 2006, geography had ceased to be a separate subject; its topics were taught rather cursorily as a part of other subjects. Secondly, history was taught as a heavily nationalistic subject, devoid of objectivity, full of historical distortions and hate material. An appraisal of the history curriculum in SNC was therefore an important need, and this book undertakes that task too.

Among the grave concerns regarding curriculum and learning material is the increasing role of religious leaders in the determination of what the students can and cannot learn in schools. Their initial role to only check if anything prejudicial to the fundamental religious sensitivities gets inadvertently included in the texts seems to have now been extended to checking the entire content for acceptability to the Ulema. This is a very

dangerous trend, and needs to be reversed. The nation is already witnessing an unprecedented surge in religious militancy threatening its social fabric. Examples galore. The current government seems to be too beholden to the clergy, so it is not likely to reverse this trend. One can only hope that sense will eventually prevail, and this lawlessness will end.

A. H. Nayyar

February 28, 2022

Foreword

Analyzing a policy, while it is in the making, can be tedious as well as gratifying. Tedious, because in the evolving process the analysts have to brave the risk of making mistakes while making the observations. Nonetheless, the risk is worth taking because otherwise the analysts will miss an opportunity of participating in the policy making process, moreover, the policy and system will not have the advantage of hearing important ideas. It is individually gratifying because one is satisfied for having voiced out what was necessary to be said.

Amjad Nazeer and his team at IDRAC have taken this risk in order to make a crucial contribution in this compilation and analysis. They emerge successful in this dreary work of critiquing the progress on the Single National Curriculum (SNC) at the first phase of its implementation while the second phase curriculum (Class 6-8) is being rolled out in 2022. Therefore, this research is time appropriate.

The data collected from the field, and presented here involved the users or beneficiaries and implementers of SNC. Therefore, it should be treated as early warning of the effects or out-put of the policy. This part is unique itself. However, while reading the manuscript, my attention was focused on the narrative that records the policy developments. I admire the job meticulously carried out by the authors, even though some of the events and culmination presented in the narrative will change and should change, as a result of the on-going advocacy.

While several aspects of the SNC and the process are doomed to remain shrouded in mystery because of the level of transparency observed, bureaucratic hurdles and political considerations that influence the actual shape of SNC. Some of the results of this exercise are attributable to wheeling and dealing of actors sitting in the power circles who influence the policy more than what appeared in the press handouts, public statements or policy drafts.

The incidents narrated in part 8.2, 8.3 and 9.1 of this study rightly sketch the wheeling and dealing which have become the key deterrent of the policy making exercise, unfortunately. The actors and factors in this business of education policy, particularly the religious lobbies and section of media, have held the process hostage, without a sigh uttered by the so-called elected government or the opposition for that matter.

Therefore, this work informs the readers about some necessary but less discussed aspects of SNC which are extremely important otherwise. I am confident that the effort invested in this study will help the stakeholders understand the socio-political and technical complexities in this policy making exercise better.

I hope and wish that as a result of this study and overall efforts in this direction will bring us closer to the goal of qualitative, creative and inclusive education for the children of Pakistan.

Peter Jacob

February 19, 2022

1.

Introduction

Conventionally, education is imparted through a curriculum – though it is certainly possible without the curriculum too. Curriculum is a complex whole - incorporating multiple processes of teaching and learning right from cognitive to physical, social, cultural, scientific, philosophical and technical ones – depending on the age and preferences of a society and State. It is designed to communicate knowledge, skills, attitudes, experiences and comprehensions acquired from historical narratives, traditional wisdom, books, lectures, illustrations and demonstrations along with some observation, intuition and heuristic experimentation. Academically, a whole range of methods and approaches have been accepted, adopted and adapted, criticised, modified and innovated to keep pace with the changing socio-economic circumstances, teaching-aids and

materials, and a given academic environment. World recognized academicians and educationists have been offering a range of definitions of education and curriculum – at times overlapping but not always because curriculum is just an element of education.

John Dewey, the famous educationist purports that, 'Curriculum (1902), is a continuous reconstruction, moving from the child's present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies'. Harold O. Rugg, another known educationist defines curriculum (1927) as, 'It is a succession of experiences and enterprises having a maximum lifelikeness for the learner ie giving the learner a development most helpful in meeting and controlling life situations'. Hollis Caswell in Caswell & Campbell (1935) thinks, 'The curriculum is composed of all the experiences children have under the guidance of teachers...Thus, curriculum, considered as a field of study represents no strictly limited body of content, but rather a process or procedure'. On the other hand, in J. L. McBrien & R. Brandt (1997) views, 'Curriculum refers to a written

plan outlining what students will be taught ie a course of study. Curriculum may refer to all the courses offered at a given school, or all the courses offered at a school in a particular area of study'. Nevertheless, to Indiana Department of Education, 'Curriculum means the planned interaction of pupils with instructional content, materials, resources, and processes for evaluating the attainment of educational objectives'; while Robert Gagne (1967) thinks that 'Curriculum is a sequence of content-units arranged in such a way that the learning of each unit may be accomplished as a single act, provided the capabilities described by specified prior units - in the sequence - have already been mastered by the learner'.

Depending on the subject, a whole range of teaching methodologies or approaches and classroom-environments are recommended by educationists to effectively transmit elements of curriculum ie Montessori, teacher or student-centred approach, programmed-instruction as teaching strategy, heuristic approach, brainstorming, fishbowl-discussion or problem-solving strategy, inquiry-based learning, role-play

or simulated skills training, kindred or group-teaching approach, inductive and deductive teaching methods, cooperative teaching-and-learning strategy, think-pair-share strategy, jigsaw-learning and sharing skills, cognitive or mental mapping and KWL techniques ie “what I know, what I want to know and what I have learnt” strategy and integrated skills transmission¹.

In these perspectives, the study in hand is going to evaluate the content, contours and implications of Single National Curriculum (SNC) along with implicit teaching-methodology assessment advised by the official arms of the sitting government ie Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT), National Curriculum Council (NCC) and Provincial Textbook Boards. An elaborate analyses and critique of the SNC lie ahead.

Since late 2019, the incumbent government took the centre-stage of education by storm with a mindboggling claim of introducing Single National Curriculum in all streams of education ie Public, Private and Religious Seminaries within their own term. “It will put an end to apartheid, class-based

and poor system of education and put in place a uniform curriculum and quality education through a broad-based consensus”, the government claimed. By March 2021, Curriculum Guidelines and Model Textbooks had been brought to light by National Curriculum Council (NCC) and Provincial Textbook Boards (not all, however). Obviously, it took the progressive circles and educationists of the country by surprise, transpiring that the ‘proposed curriculum’ and ‘model textbooks’ were neither rational, nor objective and progressive as claimed by the official stalwarts. In fact, they have attempted to build upon a curriculum, developed earlier in 2006 under a dictatorial regime striving for ‘enlightened moderation¹’ from 2001 to 2008. Though with fits and starts, the curriculum had gradually been adopted till 2014. Comparing with the past, the said curriculum was believed to be marginally better though not without voids and weaknesses. Much of the conservative and retrogressive stuff still perched there, implicitly or explicitly and Students Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

¹ A term made popular in Pakistan by the former military ruler General Pervez Musharraf implying to the process of replacing traditional notion of Islam with its progressive and tolerant version.

were not thoroughly adopted. Obviously, the current plan to renew the curriculum has, once again, stirred a massive debate amongst the civil society and progressive educationists.

Right with the maiden overview of SNC, a nationwide social, political and academic discussion and deliberation gushed out. Along with the hyperbole gestures of building an advanced system of education, abolishing inequality within, wider stakeholders' consultations, its SLOs, content and core competencies set forth, everything came under discussion – so widely that it, perhaps, could be unprecedented in Pakistan's history of education. Poor existing infrastructure, teachers' incapability, medium of instruction, the content and substance of sciences and social sciences, civic and modern education demands, heavy Islamic lessons in Islamiyat and social sciences subjects, every aspect was meticulously examined and argued for and against by the experts, journalists, academicians and social scientists. Implementing it with the overarching three modes of education has also been controversial since day one.

While SNC debate and controversies were yet not resolved, the then government came up with yet another controversial move of drafting New Education Policy (NEP) and complete it within the year ie 2021 – a perfect example of putting horse before the cart. Once again, the official background paper of NEP bragged of revolutionizing Pakistan’s Education System by accelerating enrolment, bringing Out of School Children (OOSC) back to schools, constructing required number of schools, imparting modern scientific, technological and vocational education at various levels and linking the whole discipline with business, enterprising, industry and trade. Right from start, it showed the signs of retreating from its commitments made orally and on paper. Pertinent to mention here it is that since 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010), education has been devolved and declared as a provincial subject (right from curriculum design to school management). Nationalists and those believing in federal democratic governance have been strongly criticising the Central Government for trespassing its jurisdiction by conceiving NEP as well as evolving SNC.

1.1. Approach and Objectives of the Research

The study attempts to understand and analyse NEP², and SNC in particular – along with extensive critical reflection on most of its aspects and implications. SNC aspires to become ‘one system of education for all’, in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction and assessment-standard so that all children have a fair and equal opportunity to receive quality education. The research in hand examines: whether all children are now going to have equal prospects for quality education? Is it going to alleviate disparities in education across multiple streams? May it offer equal chance for upward social mobility to underprivileged children as well? If and how is it going to be implemented in all systems of education? Does the content suggested and incorporated correspond to the claims propped-up by the federal government? And, most importantly what is the reaction of provincial governments in the context of 18th Constitutional Amendment?

In general, the opinion of education experts, advocates and critics, government representatives -

² So far, no significant progress has been made around NEP.

respective ministers and ministries in particular -, private schools, madrassa representatives, religious minorities and larger civil society - has also been awarded proportional space. Agreements, disagreements and difference of opinion – technical, social or religious – have been precisely enunciated parts by parts. Although ‘medium of instruction’ too has been a subsidiary debate around SNC but it has been deliberately avoided to keep the study’s scope specific and limited.

Simultaneously, it is IDRAC’s responsibility to acknowledge and thank Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) which sponsored research and printing cost of study. TFD, it is important to reiterate, is a non-religious, non-sectarian, non-government and non-partisan organization that assists civil society in Pakistan only to promote human rights, democracy, rights of religious minorities, peace and social development. Nevertheless, the content and analysis drawn is of the authors’ responsibility and TFD has got nothing to do with it.

1.2. Methodology and Sampling Size

Employing the said approach, intensive primary and secondary information has been collected. Primary information has mainly been collected from Islamabad (ICT), Rawalpindi, Layyah, Multan, Lahore, Khanewal, Dera Ghazi Khan (Punjab), and Karachi (Sindh), and Pishin and Killa Abdullah (Balochistan), but there are some exceptions too. Having gone through comprehensive desk review, both Quantitative and Qualitative research questionnaires, along with guidelines, were prepared to interact with the teachers and representatives of the three systems. Where desired, intensive secondary data has been borrowed from esteemed papers, journal articles, reports and news articles to have an idea, how others comment and perceive SNC?

Adopting, participatory approach in general, around 45 KIIs, and 232 quantitative questionnaires were conducted from one or another system of education including public school teachers, heads or instructors of deeni madrasa (Shia, Sunni, Deoband or Ahl-e-Hadees), private school teachers and some independent experts too. Select

representatives of religions minorities ie Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis, and Bahais have either been spoken to directly or their opinion has been collected from some alternative source. Views and opinions of NCC, Curriculum and Textbook Boards (Provincial), School Education Bureaucracy and Departments, Mutahida Ulema Board and of Privates Schools Associations and publishers have also been taken into account to get to reliable conclusions.

Purposive Sampling Technique was adopted to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Face-to-face interviews, proved instrumental in building appropriate understanding of the issues and challenges on ground. In addition, data has also been collected using Google Forms. Respective forms were circulated to all three systems ie public, private and the madrassas. Exact number of quantitative qualitative interviews, their source and districts visited are enlisted here below:

District Wise Quantitative Sample Size Distribution		
Region/Province	Quantitative	Qualitative
Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT)	32	9
Layyah	40	6
Multan	38	6
Rawalpindi	56	5
DG Khan	16	2
Khanewal	13	2
Lahore	35	1
Karachi	0	8
Pishin	1	2
Killa Abdullah	1	2
Quetta	-	2
Total	232	45

Table 1: Sample Size Covered

Overall, a sample size of 232 quantitative questionnaires were collected. A majority 24 percent was collected from Rawalpindi, Layyah (17 percent), Multan (16 percent), Lahore (15 percent), Islamabad (14 percent), DG Khan (7 percent), and Khanewal (6 percent). A couple of voices were also gathered from Pishin and Killa Abdullah (Balochistan) respectively. Overall, the study has covered 88 Public (38 percent), 96 Private (41 percent), and 48 Madrassahs (21 percent).

Gender Wise Coverage		
	Frequency	Percent
Boys	82	35
Girls	43	19
Mixed	107	46
Total	232	100

Table 2: Gender Wise Coverage

Overall, about 35 percent schools were of Boys, 19 percent of Girls, and 46 percent had co-education.

Type School/ Madrasa						
Gender: School/ Madrasa	Public		Private		Madrasa	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Boys	38	43%	3	3%	41	85%
Girls	41	47%	0	0%	2	4%
Mixed	9	10%	93	97%	5	10%
Total	88	100%	96	100%	48	100%

Table 3: Type by School and Madrasa

Similarly, by type, 43 percent boys school were public, 47 percent were girls, and 10 percent were mixed. Whereas, 97 percent of private schools were mixed, and 85 percent of madrasas were boys, and only 4 percent were girls, and 10 percent were mixed.

Qualification of Teachers?						
School/ Madrasa	Matric		Intermediate		Bachelor	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	2	33%	5	29%	14	23%
Private	0	0%	1	6%	37	62%
Madrasa	4	67%	11	65%	9	15%
Total	6	100%	17	100%	60	100%
	Master		M.Phil		PhD	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	59	44%	8	67%	0	0%
Private	57	42%	1	8%	0	0%
Madrasa	19	14%	3	25%	2	100%
Total	135	100%	12	100%	2	100%

Table 4: Qualification of Teachers

Interestingly, there were 2 PhD teachers, teaching in madrasa, though, they did their doctorate in Islamic and Arabic studies. While, 67 percent of Madrasa teachers were Matriculate, 65 percent Intermediate, 15 percent Bachelor, 14 percent Master, and 25 percent had done their M. Phil. Among government teachers, a majority (44 percent) had acquired their Master's degree, and 62 percent of the private school teachers had finished their Bachelors.

Teaching Experience				
School/ Madrasa	Less than 5 years		5 to 10 years	
	N	%	N	%
Public	31	35%	37	39%
Private	45	52%	42	44%
Madrasa	11	13%	16	17%
Total	87	100%	95	100%
	11 to 15 years		20 years or above	
	N	%	N	%
Public	13	32%	7	67%
Private	7	18%	2	22%
Madrasa	20	50%	1	11%
Total	40	100%	10	100%

Table 5: Teaching Experience

In public sector, majority of teachers possess teaching experience up to 10 years while more than 50 percent teachers in private schools are having less than 5 years of experience. In case of madrassas, about 50 percent of the teachers are teaching for 11 years or above.

1.3. Challenges, Ethics and Constrains

Although, earnest efforts were made to make this study as trustworthy as possible but obviously, there are limitations and constrains too. First, the novel COVID-19, surfacing in March 2020 and

subsequently mutating into several waves, was still prevalent during the study, essentially causing accessibility constrains. Observing precautionary measures, however, IDRAC's team did manage to collect data but there are clear gaps and anomalies too. However, generalizations are made by carefully triangulating information with secondary data to avoid inaccuracies. Precisely, it is a small sampled study in quantitative terms but with elaborate qualitative analysis.

Secondly, due to the bureaucratic reservations, meetings with certain respective education officials in Islamabad and Punjab, could not be arranged. For instance, some of the Executive District Officers (EDOs), Education, from Multan, Rawalpindi and Layyah simply kept putting off, indefinitely, to meet for the interviews. Hence the plan had to be discarded. Though, government school teachers or principles too were reluctant to sit and talk but a reasonable number of them also agreed too, some of them requesting to be mentioned as anonymous. Nonetheless, madrasa and private school representatives had no reservations in general. A few of the respondents were sceptic

about the purpose of the research in the sense, 'who and why it was being conducted for' while a few were curious to know, 'what and how will they be quoted and if the study was going to be published?' IDRAC, however, kept things transparent and was able to secure their confidence for a frank discussion. On the other hand, views and arguments of the custodians of SNC have been extracted from secondary sources.

Predominantly, it is a narrative, qualitative and analytical study in nature with a limited quantitative analysis – though it is important in its own terms. In case of education statistics, secondary sources have been relied upon. Where first-hand information regarding SNC's planning and implementation was not available, secondary sources had to be relied upon. Intellectual honesty was exercised in quoting a source or borrowing an idea or analysis anywhere from. Names and roles were clearly mentioned, where the respondents had no reservations for putting in their names.

2.

Context and the State of Education in the Country

2.1. Single National Curriculum as a Misplaced Priority

Just a cursory look at the spectrum of primary and secondary education, speaks volumes about the misplaced priorities of the current government. SNC is another similar move. Approximately, 22.8² million children are out of schools (OOSC). The country maintains one of the largest primary-school drop-out ratio in the world that stands around 41 percent (40 percent boys and 42 percent girls)³. Though, the official drop-out rate at the primary level stands at 33 percent⁴. Of OOSC, about 63 million are of primary school-age-going between 5 and 16⁵. Out of this, an over 20 million (32 percent ⁶) is currently out of school at the national level at the government level. This implies that one-third of children are out of school. Massive rural-urban poverty, long distance,

inaccessible school locations, child labour and girls' domestic labour, physical punishment and missing facilities (including classrooms, helping aids, boundary walls, toilets and potable water) cause children dropping out prematurely.

Pitiably enough, Pakistan's gross enrolment ratio (GER) stands around 95.48 percent ⁷ (2019), but its net enrolment ratio (NER) hardly remains 67.575 percent (2018)⁸. There are only 137,079⁹ Primary Schools in Pakistan. At least 85,000 more primary schools will be required by 2040¹⁰ ie 35,000 in Punjab 25,000 in Sindh, 15,000 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and 10,000 in Balochistan¹¹. Out of these, close to 87 percent of the primary schools fall in the public sector while the remaining 13 percent are part of the private sector. In these primary schools, more or less 18.664 million children are enrolled at the primary level¹², of which 12.065 million¹³ children are studying in the public schools.

Amassing around 22.8 million school-going-age children (mostly girls) out of schools, Pakistan constitutes the second highest number of OOSCs¹⁴

in the world after Nigeria. The much acclaimed, National Education Policy (NEP 2009), determined to lift off the country's literacy to 86 percent by up-scaling on-going formal and non-formal literacy programmes till 2015 also failed miserably. The ratio of Early Childhood Education (ECE) fell from 39 percent (2015) to 37 percent (2016) - waning Pakistan's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-4) which obliged the states to provide at least 12 years of children's schooling and 25-A of the country's CoP committing Universal Primary Education (UPE). The country has already botched on Millennium Development Goal's (MDGs) target of 87.5 percent enrolment by 2016¹⁵. Though increasing steadily, but in certain years our NER and GER even decline from the previous¹⁶.

Though performing generally better but even Punjab's NER at the primary level (age 6-10) hovers around 70¹⁷ percent - too low by international standards. Close to 1300 Union Councils lack a girls' schools across the country. As estimated by United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), at least 15 percent annual educational-development

budgetary increase is desired to achieve 89 percent enrolment by 2024-2025¹⁸.

In 25 key districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), literacy rate stagnates at 55 percent ¹⁹ which was 53 percent in 2014-15²⁰, meaning that 45 percent of the adults remain non-literate. The province's GER at the primary level is 89 percent ²¹, which was 92 percent in PSLM 2014-15, this implies that it fell by 3 percent. Similarly, KP's NER at the primary level is 67 percent ²², which was 71 percent in PSLM 2014-15, implies it increased by 4 percent. Even then the KP government claims of education being their top priority, of issuing girls' education vouchers, and boasts of 34,000 students moving from private to public schools in 2016²³, what they claim to be a sign of parents' improved confidence in public schooling. Beyond political rhetoric, such claims are rarely proved on ground - even through the official data.

In percentage terms, the province of Balochistan has the highest proportion of OOSC at 47 percent (2 million: boys 38 percent and girls 59 percent), followed by Sindh at 44 percent (6.4 million: boys

39 percent and girls 51 percent), KP at 32 percent (3.8 million: boys 22 percent and girls 44 percent), Punjab at 24 percent (7.7 million: boys 22 percent and girls 26 percent), and Islamabad at 10 percent (52 thousand: boys 9 percent and girls 11 percent). In absolute terms, it is evident that the Punjab province holds the largest total population of OOSC and then the Sindh province²⁴.

At the National level, the literacy rate of population (10 years and above) remains stagnant in 2019-20 with 60 percent as in 2014-15²⁵. Comparatively, the literacy rate of Punjab has the highest with 64 percent among other provinces in 2019-20 as compared to 63 percent in 2014-15. This is followed by Sindh with 58 percent in 2019-20 in comparison to 60 percent in 2014-15. While, Balochistan has the lowest literacy with 46 percent in 2019-20 as against to 44 percent in 2014-15. It is appropriate to bring up that Punjab and Balochistan is witnessing an increasing trend in Literacy, whereas Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh is depicting decreasing trend during the 2019-20. Moreover, the literacy rate of Islamabad is the highest with 85 percent²⁶.

Indicators of education in Balochistan are even poorer: as mentioned above, literacy rate rubs around 46 percent ²⁷ inclusive of those who can barely read or write; girls' literacy is even dismal just touching 29²⁸ percent - perhaps lowest in the world. Overall Gender Parity Index (GPI) for enrolment ratios in primary education²⁹ is 0.87. While province wise, GPI places Balochistan at (0.61) i.e. lower than KP (0.75), Sindh (0.79) and Punjab (0.96), GB (0.94), and ICT (1.01). Wretchedly, as many as 5000-6000³ or above public primary schools are single-teacher, single-roomed without toilets, electricity, gas and running water. About two-thirds of the schools in the province lack vital facilities⁴. According to the Balochistan's official statement around 2³⁰ million children are out of schools and about 60 percent of the children quit by the time they reach primary or middle level whereas 45 percent of the students drop-out before their 10th Grade.

³ The figure is also endorsed by the Deputy Director Bureau of Curriculum (Balochistan), Dr Gulab Khilji.

⁴ The figure is also endorsed by the Deputy Director Bureau of Curriculum (Balochistan), Dr Gulab Khilji.

Enrolment and sustenance ratio shows a dreary picture in Sindh too. The province's NER at the primary level rests around 61 percent³¹; for middle level (age 11-13) it just hits 34 percent³² while at the tertiary level 25 percent (age 14-15)³³ only. Overall NER for the province at the primary level sticks to 51³⁴ percent while amenities, teachers' availability and presence, and accessibility to schooling are quite bad. For several socio-political and administrative disruptions, scores of schools are either closed or practically dysfunctional. Inequity, inequality, poor quality of education and rural-urban divide are turning chronic. Whatever improvement, of whichever indicators (including the provision of missing facilities and enhancing teachers' capability) is observed, is the product of Dfid, EU, UNICEF, ITA, BRSP, AKRSP, SPARC, Save the Children, Plan International, Alif Ailaan, Right to Play, Knowledge Platform and other national and international donors' and NGOs' contribution, not the outcome of governmental efforts and resource allocation. Given the existing pace of growth, assesses British Council's 'Pakistan's Education Emergency Report', the country will not be able to

achieve minimum international standards of education even in the next several decades³⁵.



Picture 1: A Government Boys and a Girls Primary School, Layyah



Picture 2: A classroom of Government Middle Schools, Pishin (Above), and Rajanpur (Below)





Picture 3: Images of multiple Government Girls Schools, Rajanpur





Picture 4: Images of a Government Girls Primary School, and a Stagnant School in Rajanpur

Roughly, there are over 31,115³⁶ madrassas in Pakistan (of all sects and schools of thought) with over 4.009³⁷ million children (58 percent male (2.362 million), and 42 percent female (1.737 million)³⁸ studying there. It is noteworthy that all the 31,115 deeni madrassas are working under the patronage of private sector, and not a single madrassa is being managed and controlled by the public sector. Approximately, the country produces about 35,000 to 40,000 qualified students every year³⁹. Not all of the parents are gullible or are wooed by religious clerics to enrol their kids there in the service of Islam. Poverty and unaffordability compel hundreds of thousands of parents to look forward to madrassas for their children's free of

charge learning and other essential needs. Many of the relatively formal madrasas have got a well-defined merit to admit select number of students. Many a student hailing from poorer income echelons prefer getting in here for free accommodation and free food. According to Fayyaz Hussain, completing his ethnographic research on Jamia Ashrafia (Lahore)⁵, almost 50 percent of the students join a madrassa due to poverty, 41 percent for social reasons and only 6 percent seem to be driven exclusively by faith. About 3 percent enrol here in search of education and only 2 percent state political cause for joining madrasa⁴⁰. The causal statistics, therefore, explode the myth of parental free choice or the students' inclination towards madrasas in the service of Islam.

Save water and toilets, an overwhelming number of madrasas too lack essential infrastructure. Violence and child abuse is also frequently reported from madrasas. On financial count, all madrasas run on charity (*zakat, atyiat, khairat, chanda* and minor but irregular contribution by the parents or some

⁵ Though the data is quite old ie of 1994 but seems to be still valid – in the absence of recent data in this regard.

of the former students). Reforming or transforming such madrasas into modern institutes not only asks for careful negotiation and planning but a huge amount of periodical budget too. Driven by charity, how cum the custodians of madrasa are going to adopt such radical change like replacing or supplementing their curriculum with the one proposed by the sitting government?⁶

2.2. The Real Challenges on Ground

Multiple national or international assessments place our students' knowledge and skills far below their grade. The Standardized Achievement Test results – not only in languages but in sciences and mathematics too – are utterly disturbing. Our national average score in languages from Grade V to VII remains roughly around 35 percent while for sciences and mathematics, it is around 25 percent. On average, as per ASER⁷'s periodical assessment, about half the Grade-V students stumble on reading Grade-II level texts, even simple sentences. Children's arithmetic competency falls below average, as less than half the Grade-V students

⁶ M. Arif Ghazali, Principal Multan Public School, Multan.

⁷ Annual Status of Education Report (ASER).

miscalculate even two digits' division. Comparatively, 60-65 percent private school students perform better in all subjects on the same parameters. Contrary to the claims of lifting up public education standards, public schools continue to be transferred to private entities. The problems of equity, access, availability, adaptability and acceptability as well as poor education governance, lack of transparency and accountability are being squarely neglected by the new Education Policy Framework.

In Punjab approximately, one-third of all schools run short of required teachers. Over 5,000 teachers are likely to retire in 2022 and about 6,300 teachers are going to retire in 2023 ie 11,300 teachers shall vacate their seats. There are about 4,421 teachers who are known to be erratically positioned and can be transferred to other districts leaving behind a void in the schools they are currently teaching. Almost no recruit for school teachers was made during 2018-2020. Thus, teachers' shortfall is on the rise. According to Muhammad Imran, President - Punjab Teachers Union, Rawalpindi Division, *"The rationalization*

policy that the Punjab government had recently devised was completely cut off from our local realities. There are issues of over staffing in some schools, while others remain understaffed resulting in poor Students per Teacher Ratio (STR)⁴¹”.

Presently, there are 81,466 vacant posts against 433,134 sanctioned posts. Comparative analysis of vacant seats among 36 districts reveals Sialkot having the lowest share ie 13 percent whereas Jhelum, with highest ratio ie 39 percent (out of 4,034 seats, 1,591 are laying vacant). In all, 55 percent of the districts ie 20 out of 36 districts, maintain over 20 percent vacant seats. In the remaining 16 districts, the vacant seats lie at 15 percent or above. As per government’s own data, teacher recruitment went up till 2015 but the trend started going down since 2018. A stark decline in teachers’ strength is observed at the primary and elementary level with nominal positive trends at the secondary and higher secondary level.

In Punjab, 391,799 (male 173,88 and female 217,911) teachers were appointed in 2018; around 377,895 (male 168,457 and female 209,438) in 2019 while 366,671 (male 163,216 and female

203,455) were appointed in 2020. Since 2015, the teachers' strength began to increase from 109,763 to 126,225 by 2020. The highest number of hiring teachers was done between 2016 to 2018, with an increase by 29.5 percent at the primary level that shot to 142,151. The same trend was, however, not maintained as the strikingly declining trend (11 percent) was noticed between 2018 and 2020 ie drop of 10,601 teachers in 2019 and the drop of 5,325 teachers in 2020. The 19.4 percent drop in a single year (2020) was shocking while in 2015, the strength was recorded at 82,745 with an increase by 9 percent in 2018. The highest recruitments were observed in 2017. However, the drop in the strength is estimated at 23 percent between 2018-2020. Since 2015, there has been an increase by 21 percent in teacher strength in the province. Nevertheless, between 2015-2019, an increase in teachers' strength was observed by 14.31 percent, with a sharp rise in 2017 by 6.2 percent⁸. But once again in 2020, 3 percent decrease in teachers'

⁸ The information was secured by Centre for Peace and Development Initiative (CPDI) from SED, Punjab, who had some reluctance in sharing it. However, it was analysed by Zeba Hashmi in her blog Ibtedah for Education (IFE). Just a gist of it is being shared here.

strength was noticed bringing their strength to 24,380⁴². No rational or realistic recruitment policy is followed. Such a strategic measure is also sacrificed at the altar of political or electoral gains.

The teacher-students' equation is almost double (1:40) than the international standard. While, at the national level, the pupil-teacher ratio from primary to secondary levels was 29 for public and 18 for private sector⁴³. Moreover, the pupil-school ratio at the national level was 158 for public and 212 for private sector⁴⁴. Similarly, teacher-school ratio for public was 5 and 12 for private sector⁴⁵. In addition, teaching secular subjects in madrasas requires appointing at least 1,15,000 teachers along with guaranteed pay – as (reportedly) bargained by the Ittehad Tanzeemat-ul-Madaris (ITM). Thousands of schools in Pakistan are one-room, one-teacher schools while the number of dysfunctional schools also run in thousands. Federal and provincial governments both have failed in weeding out ghost schools and frequently absent teachers. Generally effective, but even biometric attendance system is tricked. Many teachers act more as political workers or

evangelists instead of being instructors. Efforts to fire absent or incompetent teachers or discontinue their salaries invokes unionized protests or are resisted by MNAs/MPAs indirectly influencing the Chief Minister – though the situation varies between regions and provinces. Under such circumstances, how can one admit SNC to be the first-right-step as stressed by NCC? The fact is, the ruling party itself overshadows reforms for opting-out false direction, miscommunication, lacking will and realistic planning⁴⁶.

Multiple efforts, though without much substance, have been made to improve the quality and content of education – resulting in either a small progress or maintaining the situation as it is. Over the years, a range of plans and policies have been adopted to comply with the constitutional commitment to provide ‘free and compulsory’ education, improve quality and content to eliminate inequality but without a notable success. An official and nationally recognized ‘Annual Education Monitoring Report’ (AEMR) is missing in the country. Working under the Federal Ministry of Education, the Academy of Education Planning and

Management (AEPM), produces Pakistan Education Statistics every year, but it does not include education monitoring framework and misses out several other strategic indices to measure the quality and progress of education⁴⁷.

Nevertheless, through a house-to-house survey, Idara Taleem-o-Agahi (ITA) produces Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) by assessing children's competency from Grade-I to Intermediate. It also looks at the enrolment, learning outcomes and basic schooling facilities as well⁴⁸. Similarly, Alif Ailaan, an initiative launched by a team of media and communication experts, has been identifying the gaps of and concerns in educating children. Apparently, policy makers were also assisted in implementing better policies and the general public was sensitised about the significance of education. However, how much are such voices heard by the federal and provincial governments and education bureaucracy is uncertain⁴⁹. The same is not clear in the case of the SNC too.

As amply demonstrated above, it is the missing schools and missing facilities, inadequate

enrolment, the gender gap, rural-urban and public-private disparity and enormous inadequacies of the existing schools that need to be addressed first – which is obviously not possible without due priority and appropriate allocation of funds. Not the so called Single National Curriculum, rather bringing millions of OOSCs back to schools and immediate provision of missing facilities that needs to be the government's top priority, not the other way round. Mere redoing of a curriculum, especially when the schools, the teachers, the labs and libraries are barely sufficient is tantamount to putting the horse before cart. Teachers' training is another significant area, the government needs to invest and improve before embarking upon implementing SNC. All that requires allocating at least 6 percent annual budget for the development of education as committed by a number of developing countries, including Pakistan, in World Conference on Education for All (1990)⁵⁰, 32 years back. One can begin with 4 percent at least. In fact, the move is nothing more than old wine in new bottle for there have been about a dozen education policies and curriculum shifts during the

seven decades of the country's independent life. None could achieve its stated objectives.

Perhaps no stronger arguments are required to prove that, it is not the curriculum alone, even if it is relatively better, but pre-schooling, academic environment, infrastructure, quality of instruction and helping-aids that certify the quality of education which the proposed framework undermines almost entirely. Theory-driven Students Learning Outcomes (SLOs), teaching guidelines and training package, lifted and refined from 2006's initiatives, are not going to revolutionize the quality and content of education.

Though SNC has been trumpeted up as an act of 'putting an end to class-based, apartheid or discriminatory education' but demonstrably it is plainly an act of political deception, especially keeping in mind the vital indicators of education falling at the far end of global education spectrum – including the measures set by MDGs and SDGs that Pakistan has already failed and going to fail again. In addition, the effort or the spirit of SNC is nothing new. The idea and part of the plan has

already been there since 1970s. On top of that, as acknowledged by the government herself, more than two-thirds of the syllabi proposed, has already been adopted since 2014, the process maturing from 2006 to 2009. Just striking one-fifth of the change with a great pomp and show is almost a storm in the tea cup.

With reference to the school closures caused by COVID-19 during 2020-2021, a corresponding report 'Measuring Learning Losses', developed by ITA and UNICEF, reveals that comparing to 2019, enrolment of children (aging 6-16) dropped by 2 percent points in 2021. However, about 63 percent children reported of their parents stepping up efforts to sustain or enhance their children's learnings. Less than one-third ie 32 percent children stated of their schools providing them with some learning materials during the schools-closure, whilst 58 percent reported that their school teachers or school-management never reached out to them. Nevertheless, around 32 percent of the children did seek some help from PTV's TeleSchool Programs. Likewise, around 40 percent of the children, having smartphones at homes, reported

of continuing with certain bits of learning. The ratio of Grade-III children who could read an Urdu story in 2019, fell from 19 percent to 15 percent in 2021 while their capability of reading English sentences dropped from 21 percent in 2019 to 8 percent in 2021. Similarly, the students of the same level who could solve the 2-digit division declined from 17 percent to 10 percent⁵¹.

The World Bank terms such effects as 'learning poverty' and estimates it to reach down to 75 percent from 79 percent in 2019. Given the serious shortfall of trained teachers for teaching English as a second language, most of the public and low-income private schools will have detrimental effects on their language learning. There is a serious need of taking remedial measures to address such needs and lacunae. The idea of Single National Curriculum might have proved its effectiveness when serious problems of education resource-shortfall had had been resolved⁵².

Despite failing to address glaring issues and concerns around the structure and substance of education, the MoFEP has been acknowledged by

the current government to be one of the top 5 ministries performing better and achieving its targets within time⁵³. One fails to understand, what criteria were employed to measure the ministry's success.

3.

SNC Plan – Gaps and Concerns

Despite coming of age at three-quarters of its independent age, Pakistan has failed to agree on policy, content and key objectives of its education. More than anything else, it has been, unfortunately, exploited more as more of a political instrument than to be the goal in itself. Several policies have been moved forward so far - each to serve political ends of the ruling elites, more than anything else. For instance, one of the earlier education policies evolved in 1959 by the then Education Commission⁵⁴, was meant to influence younger minds to forego their socio-cultural and linguistic identities and believe that Pakistan is one homogenous socio-cultural unit. Obviously, an unnatural rather a sinister objective that could never be realized. People of Pakistan not only hold their ethno-lingual identities closer to their hearts, they have rather deepened with the passage of time.

Likewise, even worse policies and propositions were assumed in the 1980s, mainly to serve America's proxy war against the Soviet influence and invasion in Afghanistan (1979). Islamization rather an extreme version of Islam, embedding the elements of sectarianism, Jihadism and glorification of war and martyrdom – were introduced under the influence of CIA-US war against socialism and Soviet Union. Through Islamization and radicalization of national education, General Zia-ul-Haq created anti-communist bulwarks. The subject of *Deenyaat* (or the knowledge of faith, including minority faiths) was replaced with Islamiyat (the study of Islam only) proving detrimental to the multicultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious ethos of the country. Religious minorities were almost sent to oblivion and wiped out of the national curriculum. Pakistaniyat was graduated equated with one's devotion to Islam⁵⁵. Truly, Pakistan has yet not recovered from the ill-effects of the General's parochial and conservative policy and approach – where education too was maneuvered as an ideological weapon.

Nevertheless, this is also true that having gone through the volatile decade of 1980s and 1990s, the progressive curriculum and policy foundations were laid down since 2000s. Primary and secondary school curriculum began changing in 2006 and was gradually adopted from 2009 to 2014. Come 2019, with the introduction of yet another curriculum, the country seems to be struggling with the tradition of one step forward two steps back.

3.1. The Idea of SNC and its Stated Objectives

Come 2019, entering into the very first year of its rule, transforming school curricula was one of its first mission that Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI) embarked upon. Ignoring fundamental problems and lacuna of public education, the Premier, picked up one of its, perhaps, minor problems ie compartmentalized and class-based system of education. In his own words, “there are multiple levels of education with different content and quality in the country – ‘inherently discriminatory between *ghareeb ka bacha* (the poor man’s child) and *ameer ka bacha* (the rich man’s child). There is another section of society whose children go to charity-driven madrasas without any likelihood of

entering into any decent public or private arena of employment. This is almost an apartheid system of education that must end. Therefore, we are going to introduce 'Uniform System of Education' to address the problem⁵⁶", he repeated the mantra time and again, at multiple places in multiple words and styles.

The new education, contends the Premier, is also a step towards freeing "ourselves from English culture⁵⁷" and will help us to break the shackles of slavery. Within a few months down the road, the very notion of 'Uniform System of Education (USE)' was commuted with 'Single National Curriculum (SNC)' without changing his pronounced objectives of 'putting an end to apartheid system of education⁵⁸'. It is important to stress that for good long two years and, in many a case still, multiple representatives of the government keep confusing SNC with USE either due to lack of their own understanding or to make it politically attractive and deliberately deceive the common masses.

Taking pride over their plan to introduce SNC, the Federal Minister, Shafqat Mahmood said that, "for

the first time in the country's history, SNC was being introduced. Though it was a difficult task riddled with many hurdles but their government was determined to realize it. Education, he stressed, was ignored for long and it was PTI's government that made it their top priority. They were determined to introduce new curriculum as well as new methods". Supplementing, he also stressed that "no system of education ie public, private and madrasa was being replaced but only uniform standard of teaching and learning was being introduced. Adopting the model textbooks, designed by the Ministry, are not obligatory for all systems. The schools and systems could design their own syllabi - as per guidelines - but having sought a No Objection Certificate (NOC). Private schools and madrasas are free to teach subjects and books of their own choice along with adopting the core subjects recommended. English, Science and Mathematics are going to be taught in English language and to teach English at pre-school level, teachers shall be trained accordingly. SNC is going to recommend minimum learning standards not necessarily the specific syllabus or books"⁵⁹.

Nevertheless, the history of curriculum development in the country refutes all such claims. All public curricula in the country, so far, have been single national curricula, not only for government schools but also for low-fee private and charity schools as well. The 18th Amendment (2010) overturned it constitutionally. Yet the 'Single National Curriculum' continued since 2006, until the current SNC was launched in 2019. If at all, the new curriculum is single in the sense of denying the constitutional right of provinces to define their own curricula. In addition, it might be 'single national' also in the sense of trying to replace the three curricula ie of public, private and madrasa streams.

The MoFEPT describes the purpose of SNC's as to introduce 'one system of education for all, in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction and a common platform of assessment'. Once again, the phrase 'one system of education' is striking. It stresses further that through this system of education, 'all children have a fair and equal opportunity to receive high quality education, social cohesion and national integration'. 'Alleviation of disparities in education-content

across multiple streams, equal opportunities for upward social mobility, equity in education, holistic development of children in the light of emerging trends and smooth inter-provincial mobility of teachers and students' are highlighted as its complementary objectives⁶⁰.

Merging international trends in teaching, learning and assessment; adopting outcome-based approach; focus on values, life-skills and inclusion; respect and appreciation of different cultures and religions in local and global context; intellectual, spiritual, aesthetic, emotional and social development of learners; development of 21st century skills including enabling children to grasp 'Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)' through the use of 'information and communication technology' are stated as SNC's key considerations. The ministry also claims that 'before the development of SNC, multiple comparative studies were conducted to align it with international standards – including the comparison of proposed curriculum with Cambridge, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore's and their respective learning standards'⁶¹. The

proposed outline also claims of teaching digital skills, entrepreneurship, comprehension of contemporary issues as well as compassion and tolerance as never taught before.

As outlined by the Ministry, the SNC also stresses on 'equipping children with principles and attributes of truthfulness, respect, honesty, tolerance, democracy, human rights, sustainable development, global citizenship, personal care, environmental awareness, empathy, equality of persons living with disability (PLWD) and peaceful coexistence. The plan also boasts of, 'developing students' analytical, critical and creative thinking through activities-based approach rather than teacher-centric linear method'. 'The desired benchmarks and SLOs across subjects, it asserts, were not developed in 2006's curriculum while SNC was careful enough to develop them in advance. Statedly, creative arts, local culture and environment, health, hygiene and safety, alongside innovative trends with respect to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) were taken care of. Lifelong learning through development of inquiry and independent learning skills as well as child

protection and increased emphasis on positive attitudes for holistic development of students are also part of it'⁶².

Contrary to the 2006 curricula, in which Islamiyat was integrated with General Knowledge up to Grade-II and started as a separate subject from Grade-III onwards, the subject now begins separately from Grade-I, continuing up to Grade-XII.

Ironically, the Minister and NCC representatives acknowledge that the curriculum introduced back in 2006 was also based on the premises of uniformity. However, they are the ones who are keen on 'uniform learning outcomes'. The point, they sell, is that the students enrolled in Grades I to VIII shall now study 7 compulsory subjects ie Urdu, English, Social Studies, Islamiyat, General Science, Mathematics and General Knowledge. Also, they are going to, 'teach children Holy Quran and Sunnah in a manner that students stop cramming, understand the text and turn creative in their course of learning'⁶³. Earlier, the non-Muslim students were bound to study Ethics instead of

Islamiyat but now the respective 6 communities have the opportunity to study their own faith at all levels.

The Ministry asserts that, 'the content is also aligned to Pakistan's commitment to SDG-4 comprising 10 Targets, 7 Outcomes and 3 Means of Implementation ie universal primary and secondary education, equal access to technical/vocational and higher education, gender equality and inclusion and the provision of 12 years of free, publicly-funded, inclusive, equitable and quality education - leading to relevant learning outcomes and assured to all, without discrimination⁶⁴.

3.2. Planning and Processes of SNC

Following the tall claims of the Prime Minister and the Federal Minister, two of the Provincial Ministers for Education ie Murad Raas (Punjab) and Shahram Khan Tarakai (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) in particular, began to munch the same statements as the ruling party was on driving seat in these provinces. Soon, the eminent members of the cabinet, mainly the Minister for Information, Communication and Broadcasting, the Minister for

Science and Technology and the respective Chief Ministers of the afore mentioned provinces also began chiming the Premier and the Federal Minister without knowing the situation on ground or listening to the critical voices around⁶⁵.

According to the government's phased planning of developing and launching the curricula in all three systems: The First Phase comprises the development of the Model Text Books (MTBs) of Grade I-V by the Provincial Textbook Boards for the academic year of 2021-2022. In the Second Phase, the curriculum of Grade VI-VIII shall be prepared and launched in 2022-2023 while the Third Phase will commence with the preparation and adoption of the curriculum for Grade IX-XII in 2023-2024⁶⁶. To realise its plan, the government set up a National Curriculum Council (NCC), 4 Provincial Curriculum Councils (PCCs) and 2 Regional Curriculum Councils (RCCs). In reality, however, only the NCC remains active. The latter claims of consulting at least 400 public and private sector experts, along with some foreigners, and madrasa representatives to agree on learning outcomes as well as devise a proposed outline and content of

the SNC. Representatives of religious minorities, including Christians, Hindus, Bahais, Kalasha and Zoroastrians are also told of having been consulted, perhaps for the first time in the history of curriculum formation. Their historical grievances, reservations, suggestions and opinions were taken into account – as stated by the NCC’s chair and respective ministers.

In addition, the Ministry also states that, ‘teachers’ training programme has been designed to train teachers who may confront challenges in teaching SNC. The conventional assessment system is the textbook-based examination, largely inadequate to judge a student’s competency and learning outcomes. ‘The development of new and up to the mark examination and assessment system is also in process’, assert NCC⁶⁷. ‘To arrange, online teachers training the government is going to collaborate with Google UK and other relevant institutes’, states Maryam Chughtai, the current Director of NCC.

3.3. Concerns Over Consultation

Though the subject of Education was devolved to the Regions and Provinces under the historic 18th Constitutional Amendment adopted in 2010⁹ but MoFEPT claims that the formation of NCC was unanimously approved by all the provinces and areas in the Inter Provincial Education Ministers Conference (IPEMC) held on February 2014, with the purpose of developing a curriculum ensuring Minimum National Standards in all subjects with emphasis on national ideology and societal preferences. The National Education Policy (NEP-2009), it argues, ‘remains a jointly owned document ever since the 18th Constitutional Amendment. The NEP-2009 assigns NCC the role of overseeing educational development, along with monitoring, supervision and review. Later on in 2016, the NCC developed National Curriculum Framework, Minimum Standards of Quality Education, Education Supplement for Curriculum and Textbooks for Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) from Grade Pre I-VIII textbooks. Thus, the development of SNC curriculum and guidelines is

⁹ Critical implications of 18th Constitutional Amendments shall be shared ahead in this document.

the rightful mandate of NCC⁶⁸. However, such implications are inadequately interpreted and fervently rejected by the exponents of provincial autonomy and independent educationists.

Also, the respective Federal Minister¹⁰ said that the curriculum and textbooks are never static and might be updated as and if desired. The feedback received will assist the experts in reviewing the exercise⁶⁹. He kept emphasizing time and again that character-building and promoting values (read Islamic) were SNC's prime objectives¹¹, that experts were working to promote⁷⁰. "Initially, he spoke at some other occasion, "we faced huge challenges when the Prime Minister tasked us to bring uniform education system¹²; especially after the 18th Amendment, it was not possible to bring all stakeholders on board. But I was pleased to see the full support and cooperation of the stakeholders including the Madaris and private schools⁷¹".

Equivocating, the Director of NCC also affirms that regarding curriculum, 'many people, including

¹⁰ Shafqat Mahmood.

¹¹ Emphasis is of the Authors'.

¹² Note the point, 'uniform system of education'.

parents, teachers, and even students were consulted. Suggestions were welcomed even extended over the website. Contrary to the older practice, when syllabus was prepared by the educationists of Punjab and emulated by the rest of the provinces, this time, other provinces and even regions were taken on board'. 'The subject of Islamiyat was flexible and consensus-driven by religious scholars of all schools of thought, and advocating the teaching of Nazira Quran, she argued that 'when kids do learn it at homes, no harm if they learn it in schools'.

The claim of wider and diversified consultation and consensus was challenged by several independent experts. Say, in the opinion of Dr Pervez Hoodbhoy, an independent education expert, "this 400 is nothing more than just an empty figure. Pretty deceptive. Even if they did it, most of the participants seem to be either part of their own system or naive and compliant. So long as the result is disappointing, it does not matter whether you consult 400 or 4000 people⁷²". Professor A. H. Nayyar believes that "The mere claim of consulting a large number of persons may not mean very

much. We have often witnessed crowd consultations with unstructured discussions where one could hardly speak for a couple of minutes without being able to make a point. Many could not utter a single word. The exercise is only meant to give whatever has already been formulated a fake cover of consensus. I call this pseudo-consensus¹³.” Similarly, in the opinion of Peter Jacob, the head of Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), who was part of the consultation, “constituted through an administrative notification, NCC lacks statutory power and function. The non-government members, like myself basically volunteered our time and energy. I raised this a couple of times that the minutes of the meetings should be prepared and circulated. The NCC did not formally approve any document of SNC, perhaps it was only assumed that it did.” Nonetheless, representatives of Ittehad Tanzeemat-ul-Madaris (National Federation of Madrasas) were essentially there to assert for incorporating Islamic education as part of all social science subjects. ‘Islam is part and parcel of our national integrity and serves as brick and mortar of

¹³ KII with A. H. Nayyar.

patriotism’, they argued. Their point of view was not only heard, rather registered as well.

Despite the Ministry of Federal Education and NCC’s drumming up of wider consultation, several questions prop up. What happened to the original idea of USE? If the syllabus is more or less same as of 2006 (save certain insertions and omissions), then what is the whole euphoria about? Why was such a strategic subject of education propagated more as a political action than as an act of academic serenity? Why the names of the experts and stakeholders consulted were not made public? Did they genuinely and meaningfully represent multiple spheres of life and education? Was any report produced as an outcome of consultation and if it was, why was it not made public? Why SNC, played-up as a revolutionary step, is being implemented in haste⁷³? The truth is that SNC failed to reach a consensus and the so-called wider consultation is nothing more than a political gimmick to seek political legitimacy of the regime.

By the end of January 2021, the Ministry of Federal Education issued a letter to the 4 Provincial and 2

Regional Textbook Boards¹⁴ to implement its' SNC Policy. It also allowed the private publishers to develop SNC textbooks, however, in alignment with the NCC determined contents, objectives, SLOs and ensuring no anti-state, anti-Islam or incitement-to-hatred material features in. 'Avoid putting up unnecessary constrains and cumbersome procedures rather facilitate the private entities', the Ministry advised the respective Textbook Boards⁷⁴. The Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board (PCTB), thereupon, issued NOC to the private publishers and approved 125 books of Grade I to V⁷⁵.

3.4. The Enigma of New Education Policy 2021

The National Education Policy (2009) was hardly implemented, perhaps counterweighed by 18th Amendment 2010 despite ascending to a 'joint declaration'; the Education Policy Framework (2017-18) was half-baked and SNC was already in hot waters that yet another majestic plan of developing new Pakistan Education Policy (2021) landed in. 'Several initiatives have been taken with

¹⁴ Regional here stands for Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

respect to SNC', the Federal Minister reiterated and now 'a formal education policy was necessary. The process, including widespread consultation, was started and all suggestions were welcome'⁷⁶.

To kick off the process, seminars and consultations were held in all the regions and the provinces to finalize the plan⁷⁷. About 45 Vice Chancellors of multiple universities were invited in one such seminar to gather their views on PEP 2021⁷⁸. Reportedly, the federal and provincial ministries and concerned departments discussed and reviewed a range of issues such as uniform national curriculum, drop-out and out-of-school children, tech-use in education and training, and other related issues. Equity and quality of education for all children and institutions was the proclaimed aim of the policy. 'The policy, stated the ministry, 'will build consensus on national education standards, stages of education ie primary, middle and high along with the system of admissions and exams, teaching and teachers' management standards etc. National harmony and cohesion across religious and ethnic diversity and denominations shall also

be determined in the socio-cultural context of Pakistan'⁷⁹, it argued.

Further on, the Ministry directed all the provincial and regional governments to collect their input on key aspects of the policy debate. It also prescribed certain topics desired to be discussed in the national policy document. Similarly, it expressed its intent to discuss the plan with eminent stakeholders including writers, researchers, academia, educationists and encouraged them to proactively participate in this nationally significant initiative⁸⁰. All federating units including public and private sectors, Federal Government Educational Institutions (FGEIs), cantonment and garrison schools, LUMS (Lahore University of Management Sciences) and AKU-IED (Agha Khan University – Institute of Education Development) and the representatives of *deeni madaris*,⁷ were invited to extend suggestions. In a similar line, the Ministry organized a workshop and a 4-day national conference in February 2021 in all the provinces and regions, addressing the subjects of life-skills-based education and critical thinking. The inputs

and feedback gathered will be incorporated in the NEP, the Ministry stated⁸¹.

While meeting techno-industrial owners, the Minister asserted that, 'ed-tech is going to be the core pillar of the would-be education policy as it may encourage innovation in the learning processes. The technology would make learning holistic and enjoyable, and shall create an ecosystem of education to produce learned, tech-sophisticated and productive students. In the PEP-21, computer education shall be fused-in from Grade VI-VIII along with the provision of online content. Universal Service Fund (USF) – Pakistan, was requested to enhance internet coverage and connectivity across the country. Also, teachers shall be given training to adopt modern learning technologies and innovative methods'⁸².

Reasserting the purpose, the Secretary of the Ministry stated that, 'with all its associated entities and, provincial education and training departments, the Ministry is striving to develop and implement effective educational plans and strategies to rectify learning losses, retain students

and to ensure ‘no child is left behind’. Also, it is re-envisioning ‘Pakistan Education Policy 2021’ while maintaining focus on improved education at all levels, transforming distant and non-formal education, engaging out-of-school children and imparting relevant skills’⁸³.

3.5. The Tragic Flaws in Education Policies

Contrary to its verbose claims, not a single inch progress around NEP-2021 has been observed, save a working paper on the state of school education put up on the website of MoFEPT. “Upon the Prime Minister’s directives, ‘the Ministry, states the Federal Minister, ‘is developing the policy as a living document to enable future generations to be a source of greatness for our country. Everyone's suggestion counts for national harmony and inclusive future. Be part of this historic process⁸⁴”.

In fact, what the Prime Minister or the Federal Minister brag about is neither new nor surprising for anyone who flips through just a few pages of the history of Pakistan’s education. Every single government - be it civilian or military - venturing for the curriculum-shift or new education policy

blamed the former regimes for not awarding enough importance to education - vital for socio-economic, industrial or technological progress of the country. All of them charmed people with the slogan of lifting the country out of its chronic educational crisis and put it on the right path. Perhaps with the exception of 1947 and 1972, every single regime set its targets ambitiously, unrealistically and exaggerated⁸⁵ – emphatically alleging all the previous regimes to be incompetent and insincere in achieving their goals. Come new regime, the wheel would be set in motion all over again. So is the current government. Hindsight reflection, exposes its lack of will, incapability and insincerity with education of the present or future generation. Save delivering bare minimum salaries, none of them allocated sufficient resources required to achieve their lofty objectives.

Reviewing the history of educational policy and planning manifests that setting huge targets, bemoaning the failure and devising them anew with unqualified hopefulness has been, a kind of game, policy-makers played ad nauseam. Over the last seven-and-half decade of independence, about

9 national education policies, 12 five-year plans and close to a dozen other schemes have been launched while several seminars, conferences and educational moots have been held⁸⁶. Obviously, their respective educational priorities were not only limited to enhancing NER/GER and literacy targets rather their approach towards education – imbued by Islamic, authoritarian, socialists or democratic inclination - also varied. For example, the 7th Five Year Plan (1988-1993) categorically rejected non-formal education in their effort to promote education and literacy, whereas, the non-formal schooling was resurrected in 1992. The Education Policy developed in 1998, on the other hand, literally condemned formal education and preferred non-formal approach to upthrust primary education. Keener analysis unfolds their lack of political and financial commitment to education. Save the sole exception of 2nd Five Year Plan (1959-1965), what has been common with all such plans, policies and programmes is their drastic failure⁸⁷.

Eloquence gradually replacing substance in all upcoming governments' plans and policies manifests their failure. Though, quality and content

consciousness began improving in 2000s but inadequate planning and poor financial commitments are still the same. Apart from incorporating advanced objectives and learning outcomes, however, Islamism, nationalism or nation-formative intent and traditionalism has always been explicitly or implicitly an integral part of Pakistan's education policies and curriculum content.

4.

Political Controversies Surrounding SNC

The way SNC is being enforced in the regions as well as provinces has attracted colossal criticism - mainly in the legal and constitutional context. To minimize conflict probability, the CoP clearly separates the legal and executive powers. Trespassing the constitutional limits and constrains – the PTI government is heading towards not only devising the so-called SNC, rather cajoling the provincial governments to implement it, especially in the provinces where it holds power. Adopted unanimously in 2010, the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010) devolves the jurisdiction of primary education entirely to the provinces and regions. However, it does allow the Federal Government, to devise policy and content of education in the Capital Territory, as well influence higher and technical education. Also, under the Point XII (Part-II) of the Federal Legislative List of the CoP, the federal government

may prescribe institutional standards of higher, scientific and technical education – envisaging universities, vocational institutions and institutes awarding degrees. Rolling out SNC, simply encroaches the provincial policy and legislative spaces. Therefore, through their ministerial and administrative bodies, such as the Provincial Ministries of Education, the Provincial Curriculum and Textbook Boards and School Education Departments, the provinces are completely authorized to form their plans, policies, curriculum, syllabi and standards of primary and secondary education⁸⁸.

Clearly, assumption of any curriculum or policy position on primary and secondary education by the Central Government is ultra vires to constitutional prescription. Federal government, at best, can only play a consultative role, and that is it. Contrary to the claims made by the Ministry of Federal Education, the Centre is not authorised to set uniform or minimum curriculum standards. Also, this is not an appropriate justification, as is extended by the SNC and NCC spokespersons that they built upon the 2006's curriculum to bring it at

par with the international standards or that SNC was not a binding on provinces to abide by and they could evolve their own curriculum under the same guidelines. If that is the case, then why coerce the provinces to adopt SNC? Why rebuff all criticism and term it as 'mafia's elitists objections? What the Federal Ministry fails to grasp is that, it is the 'Ministry of Federal Education' and not the 'Federal Ministry of Education'. So much so that the Ministry advised the National Book Foundation (NBF) and the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board (PCTB) to develop model textbooks and was herself enforcing it too. The very attitude might be a precursor of other coercive measures within the provincial arena of education intensifying an already repressive environment. All such measures are against the spirit of federalism. Allowing, the provincial and federal governments to work side by side but independent of each other is, at times, known as 'marble-cake federalism' ie vertical sharing of legislative powers while enjoying legislative competence on the subjects of concern⁸⁹.

Rather than observing restraints, the corresponding minister, takes pride in saying that, ‘for the first time in the history of Pakistan, SNC along with the model textbooks, teachers-training modules and assessment-framework¹⁵ are being developed’, simultaneously⁹⁰ - implying that the respective ministries and regions are or should be no more than rubber stamps. Thus, SNC puts the essence of cooperative federalism into question? Rather than naively buying into the Federal Government’s ideas, the provincial legislature must discuss, question and meaningfully deliberate, accept or reject all such matters falling under their jurisdiction. In reality, the federation-province cooperation lacks completely and fissures are quite visible. Devolution of powers and devolved services are diametrically opposed - what the ruling party has been asserting before it came to power. Sindh Government, however, is conscious enough and has been challenging and exercising its due autonomy⁹¹.

¹⁵ Technically, the part of provincial jurisdiction.

4.1. The 18th Constitutional Amendment and SNC

By abolishing the controversial 'concurrent list', the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010) reconstituted the centre-province relationship and affairs of governance amongst and within the two. Along with education, several areas of citizens' and civic concerns - inclusive of their legislation - were devolved to the provinces. Regarding the right to education, the Article 25-A was inserted describing that: *'The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of age 5-16 in such a manner as may be determined by law'*. The landmark amendment imparts provinces with strong legislative and financial autonomy in the said subject too – along with weighty implications for the overall system of education. In other words, it terms education to be the fundamental right of every child which can also be enforced by the court of law. Subsequently, the provinces are now authorised to pen-down their own policy, curriculum, syllabi as well as the teaching, learning and assessment standards. In the meantime, all the 4 provinces have legislated to provide free and compulsory education to children in their

respective territories but unfortunately, no further progress has been made in this regard⁹².

‘By introducing SNC, the Federal Government has breached the right entitled to the provinces in the historic 18th Amendment. ‘Sindh Government will come up with its own policy and curriculum if the need arises’, stresses Sardar Ali Shah, the Education Minister of Sindh. ‘Implementing SNC is not mandatory for each province. Empowered by the 18th Amendment, they may embrace or disregard the so called SNC and the federal government cannot impose its unconstitutional act on other provinces. The province, however, may accept positive changes but only in the subjects of science. Each province has its own history, language, culture, and of course, their heroes too – the stuff that constitutes Social Sciences. National heroes are already part of Sindh’s curriculum. Additionally, they have every right to teach their own culture and language along with Urdu and English – as it is their historical and constitutional right, they would hate to forgo,’⁹³ supplements the Minister.

‘SNC is part of the ruling party’s manifesto, not a sacred provision of the constitution. While evolving SNC, Sindh Government was not taken on board rather intended to hand them over the books already printed, which is, obviously, not acceptable. A curriculum could be no more than a parameter, flexible enough to be changed as per need. But SNC is a kind of impractical package being forcibly implemented. The Federal Government desires to impose SNC in haste’⁹⁴, adds the Minister. ‘The ruling Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) in Sindh, is a democratic party believing in the constitutional supremacy and abhors violating the constitution. Without the participation of one of its provinces ie Sindh, any curriculum could not be called ‘national and uniform’,⁹⁵ he argues.

Pleading in favour of the said Amendment, Sindh Law Department also opposed the implementation of SNC in the province. Chief Minister, Sindh, Murad Ali Shah contested the infiltration of SNC – terming it a trojan horse striding-in to erode provincial autonomy. Without assuming a categorically apposite or opposite position,

Balochistan province, however did accept it, though reluctantly. The latter has been having several reservations including ignoring the fundamental barriers to better education ie missing teachers and missing facilities, teachers' incompetency for teaching the new curriculum, the proposed curriculum's limited relevance to the Balochistan's socio-cultural and historical context, advanced and extended essays and exercises, heavy Islamic content (within and outside Islamiyat), undermining Balochi, Pashto and Brauhvi languages and most importantly the budgetary constraints etc¹⁶. In other words, with Sindh's refusal and Balochistan's strategic reservations and seeking one full term to implement it, the curriculum already ceases to be uniformly accepted. On ground situation, opaque as ever before, NCC once again claimed of securing consensus on core curriculum for Early Childhood

¹⁶ Part of the views were shared by Dr Gulab Khilji, Deputy Director Bureau of Curriculum, Balochistan (KII). 'The curriculum, mainly of social sciences, has been revised according to socio-cultural context of Balochistan. Provincial Cabinet has approved it and it has been notified by the Chief Secretary, Education. The SNC Textbooks (Balochistan) are now being printed in Lahore. However, practically, it cannot be formally adopted before March 2023', supplemented Dr Gulab Khilji.

Education (from Grade-I to Grade-III) in February 2022⁹⁶. Contradictions abound, but the former Chairman NCC¹⁷, keeps stressing on all provinces being on board – including Sindh. ‘Sindh Government, through an official letter, has informed NCC about the adoption of core subjects’, he claims⁹⁷.

Eventually, the Prime Minister launched SNC in August 2021, stating that, it would prove an essential step in transforming the nation into a *“unified entity, rooted in common morals and ethos; and will help the nation to achieve the common goal of progress⁹⁸”*. The Minister for Federal Education began repeating the same mantra that *“one national curriculum was need of the hour to eliminate injustice and to lead us to become one nation⁹⁹”*. *“Introducing ‘uniform system of education¹⁸’ across the country, was meant to generate a uniform pattern of thought across the nation, possessing reformative effects on society. The new generations will be proud of them”*, he even dared to boast¹⁰⁰. Little effort is

¹⁷ M. Rafique Tahir.

¹⁸ Note that at this stage too, he is deceptively using USE instead of SNC that the PM launched.

required to uncover such statements. The federal government intentionally undermines provincial autonomy in the field of education¹⁹ - as is the case with several other areas. Constitutionally wrong but it takes advantage of having its government in three out of the four provinces (save Sindh) and two of the regions that either seem accepting SNC without any reservations or remained silent during the whole process.

Ironically – despite the enormity of the problem - opposition politicians and political parties did not play a noteworthy role in offering resistance to such a poor show put up by the ruling party. Save a couple of tweets and some loud statements by Sindh government and much to the critics’ surprise, Senate, National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies remained deafeningly silent on the issue of SNC. All throughout the PTI’s term, not a single striking statement was heard about SNC from the opposition benches. Equivocating, the Standing Committee on Education (Federal and

¹⁹ Similar acts, intentions and expressions could easily be found in other areas such as health, civic services and social welfare.

Provincial) did not hold any meaningful deliberations on SNC.

General Secretary, Punjab Teachers Union (PTU), Rana Liaqat Ali, an experienced teacher thinks that, since long, there has been a cold war between the provincial and federal government over SNC and a USE. Introducing Urdu as the national language, has also been debated as post 18th amendment, certain provinces (Sindh in particular) have been promoting their regional languages in school curricula. But at the same time, other academic experts have been writing to the centre that, education being a national matter, should not be treated heterogeneously in the country¹⁰¹.

5.

Management and Implementation of SNC Textbooks

Like textbook development, textbook management and implementation has also been contested to the core, almost in its entire past. But with the appearance of SNC driven textbooks, almost a floodgate of criticism, analyses and opinions opened up. National Book Foundation (NBF) at the federal level and Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board (PCTB) pioneered in printing out model textbooks in compliance to the NCC guidelines and learning outcomes. Certain private publishers were also allowed to print books – provided they prepare their material as per prescribed principles and seek NOC from the respective authority ie Provincial Textbook Boards (PTBs). Curriculum review or change is not or might not be something new or abhorring as it is a long-standing tradition in the developing as well as developed countries but the problem lies in its'

genuine need, management and effective implementation. What is even more important is the provision of desired institutional structure and paraphernalia.

The new national curriculum - evolving in 2006 and culminating in 2009 - was steadily sinking in the public education system across the country with marginal exceptions. Regarding other systems, a very limited exception could be observed in the elitist private schools, operating in chains and following the Cambridge, Harvard or Oxford System's syllabi. Madrasa case is aside as most of them follow their own *dars-e-nizami* syllabi since long and while those already following government syllabus exclusively or in parallel had definitely adopted it. The whole process was complete by 2013-14. Except those going through "O" and "A" level international exams, all other systems have got the same SLOs as they have to appear in the Board Exams. But at present, unfortunately, the whole state of affairs around has been opaque and controversial. Some of its key controversies and managerial issues are being discussed here below.

5.1. Federal Level Concerns

Though in the backdrop of devolution, it is inadequate but earlier in 2021, the MoFEPT advised all provinces, except Sindh, to launch and implement SNC in all public and private schools as well as in madrasas. While commenting on SNC's progress, the Prime Minister had already said that by April 2021, all schools in the country would be studying the same curriculum¹⁰². It also informed concerned authorities that the new academic session would start now in August 2021 as due to Covid-19 and prolonged closure of schools, the exams were extended to be held in May-June 2021. Technically, PTBs only prepare and publish textbooks whereas it was the Programme Monitoring and Implementing Unit (PMIU) that acquires books in order to distribute them in public schools¹⁰³.

In November 2021, the federal and provincial education ministers huddled to form a committee, headed by the Additional Secretary (Ministry of Education) to implement SNC. Resultantly, the MoFEPT notified a 10-member committee to effectively implement SNC. The Committee was

mandated to devise a mechanism to streamline NOCs to facilitate schools and publishers operating around the country. Norms like joint provision of NOCs, rapid review process and honouring inter-provincial NOCs were agreed. The Committee was also mandated to foster greater public-private partnership and scaling-up the use of quality textbooks developed by the private publishers. Careful use of provincial trainings and assessments resources was also considered¹⁰⁴.

Director NCC, Secretary - Education and Literacy Department (Sindh), Secretary - School Education Department (Punjab and Balochistan), Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Managing Director PCTB, Chairperson - Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbook Board (KPTB), Directorate Curriculum and Teacher Education (KP) manned the Committee. As entitled, the committee was supposed to evolve consensus, draft guidelines on Core Standards and SLOs – as defined in SNC framework - and Inter-Provincial Harmony. Further on, the notification emphasized to accentuate the process of SNC implementation¹⁰⁵. Refuting several political claims,

the government kept shifting its stances and statements as well as implementation plans all throughout 2020 and 2021.

The current Chairperson NCC, Maryam Chughtai believes that, 'the government needs to be commended in striving to create a standard national syllabus. Nevertheless, essential enforcement of SNC - in the absence of supplementary information and training - will make it problematic for teachers as well as students'. 'Parents, she states, 'should have a choice as to what they would like their children to study. Implementation of SNC should be made a matter of choice rather than compulsion. Ideally, the government should have improved the structure of the public schools first along with the provision of better teachers and managing their training. As a matter of urgency, it should have allocated more resources and have improved the learning conditions rather than lowering down the standard for all'¹⁰⁶. It appears to be a valid position but in real terms, her very role as Chairperson NCC and as the coordinator for SNCs national consultation

readily contradicts her critique or renders it to be just a spurious lip service.

5.2. Implementing SNC in Public Schools

According to PCTB representatives, SNC provides only the guidelines to all educational institutes, responsible to implement it accordingly. It is nothing more than a curriculum plan without any restrictions to adopt a particular textbook. Therefore, private schools are free to publish and teach textbooks of their own choosing, however, as per official guidelines and not without having obtained an NOC from the corresponding authority. Validation and implementation of SNC falls within the jurisdiction of Programme Monitoring and Implementing Unit (PMIU). Punjab Education Department has already directed the respective heads of the District Education Authorities' (DEAs) and the District Registering Authorities' (DRAs) Commissioners to ensure that all registered private schools do seek approval from PCTB for textbooks and supplementary reading materials¹⁰⁷.

‘So far, hundreds of publishers have been provided NOC by the PCTB. For Instance, the Oxford University Press (OUP) and Cambridge University Press (CUP) have got approval from PCTB and can publish their own science and social science textbooks. Similarly, several other publishing institutes have also sought approval. Even if a private school wants to adopt a specific book, it can, by seeking approval and moving ahead’. Nonetheless, ‘it is yet not clear that how many schools and institutes have been granted NOCs so far’, state some of the PCTB officials. Reportedly, pertaining to the enforcement procedure of SNC, Punjab’s School Education Department (SED) is yet not clear and places responsibility on PCTB. Dealing things within time has been a chronic challenge for provincial textbook boards. On top of that lack of clarity and mutual contradiction makes the process further confusing. The Education Minister (Punjab),²⁰ describes the implementation of SNC to be ‘absolutely essential’ while stressing that ‘any news on electronic or social media regarding the exemption are fake news’¹⁰⁸. However, in the views of certain undisclosed representatives, ‘it would be

²⁰ Murad Raas.

very difficult to stop ‘SNC violation’ as the available human resource is drastically insufficient to monitor the process as it is being implemented without taking into account the available institutional capacity and resources’¹⁰⁹.

Post 18th Amendment, Sindh School Education Standards and Curriculum Act was passed in 2015 ending up in constituting Sindh Curriculum Council while the Bureau of Curriculum was refurbished as Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research (DCAR). Having had about 9 meetings with Sindh Textbook Board (STB), the respective Minister for Education, in consultation with STB and other associated departments decided to not to implement SNC as it was entirely an arena of the provincial government. Even then the Minister, being cautious enough, advised his department to study, compare it with the proposed SNC and extend any suggestions – if workable¹¹⁰. STB, therefore, did not prepare new textbooks as desired or directed by MoFEPT. The Board is rather developing its own new curriculum to be introduced at the secondary, higher secondary and intermediate levels of the new academic year

2022-2023. The Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research (DCAR) and STB published primary classes textbooks according to their existing syllabus¹¹¹.

Monopolizing, the production of books, the provincial textbook boards, usually produce shoddily printed books with poor pedagogy and graphics over low quality papers, replete with mistakes. The very attitude, in fact, props up the probabilities of corruption. The handsomely paid, textbook authors are handpicked and then keep coming up with new editions, one after the other, with marginal modifications only. Sticking to one book multiplies their profits as textbooks are printed in millions – throwing massive financial burden over parents. But for writers, reviewers and publishers every new edition multiplies their profits. SNC will phenomenally intensify the problems for declaring one textbook to be compulsory for multiple streams of education. Though since 18th Amendment, textbooks are being provided free of charge to the government schools but hundreds of thousands of children of scores of low-fee private cum charity schools (following the

government-recommended curriculum) have to buy books from the market. Thus, SNC textbooks are limiting the learning horizons even further. Parochial bureaucracy welcomes all such moves to narrow down the younger generation's vision and amplify their authority¹¹².

In case of change, be it positive or negative, education bureaucracy proves to be indolent and inefficient²¹. If at all, new curriculum naturally takes time to settle down within the existing framework, further so in this case of the heaviest curriculum introduced in the name of SNC. Even the 4th and 5th Graders are burdened with 5 subjects whereas most public schools are run just by 1 to 3 teachers, already struggling to cope with the existing strength and subjects to teach. Around 71 percent of the schools in Sindh have 1 to 3 teachers. Save Punjab, the situation is more or less the same in Balochistan and KP, particularly in rural schools of the provinces. Far from the governmental claims, inequity is likely to go up than coming down¹¹³.

²¹ Muhammad Arif Ghazlani, Head of Multan Public School, Multan.

Critics and analysts were not duly heard. Even Sindh's reservations and causes of concerns remained unheard. SNC was not the first and the sole starting point. By and large, the programme is poorly designed, awkwardly launched and implemented haphazardly. Public school teachers are failing to adapt to the new content even after the training – a ritual performed virtually in a hodgepodge, sporadic and shallow manner – replete with errors and absenteeism. Counteracting the truth on ground, the Punjab Government still claims of prolonged consideration and having extended training to thousands of teachers around SNC¹¹⁴ - assisted by online Learning Management System (LMS)¹¹⁵.

Independent educationists are concerned that clueless, yet powerful government officers, might harm the future of education. Private Sector is unable to publish their textbooks without securing NOC – turning out to be a multi-layered and constrictive process. Besides, they run the risk of complying with the shoddy-standard model textbooks published by the government. Naturally, they fail to figure out which books can or cannot be

offered to the students in the upcoming academic year. Off the record, several high-ranking officials, overseeing SNC's implementation, confess of the messy situation. There are others, who are least bothered about. One of the high officials, reportedly, told the concerned private schools' representatives that, 'they need not to be overly concerned about the slapdash situation. As the time goes by, 'everyone will adjust and the brouhaha will stop'. Just to prove its loyalty to the central government, only PCTB proactively plays the role of an arbiter of the textbooks published in the province – despite the fact that model textbooks, their structure and content are severely under fire. Pretty awkwardly, the Board appears to be a dollop of faith and patriotism¹¹⁶.

The Education Minister (Punjab), termed the independent critics as 'mafias' turning against SNC's implementation and reiterated in the words, "make no mistake about it, SNC will be implemented in its letter and spirit. These mafias²² have only personal interests and slave

²² In original tweet the key word "MAFIA" and "Slave Mentality" appear in bold and first letter capital. Written as regular text by the Authors.

mentality¹¹⁷”. Following the suit, conservative journalists and religious clerics also began labelling rational critics as ‘infidels’, ‘anti-state elements’ and ‘elitists’ – without giving an ear to their sensible criticism. Regarding the technical aspects of SNC, the Director of the Bureau of Curriculum and Extension Wing (BCEW), Sindh, was of the opinion that, ‘the larger part of SNC was just an emulation of the 2006s National Curriculum that the province had already incorporated. Their school curriculum is largely activity-based and takes into account the ‘students learning outcomes’ too. Overlooking learning outcomes, what has been mainly taken care of in SNCs is Islamiyat¹¹⁸. If the Federal Government was seriously interested in introducing a progressive curriculum, they should have had worked more on science subjects’.

Contradicting all such claims of introducing an ideal system, reality on ground is entirely opposite. In the views of A.H. Nayyar, an acclaimed educationist, ‘sticking to one textbook for one subject is primarily responsible for the existing dismal state of affairs. The public examination boards - about 25 of them - follow the same

pattern. The 'students learning outcomes,' 'analytical ability,' 'creativity' and 'comprehension' indicated by NCC are nothing more than fancy words devoid of any substance, as the kind of curriculum and textbook recommended by SNC do not hold such worth. An attempt to eliminate single textbooks in favour of multiple books for a subject - as was the case in 1970 - was made in 2007 under the National Textbooks and Learning Materials Policy. Multiple publishers were invited to submit draft textbooks for the approval and MoFEPT also chose eminent authors to writing textbooks. But the plan was eventually shelved. Had it went through, it would have introduced a positive competition between authors and publishers, and multiple quality textbooks might have been circulating in the market. As the initiative would have undermined the importance of PTBs – monopolizing the authority of regulating textbooks – they left no stone unturned to overturn it. Eventually vested interests and malevolent influences crept in during the final rounds of the policy-shift and subverted the process of change underway¹¹⁹. With the launch of SNC, similar interest lobbies have become even stronger'.

The current government is, once again strengthening, the disastrous single textbook policy. Prepared by MoFEPT, the so-called model textbooks, prepared by the Ministry of Federal Education, are being passed on to other provinces to print them as the product of their own textbook boards. Obviously, the provinces and regions following the centre will undergo similar problems. In fact, doing away with the single textbook policy is the stepping stone of improving our public education. Exam questions should be posed not from the single text but from the curriculum-defined learning outcomes. Currently, the officially defined experts set exam questions from only the prescribed textbook. So much so that indicating which page and paragraph they prepared their exam questions from is also part of their standard operating procedure. Thus, it naturally binds teachers and students to only one book per subject per class. Words like 'critical understanding' and 'cognitive skills', used by SNCs' SLOs reach nowhere beyond verbosity. SNC also compels teachers, students and examiners to treat one textbook as sacred. Exercise questions in SNC model textbooks

ask nothing more than reproducing answers from the text. Rote memorisation, clearly, is going to dominate public schooling system once again, massively cutting down subject comprehension¹²⁰.

Ideally, printing SNC textbooks should stop. If at all, the curriculum needs to be redesigned in the light of the criticism and suggestions extended above. Likewise, NCC should commence the consultation process afresh.

5.3. Implementing SNC in Private Schools

Private schools are at a fix over the federal and provincial government's command to implement SNC. The sudden change along with shifting of medium of instruction (Moi) from English to Urdu for Science and Social Studies – merged into one subject known as General Knowledge at primary level – also make the transition challenging. The books prescribed by SNC were approved – though not all – far later than the commencement of the academic session – 2021-2022 in March 2021. Grappling with procedural difficulties, along with their substantial reservations on the SNC recommended texts – several elite schools have

reservations in implementing SNC. Beaconhouse School System, Aitchison College, City Schools System, Roots Millennium, Lahore Grammar School, The Educators and even Army Public Schools and Colleges are reluctant to blend SNC into their existing curriculum – which they believe is of higher quality than the one recommended. Reportedly, certain influential schools were allowed to carry on with their own curriculum without making fuss – so long as a way out is found for them. But certain other schools, such as Aitchison College, were strictly instructed to implement SNC immediately, or ‘an action will be taken against it’¹²¹. Even some of the private schools were threatened to revoke their licences, if they would not adopt SNC. *“Zero exemption’, on the implementation of SNC; it shall be equally implemented in all public and private schools and madrasas”*¹²², tweeted the Minister for Education, Punjab. He also termed avoiding implementation of SNC as ‘challenging writ of the government’¹²³.

The Textbook Publishers Association (TPA) demanded the federal government to direct the PCTB to speedily issue them NOCs and withdraw

the hefty fee for that. Otherwise, they will have to increase the prices of the books even further – as high as 300 percent because they are made to pay Rs 140,000 to PCTB and its Review Committee. At present the publishers are supposed to give Rs 15,000 to Curriculum Review Committees; Rs 45,000 to Mutahida Ulema Board (MUB), Rs 80,000 to External Review Committees and Rs 15,000 to PCTB herself against issuance of NOC. Also, for approval, the publishers have to submit 5 to 8 copies of each book to PCTB desiring additional publishing by spending Rs 2,500 more. ‘In this manner’, argues TPA, ‘SNC would turn out oxymoron and strengthen class-based education system further’. ‘Though, respective curriculum boards’, say Private Schools Management Association (PSMA), Sindh, and General Secretary, Pakistan Alliance of Private Schools Association (PAPSA), advised us to print books as per government’s model textbooks - keeping in mind their themes and methodology, but the transition from one curriculum to the other is never a smooth sailing as the government tends to think’¹²⁴.

Accumulatively, including fees and prices of the authors, editors, paper-cost, printing, binding, marketing and office overheads, end price of the books shall increase exorbitantly – heavily burdening the parents. In the words of TPA’s representative, ‘last year primary class syllabus costed close to Rs 4,000 which may swell to Rs 12,000 this year, if associated fees are not subsidized. Simultaneously, certain representatives of PCTB affirm of approving around 125 books of private publishers from Grade-I to X¹²⁵. To worsen the situation further, private publishers have been imposed a deadline without taking them in confidence. Complicating things further, review and NOC procedure varies between provinces. Instead of a clear policy prescriptions, chaos abounds¹²⁶. On top of that, Punjab’s Education Minister tweeted proudly that ‘private publisher’s books cost thousands of rupees, while the government’s one-year course can be purchased in Rs 800 only. The Mafia's object because their money will stop flowing in’¹²⁷.

National and Provincial Private School Association (PSAs) growled that the government was insisting

to adopt SNC while the books, till the beginning of the session (March 2021), were not available in the market. Whatever was there, was in piecemeal either in the shape of screenshots, social media clips or certain bits were placed on the ministry's website. A noteworthy private school's letter written to the parents' states that: 'working within the SNC constrains and providing quality education to children has become a challenge. Preparing students to be internationally competitive - along with teaching SNC subject - will significantly increase work pressure on students and teachers, particularly at the middle and secondary levels. School administration has always complied with government directives and implementing SNC would require a complete renovation of the school programme in 3 months - an endeavour that could only be carried out over several years. Under the circumstances, if the parents have some complaints²³, they must launch these against the respective ministries'¹²⁸.

Number of parents are apprehensive of implementing SNC in high-fee private schools – lest

²³ Emphasis is of the Authors'.

it degenerates the quality of education their children acquire. Nevertheless, it is evident that private schools will, somehow, manage to maintain their standard. After all, it is their business yielding them massive profits. Eventually, it is the low-fee private and underprivileged public schools and non-formal evening, community and charity schools will bear the brunt of unthoughtful political experimentation with schooling²⁴. In principle, parents have the right to choose whatever nature and quality of education they wish to impart to their children – though under certain qualifiers. So long as they do not trust government schools for imparting the progressive social and scientific education – what they want their children to receive – they have every right to pick and choose the school and syllabi for their kids¹²⁹. In other words, SNC is going to overboard parental right to choose quality and content of their children’s learning. Reportedly, Aitchison, a renowned college in Lahore, expressed its concerns over the quality and content of the model textbooks, and refused to adopt them¹³⁰. Elite schools are reluctant for their

²⁴ N. Khalid, Senior Teacher of a Private School in Multan (The respondent requested to keep his/her name anonymous).

own reasons while low-fee schools, despite having multiple concerns, are too vulnerable to argue against²⁵.

5.4. Implementing SNC in Religious Seminaries (Madrasas)

Before describing the status of SNC's implementation in madrasas, it is relevant to mention the Minister for Federal Education believes that, "*...the new generation would be made a true Muslim, and a good Pakistani through the new syllabus (read education*²⁶). Also, the new curricula should teach ethics to the minorities according to their own faith"¹³¹. The Minister also lauds the role of madrasas, time and again, in the words say, that they are... 'imparting education to the children of the poor and underprivileged sections of the society'¹³², thus lending a great service to the nation.

The Prime minister and, the Federal and Provincial Minister for Education in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, have, specifically, been claiming of

²⁵ As revealed from KIs with a range of private schools' representatives.

²⁶ Insertion in the parenthesis is of the Authors.

simultaneously implementing SNC in madrasas too though the state of affairs there is inappropriate and non-conducive. At the same time, those at the helm, are either unaware of the obstacles in doing that or they are underplaying it just for political gains. Madrasas are not homogenous in terms of class, category, content, sect, school of thought and most importantly in their system of teaching Islam. Before moving ahead with such plans, no deeper analysis and corresponding strategy has been drawn. Since day one, save a few unthoughtful statements, no sense of the situation on ground seems clearer to both ends. Where, with which, at what levels, in how many madrasas and how-far SNC will be implemented? What kind of curriculum, timeframe and most importantly the purpose they are already promoting and how to appropriate their systems and substance? Simply no mapping or careful consideration at all – whatsoever. The government, respective ministries, PTBs and SEDs never did their homework - in any area - but they are particularly clueless and about the system and content being offered in madrasas. The truth is that implementing

SNC in madrasas, if at all, is far bigger and daunting a task than in any other genera of schooling.

Save Tableeghi Jamat, which provides highly informal Islamic education without any certification²⁷, all other streams offer a formal Islamic education under 5 of their Boards ie Wafaq²⁸-ul-Madaris Al-Arbia (Hanfi and Deobandi), Wafaq-ul-Madaaris al-Salfia (Ahl-e-Hadeeth), Tanzeem-ul-Madaris (Ahl-e-Sunnat), Wafaq-ul-Madaris (Al-shia) and Rabta-ul-Madaris of Jamat-e-Islami²⁹. The first one is the largest Wafaq,³⁰ and their apex organization ie Ittehad Tanzeemat-ul-Madrasas is known to have requested the Federal Government to allow them 5 to 6 years at least, to accommodate SNC within their existing system. Reportedly, an MoU has been signed for the same¹³³. Al-Arbia and Al-Shia Wafaq agree of madrasas to be managed by the respective

²⁷ For example, the madrasas run by the known Maulana Tariq Jameel prover informal Quran-o-Sunnah education without handing over any certificate to the qualifying students. They believer, their Islamic education is just to please God.

²⁸ Wafaq stands for 'federal'.

²⁹ Save certain variance in sectarian interpretation, all of the claim of teaching Nizami Curriculum.

³⁰ Information disclosed by the representatives of Jamia Muhammadiya, Islamabad.

education ministries while the other three do not agree with them³¹. However, not a single madrasa, interacted during the study, mentioned of having been formally consulted or communicated about the status and plan of SNC to be implemented by their respective Wafaq.

Although Sunni sect makes up around three-fourth of the population in the country, larger number of madrasas are affiliated with the Deobandi school of thought. Save Ahl-e-Tashee's Wafaq-ul-Madaris, Islamic syllabus of all the systems is largely the same³². Conventionally, under their respective Dars-e-Nizami, they have not been teaching sciences and even most of the social science subjects too – save those seminaries or mainly religious charity or falaahi schools that have been teaching government approved curriculum in parallel with the Islamic courses³³.

³¹ As reported by Mujahid Gardezi, Head of Majlis Wahdat-ul-Muslimeen (MWM), Multan Division.

³² Maulana Tanveer A. Alvi, Jamia Muhammadiya, Islamabad.

³³ First-hand information collected from multiple madrasas in Islamabad, Karachi, Multan and Layyah.

Roughly, there will, perhaps be, less than 10 percent³⁴ of the madrasas who are already offering Islamic as well as secular studies in a systematic manner and may, if they like, adopt SNC. Even these madrasas formally state that their real purpose is to 'serve Islam and produce religious scholars, maulvis and imam mosques. They impart them basic literacy and numeracy skills just to help them manage their day-to-day mundane matters. Usually, they allocate less than one-fourth of their teaching-learning time to the latter than to the key thrust of their schooling ie religious education. Most of them rather wish formal schools to adopt their model than other way round. Dedicating one's time to secular studies more than what is allocated, is even believed to be a disciplinary violence. Usually, their academic year is about two months longer than a government school's typical academic year¹³⁴.

A huge number of madrasas – statistics unavailable – simply lack an academic framework, resources,

³⁴ This is just a rough estimate drawn from random visits to and conversations with madrasas representatives. No reliable statistics are available in this regard.

classrooms and teachers to accommodate SNC³⁵. Their SLOs, written or unwritten, are entirely faith-driven. Those who offer Islamic education exclusively, simply enrol a student of whatever former or informal learning he comes with and at whatever age and whichever area he comes from. Characteristically, they start teaching him Arabic alphabets, phonology and fundamental expressions to help him learn naazira Quran and then proceed to Hifz. A few madrasas, ie the likes of Jamia Salfia, Dar-ul-Uloom-e-Islami, Jamia Dar-ul-Uloom and Khair-ul-Madaris, as explained by Maulana Akhtar Ayube, observe a prerequisite that a child must be Primary Pass at least, Hafiz and must not be older than 15. If not Hafiz, must not be older than 10. Higher education such as Khaasa Awwal and Khaasa Doam, Aaliya Awwal, Aaliya Dom, and Doara-e-Hadees or Shahadat-e-Aalmya are offered by extremely limited number of madrasas in Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa³⁶.

³⁵ KII with Saeed-ur-Rahman Rabbani, اسلام آباد ، اداره علوم اسلامی، مدرس و ناظم امتحانات

³⁶ Ideas extracted from KII with Maulana Taimoor Usmani and Hafiz Abdul Basit (Dar-ul-Uloom-e-Islami, Islamabad) and from representatives of multiple other madrasas; and Abd-ul-Basit, the Mohtamm (Administrator).

Charity schools operating within the aegis of madrasas such as Faiz-ul-Islam or Ahrar-ul-Islam intend to implement SNC straight on as they embrace governmental system in its entirety despite managing their premises, salaries and operational costs through charity³⁷. Several of their spokespersons think that SNC's implementation in madrasas (save those already following the state system) is highly likely to fail as their curriculum is deeply entrenched in Islamic tradition despite some sectarian and ideological differences. The government, they also stress, is neither sincere nor wilful and resourceful enough to transform all systems all at once³⁸. As articulated by Maulana Tanveer A. Alvi³⁹, of Jamia Muhammadiya (Islamabad) *“Uniform System of Education (madrasa representatives usually confuse between*

³⁷ Faiz-ul-Islam school is registered as trust and is affiliated with Rawalpindi Secondary School Board. Periodical as well as random contribution is made by the ordinary people or, in certain cases, from those already having studied in the school and now serving at some privileged positions. Some of the retired teachers also server here, without any major financial interest (KII with the Principal of the School).

³⁸ Representatives of Anjuman Faiz-ul-Islam (Shabbir A. Satti) and Majlis Ahrar-e-Islam – names kept synonymous upon request. Representative of Future Generation School, A Charity School in Sang Jani.

³⁹ Deputy Head of Jamia Muhammadiya, Islamabad.

USE and SNC⁴⁰) is a beautiful idea as it may put an end to the deprived children's feelings of inferiority but the government lacks both will and sincerity coupled with its inability to provide required financial and technical assistance to madrasas".

Unlike common public perception, most madrasas⁴¹ (save Jamat-e-Islami's Rabta-ul-Madaris) do not explicitly associate themselves with any local or larger political party. Some of them⁴² even claim of expelling those students demonstrating their allegiance to any political party or participating in a religio-political procession. "Once Ijaz-ul-Haq (the son of Zia-ul-Haq)", states Saeed-ur-Rahman, (the representative of Jamia-Uloom-e-Islamia, Islamabad) sent us a cheque of Rs 400,000 in charity, but we turned it down with thanks,".

Early 2000s, an ordinance, known as 'Pakistan Madrasa Education (Establishment and Affiliation of Model Dini Madaris) Board Ordinance 2001' was promulgated on August 18th, 2001. Under the

⁴⁰ Insertion within the parenthesis is of the authors.

⁴¹ At least those the authors interacted in Punjab and Sindh.

⁴² Dar-ul-Uloom-e-Islami and Jamia-tul-Rasheed for instance.

proposed Education Sector Reforms, three model institutions were set up; one each in Karachi, Sukkur and Islamabad. Their curriculum included the subjects of Mathematics, Computer Science, English, Economics, Political Science, Law and Pakistan Studies at different levels. The reform effort was not welcomed by the ulema. Similarly, the Voluntary Registration and Regulation Ordinance 2002 was also rejected by most of the madrassas vehemently rejecting any possibility of state interference in the affairs of madrassas. According to P.W. Singer, only about one-tenth of the madrassas agreed to be registered and the rest simply ignored the statute¹³⁵. The move came to a halt, there and then. No more model madrassas could be set up in the years to come.

5.5. Structure and Content of Dars-e-Nizami and Accommodating SNC within

Whatever point of spectrum it may exist, whosoever you meet in a madrasa (teachers or students), they term it Dars-e-Nizami system of education. Historically, Nizami Curriculum was devised by an Islamic scholar, Mullah Nizam-u-Din (1677-1740) (of Barabanki, Utter Pradesh) in mid-

eighteenth century (around 1740) Mullah Nizami radically reformed the tradition of Islamic teaching comprising *manqulaat* (imitational sciences) alone, to integrate it with *ma'qulaat* (rational sciences) as well in the given system. Building upon and expanding the curriculum to serve the temporal needs, Persian Literature, Philosophy, Mathematics, Astronomy, History, Medicine, Engineering even Managerial and Bureaucratic Knowledge of the time were also part of the studies along with Arabic Grammar ie Sarf-o-Nahv, Quran-o-Hadeeth, Fiqah, Usool-e-Fiqah (Islamic Jurisprudence), Ilm-e-Balaghat (knowledge of rhetoric), Qanoon-e-Virasat (law of inheritance), and Sharah-o-Tafseer (principles of exegesis). But with the passage of time, almost three-fourth of that has gone through foundational transformation (read it degeneration), so much so that it can hardly be called Dars-e-Nizami, save a historical attribution or merely a nomenclature. Comparatively, Mullah Nizami's reforms not only supplemented, rather preferred *ma'qulaat* (logic and science) over *manqulat* ie Islamic tradition or imitational knowledge¹³⁶.

Pretty surprisingly, there was a movement against Dars-e-Nizami with the same times due to its predominant inclination towards logic, science and arts than traditional madrasa studies. Shah Abdul Raheem (1644-1719), the father of the well-known Islamic reformer Shah Waliullah, had already constituted his own system of madrasa education, dubbed as Dars-e-Raheemia, that preferred *manqulaat* over *maqulaat*¹³⁷. Post humorously, his sons Shah Waliullah (1703-1762) and Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1824) who overtook his father's legacy, further promoted *manqulaat* over *ma'qulaat*, and institutionally preferred traditional subjects over rational sciences. In certain instances, they rather opposed the modernist tradition of Dars-e-Nizami. But for having relatively weaker content⁴³, the name went into oblivion though having caused an irreparable damage to the original Dars-e-Nizami.

Nizami Curriculum was initially adopted by Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband (India) and is now part of madrasas of all sects and schools of thought both in India and Pakistan. Though, lagging behind in keeping pace with the contemporary scientific and

⁴³ Emphasis is of the Authors.

technological demands, it has lost the original spirit of the system, yet it is still popularly known as Dars-e-Nizami. Only a few of the Madrasas say, Dar-ul-uloom Deoband (Karachi), Darul-uloom-e-Islami (Islamabad) and Jamia Khair-ul-Madaris (Multan) may sustain bare minimum elements of *ma'qulat* in their Dars-e-Nizami curriculum. In other words, it is in fact Dars-e-Raheemia curriculum that they teach under the garb of Dars-e-Nizami¹³⁸.

The fact is that along with exclusively Islamic syllabus, part of the rational sciences such as Falsafiat (Astronomy), Iqtisadiyat (Economics), Falsafa (Philosophy), Elm-e-Mantiq (Logic), Tassuvrat-e-Feesaghoras (theories of Pythagoras), Meeras (the law of inheritance), Ilm-e-Balaghat (Rhetoric) are still taught in Pakistani Madrasas but their approach is exclusively conservative or pseudoscientific – devoid of rational and scientific logic, modern theories, innovative approaches and new discoveries in all spheres of life and existence⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ Extracted from the Authors' observations and interaction with several madrasas in Punjab, Islamabad and Karachi.

5.6. Teacher's Perception about SNC

To gather teachers' views about their familiarity, content, quality and applicability of SNC, IDRAC asked select questions from the teachers of the public and private schools as well as madrasas. The survey questionnaire also enquired if their school had received SNC books and alternatively, if they were available in the market; had they gone through these books (especially their own subject); did they find the new syllabus as easy or difficult for students; and would it put an end to the apartheid system of education or not and what was their opinion about the Islamic material within Islamiyat and other subjects etc.

Teachers' Familiarity with the Single National Curriculum (SNC)				
School/ Madrasa	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Public	85	39%	3	23%
Private	92	42%	4	31%
Madrasa	42	19%	6	46%
Total	219	100%	13	100%

Table 6: Teacher's Familiarity with the Single National Curriculum

A majority of government teachers (39 percent) are aware of the SNC initiative launched by the federal government in the country. Similarly, a fair number of private (42 percent) and madrasa (19 percent) teachers have familiarization with the SNC. While, in absolute count, only a fractions of respondents were not acquainted with the needful details of SNC.

Provision of Single National Curriculum Textbook in Your School / Madrassa?						
School/ Madrassa	Yes		No		N/A	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	88	75%	0	0%	0	0%
Private	19	16%	77	76%	0	0%
Madrassa	10	9%	24	24%	14	100%
Total	117	100%	101	100%	14	100%

Table 7: Provision of Single National Curriculum Textbook in School / Madrassa?

All the government teachers (75 percent) participated in the survey affirmed that, they have received the SNC based textbooks (Class I-V) provided by the respective education department. It is important to note here, that not a single teacher negated the provision of textbooks. When

it comes to private schools, teachers (16 percent) have reported that not all, but some of the textbooks are available in the market, and can be purchased, however, in accordance with their school system. Though, teachers (76 percent) reported that schools are either (i). waiting for the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board (PCTB) to issue NOC; (ii). NOC issued, yet books are in printing phase; (iii). limited number of copies are available in the market; and (iv). not available in the market. Similar reasons are with Madrassas students in regards to buying and availability of textbooks.

In the opinion of the Headmaster of a Government School in the suburbs of sector G-14, Islamabad, they had yet not received books officially. Though they had one personal copy of each subject. Schools that rapidly received the new syllabus earlier, even did not receive before October 2021. Regarding the element of change in the new textbooks, he thought, there was no remarkable change, perhaps no more than 30 percent from the

2006’s syllabus. Major shift that he noticed was in the subject of Islamiyat⁴⁵.

Read the Single National Curriculum Textbooks?						
School/ Madrasa	Yes		No		N/A	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	80	70%	8	10%	0	0%
Private	25	22%	64	79%	7	30%
Madrasa	9	8%	9	11%	16	70%
Total	114	100%	81	100%	23	100%

Table 8: Teacher Read the Single National Curriculum Textbooks?

A large proportion of public-school teachers (70 percent), private schools (22 percent), and 8 percent in madrassas stated that they had gone through the SNC textbooks. At the same time, a relatively large proportion of private (79 percent), and a meaningful (11 percent) of madrasa teachers replied in negation. Rarely a teacher, opines the Head of the Allied School, had gone through SNC model textbooks – including his/her own subject. All opinions that you hear around are perceptual⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ Respondent’s name is being kept synonymous on his request.

⁴⁶ KII with Dr Maria, the representative of the Allied School, Layyah?

Course is Easy or Difficult for Students?		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	129	56
No	24	10
Don't Know	79	34
Total	232	100

Table 9: Course is Easy or Difficult for Students

Overall, 56 percent of the teachers responded that SNC course was easier than before. A fair percentage (34 percent) had had no idea, and 10 percent replied in the negative, and they also found it difficult for students to grasp new concepts and information.

The New Curriculum will Improve our Education System?						
School/ Madrasa	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	75	56%	7	21%	6	9%
Private	44	33%	10	29%	42	66%
Madrasa	15	11%	17	50%	16	25%
Total	134	100%	34	100%	64	100%

Table 10: The New Curriculum will Improve our Education System

Sizeable number of government teachers (56 percent) believed that the new curriculum was an important step to further improve the existing

education system. Similarly, considerable private teachers (33 percent) trusted that SNC would further strengthen the existing class-based system of education. Whereas, Madrasa teachers were having mix opinions, and results showed that, in general, they were not very forthcoming towards the SNC based curriculum.

The New Curriculum Finally Eliminate Class Segregation (Positive / Negative)						
School/ Madrasa	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	72	64%	10	13%	6	14%
Private	26	23%	60	77%	10	24%
Madrasa	14	13%	8	10%	26	62%
Total	112	100%	78	100%	42	100%

Table 11: The New Curriculum finally Eliminate Class Segregation (positive / negative)

The foundation of the entire SNC stood on the question that if the new curriculum-based system of education was able to eliminate discriminatory system of education? Accordingly, responses received were diverse. Unsurprisingly government school teachers overwhelmingly (64 percent) opposed the assumption, saying SNC would

certainly fail to eliminate multiple system of education, and will rather strengthen the class divide. A significant number of private school teachers (77 percent) thinks that it will not be able to eliminate class segregation. On the other hand, certain of the government teachers, though minor, but meaningful (n=10), and madrassah (n=8), opposed this notion of the government. They argued that SNC alone was not helpful in putting an end to the class divide in the existing system of education.

In the views of some of the madrasa representatives, say Maulana Tanveer A. Alvi from Jamia Muhammadia, 'madrassas are there to serve Islam and produce aalam-e-deen (religious scholars) and not to produce doctors or engineers⁴⁷', while others think, 'the purpose of madrasas is to produce a fine blend of *asri* (contemporary) and *deeni uloom* (religious scholarship)⁴⁸. But in both of the representative

⁴⁷ KII with Maulana Tanveer A. Alvi, Deputy Head of Jamia Muhammadia, Islamabad.

⁴⁸ To simplify, those sticking to traditional religious education hold the first opinion while those imparting formal education as well along with religious studies believe the latter. The

views, their main thrust remains on Islamic education.

Yet another stock of madrasa representatives thinks, *“the so-called governmental effort to implement SNC in madrasas is pointless. ‘Why should it? they argue. What contribution does it make in sustaining or facilitating our system? What of facilitating us, this or that government keeps slinging one or another blame upon madrasas – including the most serious one of ‘being terrorist nurseries’. Thus, it holds no legitimacy of reforming the existing system or syllabi of madrasas. It even doesn’t appoint madrasa-qualified youth as teachers of Islamiyat in public schools or colleges. We ourselves afford our students’ boarding, lodging and utility expenses. Why should we then abide by their commands. In fact, it is the government’s tactic to appoint its own teachers in madrasas – as intruders⁴⁹”.*

former category is quite limited in terms of number – though no formal statistics are available.

⁴⁹ Qari Abdul Ghafoor (KII), Jamia Raheemia, Layyah, Hafeez-ur-Rahman, Jamia Salfia, Islamabad, Madrasa Al-Rasheedia, Sector G-11/3 and others.

On the other hand, those madrasas registered with the 'provincial affiliation and examination boards' have no option but to welcome the new syllabus. There are others who argue that, *'who can refuse its benefits, if public and private students are brought at par through singular national curriculum. But it is almost certainly impossible for the government cannot arm-twist the powerful elite schools'*⁵⁰. It lacks credentials to push down 'alligators' in the field and on top of that, *'they are not willing to allocate resources desired for the cause'*⁵¹.

Not dealt in detail but the employment probability of students qualifying from all three streams of schooling does come into question, whosoever you talk to. Madrasa representatives particularly complain of being discriminated in the employability market. In the words of the Head of Jamia Salfia, Hafeez-u-Rahman⁵², *'Forget about sciences, at least we can teach Urdu, Arabic and*

⁵⁰ Muhammad Taimoor, Senior Arabic Grammar and Arabic Literature Teacher, Idara Uloom-e-Islami, Islamabad.

⁵¹ Principle Anjuman Faiz-ul-Islam School, Shabbir A. Satti (KII).

⁵² Hafeez-ur-Rahman, Principle Jamia Salafia & Abdul-Basit, Admin Officer, Dar-ul-Uloom-e-Islami, Islamabad.

Persian far better than teachers in other systems of education. Even after having secured 'equivalence' from Higher Education Commission (HEC), men qualifying from our system are not employed as teachers for the said subjects too, save they hold a parallel degree in the same subject from a government recognized university. It is no less than a conspiracy against those serving the cause of Islam. Only Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government respects madrasa qualified men, and if on merit, employs them too. Nevertheless, a limited number of qualifying students from Dar-ul-Uloom-e-Islami (Islamabad), Jamia Khair-ul-Madaris (Multan) and Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband (Karachi) turn out to be relatively successful in securing employment for teaching in public universities, colleges or in armed forces as Religious Motivation Officers (RMOs), Khateeb, Imam Mosques, and though few, but College or University Lecturers too'⁵³.

⁵³ Saeed-ur-Rahman, Nazim and Seerat Teacher of Islamiyat at Dar-ul-Uloom, Islamia, Islamabad.

5.7. SNC, Teachers' Absenteeism and Corresponding Apprehensions

In remote and rural areas, many a teacher still remains missing from classrooms, particularly in Sindh and Balochistan. For example, the Principal of a GGHS (Purana Chaman, Balochistan)⁵⁴ disclosed that, *"since I joined the school a couple of years ago (2018), out of the 8 formally appointed teachers, not a single one would turn up to the school – though they would draw their salaries without a miss. To get things going, I have privately hired 3 teachers urging the original ones to pay off at least one third of their salaries. Divide the 'contribution' made by the government-appointed teachers into three equal portions, I pay it to the four proxy teachers". "The 'system' is quite common in northern Balochistan, known as evazi ustaad⁵⁵", as told by another teacher of GBMS of Quetta.*

⁵⁴ Upon the respective Head of the School's request, her name is being kept anonymous.

⁵⁵ The information was shared by one of the teachers from Government Boys Middle School, Killi Almas. Name kept anonymous upon request.

“Broken furniture is squeezed into a couple of rooms as there are about 500 girls enrolled. In others, I have to pack at least 100 students into a single room – all on floor even in the chilling cold of Chaman (Balochistan) in the winter. This is how the school runs. It is not the case in this school or in this district, rather the situation is quite common in northern parts of Balochistan,” the principal of GGHS (Purana Chaman), argues.

Similarly, in the words of the Headmaster of GBHS (Purana Chaman), *“over 550 students are enrolled in this school with 7 classrooms and 15 teachers. On average, each teacher has to teach 40 students while accommodating 71 or more in one class and classroom. Teachers’ absenteeism is common, but taking EDO in confidence, I began deducting around Rs 10,000-11,000 from their salary in case of absence for X number of days. The tactic has worked a bit but old habits die hard. There is a chronic shortage of teachers as well as classrooms. Come summer or winter, many students have to sit on floor. Free books and free uniform certainly work as incentive for poor parents but it is hard to manage uniform for 500 plus kids just in Rs 40,000*

provided by the government under this head. Neither SNC books have been provided nor any training was conducted on that. Out of the 14 bathrooms in all, about 11 were constructed by Balochistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP). But if the bathrooms are useless, if the water is not there (the case). Eventually, bathrooms run down”.

Similarly, in GGHS, Piri Khan (Turbat) close to 52 windows and windowpanes were repaired by BRSP. Earlier, children would suffer from blazing heat in summer and terrible cold in the winter. Also, water well, boundary walls, floor, playgrounds and classrooms were repaired in addition to the provision of the two more classrooms and verandas by the same NGO. Even sports goods and supplies were provided by the same NGO. It also sponsored by the tournaments.

On top of the insufficient number of teachers' available in schools, most of the existing teachers are incapable of teaching better courses in better manners. A low quality SNC training was imparted online to maintain social distance amidst the fears of contracting COVID-19. Such a symbolic training is

highly unlikely to shift their ideology, approach and attitudes towards new subjects and new techniques. Most of the teachers are conservative and conventional in approach and behaviour who themselves believe in cramming and pouring the same material out in classrooms or exams. How can they adopt techniques inducing improved learning outcomes as is expected by the SNC Management? Besides imparting effective trainings, teachers 'learning assessment' and 'teachers' guideline' need substantial improvement. Apart from the language barrier (which itself poses substantial challenge), they know little about modern teaching methods. The point is that the public-school teachers need to be intensively taught to teach in rational and analytical manner¹³⁹. New subjects, new content, new paradigms of assessments are making students to struggle – supplemented with the Covid-19 induced gaps and school closure. All politics and debate aside – you need a considerate heart to improve the whole state of affairs. It is the matter of children's future, after all¹⁴⁰.

One way or the other most of the government school teachers still follow obsolete, teacher-

centric or textbook-centric methodology of teaching⁵⁶. Senior lot of the teachers fails to learn and practice new teaching techniques – despite having been through multiple trainings. More than often, a colossal amount of money is wasted in hodgepodge poor quality of teachers’ trainings⁵⁷. In the words of Deputy District Education Officer (DDEO, Korangi, Karachi), Elahi Bukhsh *“given their limited qualification and poor capability, explaining biological, zoological, physicist and mathematical concepts to the children, that are part of the General Science, are almost a Herculean task for the teachers”*.

Notwithstanding the desired capability of teachers, SNC’s teachers’ trainings were extended generically, without classifying school systems, teachers’ prequalification, capacity and experience, and without taking corresponding ‘learning outcomes’ into account. Private school teachers were least interested in and their attendance in online sessions was disappointingly low⁵⁸. In fact, the previous government also tried to empower

⁵⁶ Zahid Iqbal, GBS, Ochello, Islamabad.

⁵⁷ M. Arif Ghazlani, Principal Multan Public School, Multan.

⁵⁸ Sajjad Ahmad Khosa, Nice Model School, Dera Ghazi Khan.

teachers through training but much of the budget was gobbled up by bureaucratic corruption and the rest was consumed in inattentive poor-quality training without imparting them required skills on ground⁵⁹. On the one hand, Learning Management System (LMS)⁶⁰ discourages cramming but on the other, heavy subjects like intense Islamiyat, learning Holy Quran and grasping relatively better scientific and social science concepts - and the way they are going to be assessed in exams - end up prompting cramming¹⁴¹.

In views of a retired EDO (Education)⁶¹, M. Ramzan, 'Improving teachers' competency precedes students' competency. In remote and underserved areas, such as Sindh and Saraiki region, about half the government teachers are older – poorly qualified with limited capacity to absorb new concepts, theories and teaching methods. SNC content might prove arduous to their orientation. Children in public schools usually come from

⁵⁹ M. Arif Ghazlani, Principal Multan Public School, Multan.

⁶⁰ LMS is a software that delivers online courses, providing the trainees with fresh data when it's not possible for them to gather in one place.

⁶¹ Mahar Muhammad Ramzan (Rtd.), EDO (Education), Layyah.

humble backgrounds – whose parents are generally poor and non-literate. Nurtured in unsupportive environment – children also find new concepts difficult to comprehend. Loading several languages upon their heads, unsystematically, may leave them bewildered. Whatever the government may say, the next two to three years shall remain a testing phase for SNC. In reality there should have been a pilot phase before launching it with full vigour’.

Observation and interaction with madrasa teachers and administrators, speaks volumes about their teaching methodology and behaviour. They, simply, believe themselves to be the instrument or interpreters of the divine truth – where teacher can only play a role nothing more than a medium or vehicle of communicating God’s message inscribed in Holy Quran and the Prophet’s Sayings. Upholding traditional values, they believe teacher to be highly respectable and ultimate authority within the classroom. Being next to parents, his position can neither be challenged nor undermined. His behaviour could be naturally good or not so good but the onus mainly lies on the students to acquire

whatever he educates. Simply being qualified in dars-e-nizami from the same or a different madrasa, at a certain level, formally or informally, is enough to qualify as a teacher. We have rarely heard of any system of teachers training in any madrasa – though teachers’ popularity level and students’ opinion about one or another teacher may vary⁶².

In private schools, teachers are usually recruited without any training – just having a basic minimum qualification. Elite schools, however, may consider some experience too. Nevertheless, low-fee and elite private schools do provide exposure as well as training opportunities to their permanent or senior teachers. Very limited number of private teachers appeared in SNC related government trainings while, reportedly, no training was organized by the private school management themselves, exclusively on SNC. No specific, official data is available on how many teachers were trained and how many of them were drawn from different streams of education.

⁶² The Authors information and observations gathered by visiting several madrasas and interacting with multiple teachers there.

Received Single National Curriculum's Training?						
School/ Madrasa	Yes		No		N/A	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	66	75%	22	16%	0	0%
Private	13	15%	83	61%	0	0%
Madrasa	9	10%	31	23%	8	100%
Total	88	100%	136	100	8	100%

Table 12: Received Training on Single National Curriculum?

A major chunk (75 percent) of the government teachers have received the training on SNC, however, only through online sessions provided by the education department. Similarly, a limited number of private (15 percent) and madrasa (10 percent) teachers received the training through online and face-to-face learning methods. Private teachers received one-day training through their respective branch administration. While, only those madrasa teachers received face-to-face training who (i). accepted SNC, and/or (ii). are operational under the support of Punjab Literacy Schools. Rest of the madrasa teachers (23 percent) running under their respective Madaris system either (i). accepted SNC, but were unable to receive training owing to multiple reasons, and (ii). were waiting for

the respective authority to furnish them with the training. In addition, there are Madrasas (n=8) who only follow their respective Madrasas education system, hence rejected SNC at the first place.

6.

Critical Analysis of SNC Curriculum, Content and Students Learning Outcomes

The real test of quality claims are the textbooks in black and white. Federal Ministry and NCC's pronouncements of consulting around 400 experts and stakeholders along with emulating internationally recognized curriculums, and embedding state of the art SLOs can effectively be examined through Model Textbooks (MTBs) published by National Book Foundation (NBF) and PCTB (the only provincial board publishing books so far). Along with imparting theoretical knowledge and skills to the students, it is also important to consider what kind of human persons and citizens a system intends to produce.

The curriculum guidelines boast of promoting international teaching and learning trends including: peace, tolerance, civic sense, nurturing

environmental and multicultural consciousness, ethical and social attitudes and understanding of national and global context; it also stresses on the removal of hate material and promotion of gender and cultural neutrality; teaching of multiple themes, languages and vocabulary skills while adopting spiral approach of the curriculum. In addition, it also proposes incorporating themes of: sustainable lifestyle, awareness of safety and security measures; a sense of social cohesion, interconnectedness with their community and basic essence of Islam and other religions¹⁴². But to get to the blood and bones of the tall claims curriculum guidelines and learning outcomes make need to be meticulously examined.

Scrupulous content analysis – illustrated here below – comprises the study of English and Urdu Textbooks (Grades I-V), General Science and Waqfiyat-e-Aama (Grade I-V), Mathematics (Grades I, II, IV & V) and Muasharti Uloom or Social Studies (Grades IV-V). As model textbooks of Grade V-VIII have yet not been introduced, therefore, respective curriculum plan for the level has been carefully analyzed. Both positive, as well as

negative aspects of MTBs and Curriculum Plan have been appropriately highlighted. The curriculum plan as well as contents presented in the SNCs prescribed books have been hugely controversial. Thus, it is important to draw attention to them.

6.1. Volume, Extent and Writing Style of Model Textbooks

Usually, an academic year is 7.5 months long and covering the sheer volume of information and material that has been stuffed in a single book seems intimidating to be covered within this time span. On average, for instance, there are 22-25 chapters in an Urdu and English Books of Grades II to XI. If Grammar Units, placed as part of the exercises for each lesson, are included, the number of chapters' double up. Conventionally, a period comprises 40 minutes and the same amount of time is dedicated to the languages too. Normally in a year, a teacher gets to teach 130 to 150 periods only - with 5 periods in a week - to cover the whole content of a subject. Under this arrangement, 3 periods at max, can be dedicated to each chapter - which are obviously insufficient. Under the unforeseen circumstances – like strikes, security

concerns or Covid-19 like closures – the allocated time-span shrinks even further. Thus, stuffing up so much of the material is pointless, if the teachers and students cannot do justice to it¹⁴³.

Digging deeper into the subject matter of General Knowledge - introduced at Grade- I – demonstrates a clear lack of creativity. Much of the stuff is hammered in uninterestingly; is repetitive; riddled with gaps and omissions; and contrary to the NCC claims does not encourage critical, analytical or creative thinking. Though, it is usually undermined but at the average age of a child (5-6) at this level, she is already familiar with most of what is part of the General Knowledge books both in Urdu or English. Internet or television, easily in access these days already tells her much of that. If the books of General Knowledge are meant to create awareness of oneself, one's environment and of others' even then the information provided fails to serve the purpose. And If the General Knowledge textbooks are supposed to serve as foundation course for Science and Logic at Grade-IV, then deplorably enough, they lack logic and mandatory principle of topical hierarchy of teaching complex topics ahead.

Missing pieces of information or unclear understanding leads to confusion. It resembles climbing a tall building with a ladder, missing its rungs in order¹⁴⁴.

6.2. Logic, Creativity and Critical Understanding

Language and grammar serve as kids' vehicle to approach all social and scientific subjects around. If at all, they should be communicated in highly interesting and creative manner. At the age of 4-6, an average child in Pakistan enters a school already knowing at least two or three languages with a sharp language acquisition device. They are, inherently keen to learn new words, ideas and expressions – a capability usually undermined by most of the teachers and parents. Both English and Urdu Language subjects in SNC prescribed MTBs are generally devoid of logic; and are monotonous and uninteresting. Most of the essays – save certain stories or poems – are written by one particular author and edited cum supervised by a group of NCC approved authors. Ironically, neither the authors nor the supervisors are recognized literary figures.

In the presence of massively rich, fascinating and creative literature - both in Urdu and English – assigning the task to unknown and incapable authors is utterly disappointing. Likewise, exercises could have easily been developed by some established linguists and grammarians. One fails to understand, why the subject matter of Urdu and English was not chosen from a range of famous authors – including the specialized children’s authors. Precisely, Urdu and English textbooks from Grade I-V lack depth, diversity, creativity and most importantly the beauty of Urdu and English that both the languages possess. So much so, there are even grammatical and lexical errors. Obviously, no single author can do justice to a wide range of themes – even if he or she is a competent person. Having already grasped much of the language at home (Urdu and/or their mother tongue), a child is potential enough to jump start and move several steps ahead. It is unrealistic to expect a child to learn something, unless she enjoys it first. Learning complements interest. Awarding one author to produce all essays and stories clearly reveals the State’s agenda of Islamism, patriotism and

nationalism behind where language and literature are employed merely as instruments¹⁴⁵.

Certain experts believe that science and technology should have been given more importance at the primary level. Under SNC, science is no more a separate subject from Grade-I to Grade-III as it has been clubbed with social studies to be taught under General Knowledge in Urdu. Children in Grade IV & V, who have earlier been studying Social Studies in English from Grade-I onward, are now going to study it in Urdu under 'Muashrati Uloom or Social Studies' only to get back again to it in English at Grade VI and beyond¹⁴⁶. But if the private authors and publishers are not allowed to produce books - though as per SNC guidelines – then the prescribed model textbooks may prove disastrous. Nevertheless, the Minister for Federal Education reiterates that private publishers can also print the books as per SNC guidelines. Developments later reveal that private schools have finally been allowed to stick to their own choice and preferences.

According to the former Chairman Higher Education Commission, Tariq Banuri, *'refuting all its claims, SNC is going to further confuse our education system in the country. Another generation risks not being able to question their learning as it has become an insidious problem. Instead of encouraging creativity and critical thinking, it is the same old stuff that we are seeing from the past several years. With this curriculum, 'free-thinking and innovation' is highly unlikely to come by. Under the garb on 'one nation, one curriculum' the privileged students, once again, are going to offset the conservative teachings but the disadvantaged students will continue to suffer as ever before'*¹⁴⁷.

Logically, shifting the curriculum may not strike any substantial change so long as the whole system of education remains pathetic. Save in certain social science subjects, one way or the other, the substance of an area of studies has to be the same. For instance, how different can physics, chemistry, biology or mathematics be across different

curricula or system of schooling⁶³? The quality of education, teachers and teaching methodology, nonetheless, differ across unequal schooling systems. High-fee famous schools, own larger premises, hire good teachers at handsome salaries and maintain up to the mark playgrounds, labs and laboratories⁶⁴. Contrarily, public schools are deprived of every single facility, all because of the government's lack of priority and resource crunch in education. It is not hard to gather that how can children grasp scientific, logical or critical concepts without competent teachers teaching the same subjects. How can they understand a phenomenon better without personally experimenting or looking through a demonstration, even if the curriculum is the same? How can children learn sports without having trained coaches and proper playgrounds¹⁴⁸?

Some effort, however, does seem to be made to accommodate contemporary topics in sciences and social sciences but the overall content and horizons of the curriculum and model textbooks are still poor, ideologically-driven and traditionalist. Part of

⁶³ KII with Uzair Mushtaq, Mathematics Teacher at Lahore College of Arts and Sciences, Wapda Town Lahore.

⁶⁴ Head of The Educators, Multan.

it seems rubbing its contours with peace, equality, human rights and democratic norms but held with visible and invisible strings behind. Say, in the beginning or conclusion of an essay, and at times in the margins, even sciences are seen to be supplementing State ideology and Islamic Injunctions Essays or themes appear to be enfolded haphazardly without a deeper thought or preconceived logic. Several of the social science subjects turn out to be dull and drier. Patriotism, glorifying army and Islamic ideology turn up every now and then systematically or at random.

Examples and exercises for further learning are too long and certain bits simply irrelevant. In other words, building the foundations of '21st century learning outcomes' such as independent thinking, heuristic approach and problem-solving techniques – as claimed by the proponents of SNC – still seem to be afar off. On such a brittle academic underpinning, advanced learning edifice can never be installed. No surprise that in the last whole decade or more, our students' performance in ASER and STEM lags behind, even from their own level. The 2017's STEM ranking places Pakistan at

131 out of 141 countries – almost at the bottom. Across the world, Pakistani students fall far behind in Maths and Sciences. As per NEAS, the contestants’ average score falls below 50 percent¹⁴⁹. No surprise that millions of parents – of whatever socio-economic standing they come from – prefer enrolling their children into private schools¹⁵⁰.

Interestingly, Chairperson NCC also acknowledges the problem in the words that, *‘inadequately trained teachers are the biggest hurdle to the NCC driven books. It is, now, up to the schools to adopt and teach the new books. No worksheets are given with the books. As is gathered from initial students’ reactions that students are confused by two books bounded together – though the purpose was to make them economical’*. Nonetheless, she admires the change of language and argues that students are going to study General Knowledge in Urdu – as a precursor to science. Switching over to the relatively deeper or complicated ideas in English from Grades IV-V, will become convenient for them¹⁵¹. The transition will help them to proceed to the relatively complex ideas or expressions in

English and they will be ready to study sciences in English from Grade VI onwards.

6.3. SNC’s Potential for Enhancing Students’ Skills and Cognitive Ability

Primary response from the teachers of the three streams, with respect to the SNC’s ability and potential role in enhancing students’ critical understanding and cognitive ability of grasping new and complicated ideas goes as under:

SNC’s Potential for Increasing Students’ Cognitive and Practical Ability?						
School/ Madrasa	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	66	61%	15	75%	7	7%
Private	29	27%	2	10%	65	62%
Madrasa	13	12%	3	15%	32	31%

Table 13: SNC’s Potential for Increasing Students’ Cognitive and Practical Ability?

Amongst the government teachers, 61 percent teachers are optimistic that the new curriculum will increase cognitive and practical skills of the students in terms of learning new ideas and skills. While, 62 percent private teachers were not sure.

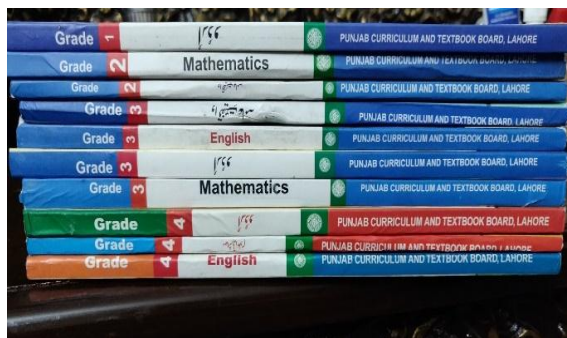
Whereas, Madrasa teachers seems sceptic, and hence cannot say that overtime, the new curriculum will bring any change.

The New Curriculum Provide a Strong Academic / Practical Basis for Children's Next Class (6th to 10th Grade)?						
School/ Madrasa	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	78	62%	4	36%	6	6%
Private	38	30%	5	46%	53	56%
Madrasa	10	8%	2	18%	36	38%

Table 14: The New Curriculum provide a Strong Academic / Practical Basis for Children's Next Class Phase (6th to 10th grade)?

From the government teachers' standpoint (62 percent) this new curriculum provides a strong academic, and solid base for the next phase (6th to 10th grade). While, close to half (46 percent) of the private teachers do not agree in this respect. Whereas, 38 percent Madrassah teachers are in doubt.

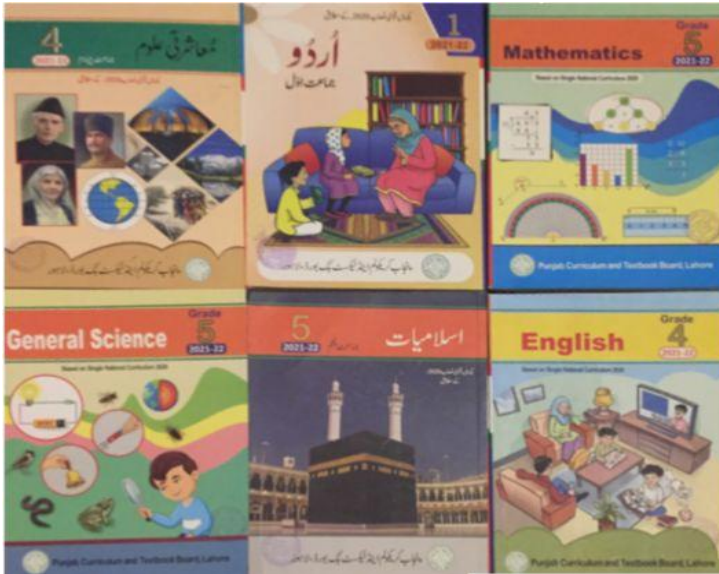
6.4. Cost, Availability and Illustration of the Books



Picture 5: Punjab Govt. Approved SNC Textbooks from Grade I to V Available at Affordable Price.

All SNC books are locally produced, designed and published and might be, more or less, widely available pretty soon. Comparing with the elite private schools' textbooks – of whose one set at the primary level may cost no less than Rs 46,000 – 50,000, SNC's complete set of a particular Grade can be purchased just in Rs 900-1200. In government primary and secondary schools, the books are provided free of charge. However, the low-fee private, charity, informal and non-formal schools have to buy these books from the market available at the affordable price.

However, this is also true that the paper, drawing, colours, composition and appearance of the books is quite unattractive, though it is understandable that. With the fine and glassy papers, they would have turned expensive and unaffordable for underprivileged parents. But the very characteristics or consciousness has caused some problems as well.



Picture 6: Locally Designed and Published SNC Textbooks

By the end of each book or in its margins certain public service messages are also inserted to raise children’s awareness in general or to sensitize them

about some societal problems or concerns. For instance, children have been advised on cleanliness, environmental consciousness, natural disasters, to not to talk to and not to accept anything from strangers. Also, there are blurbs about the safer way of crossing a road and the health-benefits of physical exercise and how to avoid from mosquitos to stay safe from malaria and dengue. All such messages are meant to transform children into civilized and responsible citizens, which is obviously a good thing.

6.5. Gender Based Analysis of the SNC Model Textbooks

Along with the essays and stories that represent gender roles and relations in one or another manner, there are illustrations too. Both the expressions as well as illustrations have triggered multiple controversies between the proponents of SNC and feminists or independent critics and educationists. One of the in-depth and meticulous studies reveals that much of the criticism – if not all – is valid. For example, 60.2 percent of the model textbooks portray men/boys as delivering societal

functions while 39.4 percent of women/girls are observed playing those functions.

In all, about 41.6 percent of all women and girls are shown wearing a hijab; 28.9 percent as wearing traditional clothes without a hijab; and 29.4 percent of the images show girls wearing western attires. What comes forth is that out of 668 pages of English Books, 58.1 percent are men/boys and 41.8 percent women/girls. In 672 pages of Mathematics 51.1 percent of the books portray men and 48.8 percent portray women in different capacities. Here about 53.9 percent of women/girls are seen without hijab and 46 percent with it. In 5 of the Urdu Books comprising 791 pages, there is around 59.7 percent of men's/boys' presence in comparison to 40.4 percent of women/girls. Over there, 58.5 percent of women/girls wear hijab while 41.4 percent are seen without hijab.

Take the books of General Science. Out of 310 pages in total around 76.8 percent representation is of men/boys compared to 23.1 percent of women/girls. In general, 64 percent of women/girls are seen without hijab and 36 percent of

women/girls are seen with it. In Waqfiyat-e-Aama, there are 49.5 percent of men's/boys images compared to 50.15 percent of women/girls. A total of 53.9 percent of women/girls are seen without hijab and 46 percent are seen with hijab. In here, 23.1 percent of women/girls are presented in hijab and 76.8 percent without. In case of Muashrati Uloom, around 234 pages were analysed. There are 65.1 percent of men/boys and 34.8 percent of women/girls, whereas 36.8 percent of women/girls are seen without hijab and 63.1 percent with hijab. In the 5 Urdu Books, comprising 791 pages, a total of 59.7 percent presents men/boys as compared to 40.4 percent of women/girls. 58.5 percent of women/girls are seen wearing hijab and in 41.4 percent of the pictures, they are seen without it. The message communicated by Hijab or portrayal of women/girls is the same as uttered by the Premier more than once that the dress code has got a connection with violence against women, and more or less, the same mindset is reflected in SNC's imagery. Where women are presented in powerful roles – may count more of an exception than a norm. Applying gender lens leads you to very different conclusions because stereotypical

presentation of women proxy sexist thinking of the drafters' and planners' minds. Precisely, a total of 60.2 percent of the books paint images of men/boys while only 39.4 percent of the books present the images of women/girls¹⁵².



Picture 7: Gender Socialisation in School and at Home

It is also important to highlight that the girls wearing western wears are all young girls – not women. Not a single woman is shown wearing

western attires. In books of English around 29.7 percent of women are seen with Hijab and 70.2 percent without it. Summing up, a massive 79.9 percent of men are seen wearing western attires while only 20 percent of them are dressed in traditional wears. Men and women are not equally represented in these books. Critics suggest that women wearing hijab or eastern or western clothes should equally be represented with their freedom of choosing one or another pattern of clothing. Others argue that hardly a fraction of women wears a head robe – as is the case perhaps in Arab countries – dupatta instead is what women wear in Pakistan. Besides, in a Pakistani cultural context, girls below the age of puberty rarely wear hijab or dupatta at all¹⁵³.

Another contested point has been the portrayal of men and women in positions of power. A common allegation is that SNC books paint more men in positions of power than women. Women are mostly shown as homemakers or in subordinated positions. Though SNC authors do not agree but the truth is that more women are shown in secondary or even in inferior roles such as

housewives, nurses, teachers and care givers. But this is also true that women doctors, pilots, police officers, players, traffic warden, army officers, politicians have also been given an eminent place. Nevertheless, more men are awarded power roles at least three times more than women¹⁵⁴. Women, in most of the cases are shown doing household chores, family care, and taking care children. In addition, women/girls are mainly depicted as wives, daughters, mothers and teachers. Stories also depict women in secondary roles to their male counterparts. So much so, where women are being presented as leaders, they are cited as men's aides, say Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah as the sister of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The text below the heading 'Women as Role Models' reads, *'Our women have always been a great support to men'*. The essay then mentions Fatima Jinnah as one of the women who 'created history' while her achievements are explained in the words ie *'her keen interest in education helped her to complete her studies'*.

In a play situation, boys are seen playing and exercising and girls are there as bystanders. In real

life, women/girls are excelling in every field of life including sports. More than once, women have represented Pakistan at Olympics. They are climbing mountains, playing cricket, contributing in IT, doing business and what not. Then why are they not being reflected in these significant roles. Putting succinctly, criticism about gender role disparity is almost correct¹⁵⁵. Criticizing the title of an Urdu Book where women/girls are shown sitting on floor while men on sofa – Minister for Information and Communication (Sindh)⁶⁵, said, *'rendering women in subordinate role is also one of the reasons for Sindh rejecting SNC. We keep women at helm and want to communicate the same message to our future generation¹⁵⁶'*.

⁶⁵ Syed Nasir Hussain Shah.



Getting Started
Look at the pictures and try to guess the action verbs in them.

Let's Talk

- Why is a good sleep important for good health?
- What do you eat to keep yourself healthy?
- How do you keep yourself fit and healthy?
- What do you do to keep yourself clean?

A Fit and Healthy Life

Pre-reading

- Look at the given picture below and guess what is happening.
- Do you think personal hygiene is important?

Lubna and her classmates were very excited because Dr. Haroon was coming to their school. The school had invited Dr. Haroon to talk about personal hygiene matters and raise awareness about COVID-19. Dr. Haroon instructed school management to distribute masks to everyone and maintain physical distancing during his visit. The children were eager to meet him.

"Hello, children! Hope you are fine. Today, I'm going to talk to you about how to look after yourself. Now, COVID-19? Dr. Haroon addressed the spread of something dirty," Maryam said, with a smile.

Wait 20 seconds.

© Maava Bari

Getting Started

Women have always played a very important role in this world in all times. History depicts that whenever females get suitable circumstances, they perform well and achieve their goals. Look at the given pictures and see how women are doing different jobs.

Let's Talk

Do you like seeing your mother in any of the above mentioned professions? Why?

Women as Role Models

Pre-reading

- Read the title and guess what the text can be about.

History is filled with wonderful examples of role models – men, women and children – who teach us to be great mothers, fathers, teachers, friends, students, etc. Our women have always been a great support for men. They are equal to men in terms of spirit, hard work, achievement etc. Their positive qualities are helping us to build a strong nation. Here only four Pakistani women are being discussed who have created history.

Miss Fatima Jinnah was the younger sister of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. She was born in 1893. Her keen interest in education helped her to complete her studies. She was a dentist by profession and later on gave it up to help her brother in the Pakistan Movement.

Picture 8: Women in Various Lead Roles

Similarly, the gender representation of the Curriculum Framework (VI-VIII) is also not

encouraging. Examples and concepts reflecting gender roles, particularly women's participation, have got extremely limited share of 1 percent only ie 3 concepts out of the 127 in all. Broader assessment of 'women's role in the history of the subcontinent', divulges 3 categories ie Women in the Muslim World, Women in the Ancient World, and the part played by women with reference to Pakistan's Emergence and History. Precise analysis reveals that only two women ie Razia Sultana (Grade-VI) and Malika Noor Jahan are presented in a supportive role; one to her father Shams ud-Din Iltutmish and the other to her husband Emperor Jahangir in (Grade-VII). Women's role in the country's freedom struggle is not appropriately mentioned. Similarly, in the post-independence era, their noteworthy contribution in multiple capacities seems underrepresented. Knowledge concepts and corresponding skills are also unaligned. For example, the required skills component under the topic of 'Turkish Muslims in the Subcontinent' (Grade-V), asks students to 'analyse why, despite being capable, Razia Sultana could not carry on as ruler for long, whereas the knowledge-concept does not correspond with the

women's political competencies or potential to rule⁶⁶.

In addition, SNC also lacks transmitting life skills – given the prevalence of early marriage, tenable pregnancies, poor awareness of puberty, sexual, reproductive and maternal health, safeguarding, and most importantly, widespread child abuse in the country. Life-skills content has been given little importance under the over significance of religious values. Part of the hygiene concern could have been presented without couching it in the religious framework. The pertinence of life skills was identified in the previous National Education Policy too but was ignored in the textbooks. It is necessary to make them part of education¹⁵⁷.

6.6. Response to Gender Critique

Government representatives, and those whose brainchild SNC is, have been defending several aspects of the model textbooks along with the gendered representation of men and women. *“It is*

⁶⁶ This analysis has been borrowed from the Curriculum Analysis (VI-VIII) of the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) and Working Group on Inclusive Education (WGIE) that was conducted by Zeeba T. Hashmi.

foolish to target SNC solely on the basis of gender parity”, argues Chairperson NCC, “for the published books belong to the respective publishers not to the government representatives. All portraits in any book – be it of sciences and social sciences are of the publishers, designed by its own painters”. Rebutting the massive gender-based criticism, she says that, “the curriculum is a dynamic and evolving process. Books may be changed by publishers in future. Schools and parents experience and response, and even the current criticism will induce them to change images and illustrations¹⁵⁸”. “Without seeing or knowing the whole content, ‘only women wearing hijab or sitting on floor (one picture only)’ is being criticized ignoring dozens of pictures where they are seated on sofa or are not wearing hijab. It is the content that need to be concentrated more than pictures”. The Coordinator NCC, tweeted that, along with the portraits of some empowered women from SNC English (Grade-V) and disproved the criticism saying – “look! How women have been shown in stronger roles in SNC. Our women, Our pride¹⁵⁹.”

Dr. Ruth Pfau was a German doctor and nun who is known as Mother Teresa of Pakistan. She devoted her life to fighting leprosy in Pakistan. She travelled to various parts of Pakistan with the aim of rescuing patients suffering from leprosy. She set up 150 leprosy clinics across the country. Due to her efforts, the disease came under control, in 1996. She was given numerous awards for her work, including Hilal-e-Imtiaz, Hilal-e-Pakistan and German Stauffer Medal.



Arfa Abdul Karim Randhawa became the pride of our country when she was only nine years old. She achieved the world's youngest Microsoft Certified Professional award at this young age. Her representation in various prestigious technology- related events, including TechEd Developers Conference, made our country proud in the whole world. She flew her first aircraft at the age of ten in the U.A.E. She was a gem of our country, but sadly she left this world on January 14, 2012 at the age of sixteen due to cardiac arrest.



Samina Khayal Baig is the first Pakistani woman to climb Mount Everest and she is also the first Muslim lady to climb all Seven Summits. She was born on September 19, 1990. She loved climbing mountains and her brother supported and guided her in her mountaineering career. She climbed Chashkin Sar, a 6000 meters peak in Shimshal, in 2010. She also climbed Koh-i-Brobar in 2011. Samina Baig belongs to the Shimshal village in Hunza Gojal, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan.



Women as Role Models

Pre-reading

- Read the title and guess what the text can be about.
- Share the names of some notable women of Pakistan.

History is filled with wonderful examples of role models – men, women and children – who teach us to be great mothers, fathers, teachers, friends, students, etc. Our women have always been a great support for men. They are equal to men in terms of spirit, hard work, achievement etc. Their positive qualities are helping us to build a strong nation. Here only four Pakistani women are being discussed who have created history.

Miss Fatima Jinnah was the younger sister of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. She was born in 1893. Her keen interest in education helped her complete her studies. She was a dentist by profession and later on gave it up to help her brother in the Pakistan Movement.



Picture 9: Women Exhibited in SNC as a Strong Role Models

Humaira Abbasi, a private school teacher argues that, *“one should focus more on the content and its quality than trivial issues such as a few drawings. The problem is that Pakistani society floats between two extremes ie being secular on one end and thriving religious extremism on the other. ‘Education, she argues, should be somewhere in the middle’*¹⁶⁰. Certain conservative religious spokespersons argue that in other Islamic countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, women/girls are also depicted with headscarves in their textbooks. The Focal Person⁶⁷ of the Chief Minister of Punjab⁶⁸ also seems rejecting criticism over SNC as baseless propaganda. He said, *“SNC is just a ‘syllabus’ under which any publisher can publish his book after seeking approval from the “textbook board”*. Murad Raas, Education Minister for Punjab, said that, *“gender critique is unfounded; women and the girls in Model Textbooks are shown as pilots and doctors too. Also, this is the first year of uniform education system. This will be continuously improved”*¹⁶¹. Another of PTI and SNC supporter, Azhar Mashwani, took to the tweet saying, *“select*

⁶⁷ Azhar Mashwani.

⁶⁸ Usman Buzdar.

criticism of the SNC overshadowed positive change in the books such as lessons on conflict resolution and child safety etc¹⁶²”.

6.7. Teachers Response on Gender Equality

On gender and gender roles and representation in model textbooks, IDRAC has enquired from the government, public, and madrasa teachers, and the analysis of their responses shows the following results:

Gender Equality Been Taken Into Consideration In This Curriculum?						
School/ Madrasa	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	71	85%	10	29%	7	6%
Private	8	10%	19	56%	69	60%
Madrasa	4	5%	5	15%	39	34%
Total	83	100%	34	100%	115	100%

Table 15: Gender Equality Taken Into Consideration In This Curriculum?

A substantial percentile of government teachers (85 percent) responded in the favour, meaning that gender equality is appropriately represented in the SNC based textbooks. Accordingly, more than half of the private school teachers (56 percent),

government school teachers (29 percent), and madrasa teachers (15 percent) think other way round. They think that gender equality is not appropriately portrayed in the very textbooks. On the other hand, 34 percent madrasas, 60 percent private, and 6 percent public teachers were not sure, what the situation was.

6.8. Islamiyat and Islamic Content in Islamiyat and Social Science Subjects

It is universally recognized that faith should either be parental or one's personal choice and must not be instructed or advocated by the state institutions. If at all, it should be non-discriminatory, non-sectarian and basic minimum in its scope and content. Rest must be left with the parents or to one's own choosing. Where there is some admirable advancement, at least in the sense of making our social sciences non-racist, non-sexist, hate-free, tolerant and inclusive, there the Islamic content within Islamiyat and social sciences have also been expanded and intensified further.

Against the modern schooling practices and experts' advice – even the social sciences are not

devoid of religious quotes and maxims. Assessing several subjects, the following could be concluded: About, 9.8 percent of the content in English Books (Grade I-V) contains religious flavour. Even the Books of Mathematic contain 4.1 percent of the religious text. General Science finds 0.96 percent presence of religious content. Around 12.8 percent of the content in Urdu Books could be labelled as religious. In the books of General Knowledge, around 4.7 percent of the text holds religious colour. This is based on the total number of pages in the books of General Knowledge. In Social Studies (Muashrati Uloom) about 10.2 percent of the content can be termed as religious¹⁶³.

Once again, the province of Sindh disagreed of placing so much Islamic content for innocent minds, making it difficult for them to learn and understand. In views of the SED representatives, Sindh, 'The Centre recommends teaching Islamic Studies from the primary level but in Sindh, schools start teaching Islamiyat from Grade-IV. In addition, the province teaches 10 *paraas* (chapters) of the nazira Quran from Grade I-V while the canter stresses on teaching the entire Quran (all 30

chapter/*paraas*) until Grade-V and the whole Quran with translation from Grade VI to XII, which is not possible for students at their age group'. Even the Bureau of Curriculum (Balochistan) put forth their reservations on stuffing heavy Islamic Content in Islamiyat as well as in social sciences⁶⁹. 'In order to make madrasas and schools curriculum uniform, around 40 to 50 Hadiths have been included in a single book at the primary level in the SNC model textbooks. In this case provincial diversity – as there are hundreds of thousands of Hindus in Sindh – has been ignored in Social Studies'¹⁶⁴.

6.9. Presence of Minority Children in Schools

Minority Children Study in your School?						
School/ Madrasa	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	27	82%	57	31%	4	33%
Private	6	18%	90	48%	0	0%
Madrasa	0	0%	40	21%	8	67%
Total	33	100%	187	100%	12	100%

Table 16: Minority Children Studying in Schools?

⁶⁹ Dr Gulab Khilji (D.D. Bureau of Curriculum), Balochistan (KII).

Minority Children Studying in Schools (Religion Wise)?								
School/ Madrasa	Christian		Hindu		Sikh		Don't Know / N/A	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	46	90%	0	0%	0	0%	42	23%
Private	5	10%	0	0%	0	0%	91	50%
Madrasa	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	48	27%
Total	51	100%	0	0%	0	0%	181	100%

Table 17: Minority Children Studying in Schools (religion wise)

A significant number of government teachers (90 percent) stated that students of other faiths, save a few Christians, were not studying in their schools. Private schools also affirmed that only Christian students, though in small fractions, were attending their school. One of the reasons for extremely limited representation of minorities in schools could be the sample districts, where their population was quite low. The second reason could be of Christian parents preferring private schools for their children to avoid any likely discrimination in public schools but this is assumptive, not tested in this study. In case of madrasas, minority students are, understandably, not enrolled. Around one-third of government and private school teachers were not certain about the number of minority

students in their respective schools. Obviously, madrasa teachers deemed this question as irrelevant and skipped it.

Minority Students Level of Representation in the SNC?						
School/ Madrasa	Yes		No		Don't Know / N/A	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	42	42%	12	80%	34	29%
Private	58	58%	3	20%	35	30%
Madrasa	0	0%	0	0%	48	41%
Total	100	100%	15	100%	117	100%

Table 18: Minority Students Given Equal Representation in the SNC

Though, comparatively a substantial number of respondents (n=117) have no idea that non-Muslims have been given equal representation in SNC or not. Whereas, n=15 (public = 12, private = 3, and naturally madrasa = 0) teachers reject the idea that non-Muslim students are given an equal representation. Yet, a majority of school teachers (42 percent public; 58 percent private) responds positively, ie SNC is inclusive and representative.

Similarly, a vast majority of teachers' (n=186) (including madrasa teachers), have no clue about the provision of a separate religious curriculum for

minorities. About 26 government teachers say that, ‘so far, no separate religious curriculum was provided to minorities, while 16 teachers said, ‘it was’.

6.10.Children’s likelihood of Finishing Holy Quran at Schools and Associated Queries

Children’s Ability to Finish Holy Quran till their Fifth Grade?						
School/ Madrasa	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	58	58%	24	24%	6	18%
Private	20	20%	75	76%	1	3%
Madrasa	22	22%	0	0%	26	79%
Total	100	100%	99	100%	33	100%

Table 19: Children’s Ability to Finish Holy Quran till the Fifth Grade

Among public schools, 58 percent teachers believe that children are capable enough, and will be able to finish reciting the Holy Quran by the end of the fifth grade. Notably, despite being part of the government, 24 percent of the public-school teachers, and a substantial 76 percent of the private schools in comparison think that, ‘children will not be able to finish reciting the Holy Quran till the fifth grade’. Needless to say, that, madrasas

think other way round. While, a large majority of 79 percent among madrasa teachers do not know with certainty.

Reading the Whole Qur'an Affect Children's Ability to Read other Subjects?						
School/ Madrasa	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	19	21%	64	58%	5	15%
Private	64	74%	30	27%	2	6%
Madrasa	4	5%	17	15%	27	79%
Total	87	100%	111	100%	34	100%

Table 20: Reading the Qur'an Affect Children's Ability Read other Subjects?

Responding to this important question on whether reading the whole Quran would affect children's ability to adequately study other subjects, just 21 percent government teachers said 'yes', while a substantial 58 percent answered in the negative. While, a substantial 74 percent private schools replied that it will impact children ability. Whereas, a reasonable percentile of 15 percent madrasa teachers believes that it will not affect children's studies. While a minuscule 5 percent madrasa teachers do feel that it will affect children's overall course of studies. There were schools, who

accommodated teaching Holy Quran by skipping Children’s Music Class⁷⁰. Private schools in particular felt that heavy Islamic studies, along with Nazira Quran overshadowed children’s time and concentration to other subjects⁷¹.

Any new teacher been Appointed to Teach the Holy Qur'an?						
School/ Madrasa	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	6	40%	77	45%	5	11%
Private	9	60%	79	47%	8	17%
Madrasa	0	0%	14	8%	34	72%
Total	15	100%	170	100%	47	100%

Table 21: New Teacher been Appointed to Teach the Holy Qur'an?

With respect to induction of fresh teachers to teach the Quran, a fairly 45 percent in teachers within the public schools said, ‘fresh teachers were not appointed for the very purpose’. Only (n=6) government teachers pointed out that some sort of makeshift arrangement was made. Private schools almost shared the same trend. Whereas, 72

⁷⁰ Head of the Educators, Multan.

⁷¹ KII with Sajjad Hussain Khosa, Principal Nice Model School, Dera Ghazi Khan.

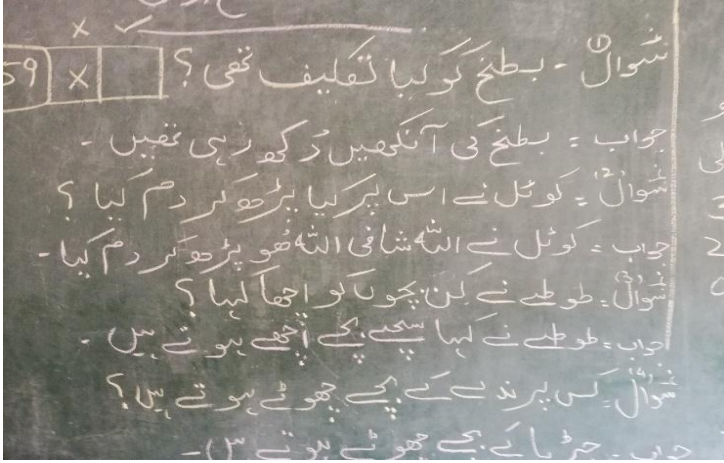
percent madrasa teachers deemed the query as irrelevant. Some of the private school teachers think that as most of the parents have no reservations on teaching Holy Quran at schools; so, it was ok. But it is very much possible that the debate on standard way of teaching the Quran may erupt in public and private schools, once it becomes a practice⁷².

Critics believe that gradually public schools will appoint madrasa-graduate *moulvis* and *qaris* to teach the heavier Islamic content incorporated in SNC as it is not possible for an ordinary Islamiyat teacher to teach that with confidence⁷³. Nevertheless, the ministry denies any such plans on cards. *“No such order has been passed by the government at any level. The teaching of Qirat to Muslim students is part of the Islamiyat curriculum and is mandatory to foster their religious learning. This instruction can be provided by the existing Islamiyat or Religious Studies’ teachers or the school can hire anyone they deem fit. This does not*

⁷² N. Khalid, Senior Teacher of a Private School in Multan (The respondent requested to keep his/her name anonymous).

⁷³ Members of Working Group on Inclusive Education (WGIE) including Pervez Hoodbhoy and A.H. Nayyar.

preclude anyone including graduates of madrassas but the decision of who to hire is of the individual school whether public or private and not of the Federal Government¹⁶⁵," states the MoFEPT.



Picture 10: Straight from the Wall of a GGMS, Patel Para, Karachi

7.

Content Analysis of Grade (VI-VIII) Curriculum

With reference to the curriculum of Grade VI-VIII, no model textbooks have been introduced. Therefore, in the absence of Model Textbooks for Grade VI-VIII, analysing the curriculum's Zero Draft sounds an appropriate strategy. It is relevant to mention that overall, the lens of civic values, religious and cultural diversity, democracy and human-rights has been employed to assess how far the proposed curriculum attempts to materialise the objectives, competencies and students learning outcomes as outlined by SNC's policy preferences.

7.1. Curriculum Analysis of Urdu (Grade VI-VIII)

In the proposed Urdu Curriculum, there are 25 broader themes subdivided into 75 topics. Each Grade has been allocated only one topic under the main theme. Under this scheme, 5 themes concern

civic values ie social responsibility, human rights, ethics and democratic behaviour; 2 themes relate to religio-cultural diversity and tolerance and 2 to gender-representation. Rest of the 16 themes relate to nationalism, patriotic values, literature, poetry, economy sports and tourism.

About 20 percent of the topics comprise civic values, whereas religio-cultural diversity and gender representation constitute a meagre 8 percent each, altogether making-up 36 percent of the entire curriculum. Rest of the topics promote Islamic nationalism, patriotism, economy and literature. In this compulsory subject, ideas based on Islamic religious nationalism may cause certain ambiguities or contradictions. In its chapter on fundamental rights, the CoP, Article 22 (1) offers safeguards to minorities in educational institutes. Certain topics may even create religion-based discrimination, instead of removing much of the bias and discrimination that was part of the curriculum before 2009⁷⁴.

⁷⁴ The whole Analysis, here below, has been borrowed from the unpublished Work of the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) conducted by Zeeba T. Hashmi from December 2021 to

For example, the topic of Muslim Nationhood specifically relates to *Khulfa-e-Rashideen*, along with the idea of brotherhood based on Islamic principles. Similarly, the theme dedicated to famous Muslim personalities (Item No. 6, pg. 38) dedicates an essay to *Salahuddin Ayubi*. Along with them, some non-Muslim personalities of the region, serving humanity, could also have been included. Nevertheless, the topic illuminating the lives of sufi saints (Grade VIII) do reflect on shared religio-cultural history of the region. In addition, where the role of Muslim scientists has been highlighted in contributing in scientific inventions and discoveries, other scientists, innovationists, rationality movements and interventions could have been included to make the chapter holistic.

Incorporating the topic of child protectionism is admirable but the risk of child abuse should have been given a place as Life Skill Based Education (LSBE) is already part of one of the stated objectives of SNC. Rights of women are restricted

January 2021. It has already been submitted to NCC and MoFEPT against their public call for suggestions.

to education, health, inheritance and economic independence only as sub-themes, whereas, their rights should have been introduced as equal and inalienable postulate of life including right to life, dignity, access to justice and right to vote along with the freedom of making decisions. While looking at the suggested list of Urdu writers and poets, one feels that the works of versatile, linguistically competent, and famous story writers and poets (both men and women) are underrepresented.

Surprisingly not a single woman literary luminary has been given her deserved space which is absolutely injustice to the tall women literary personalities as well as children too. Women authors have, particularly, written poems and stories to generate empathy with fellow citizens belonging to the marginalized groups and communities. Ideally, gender-sensitization needs to be incorporated in the textbooks as an integrated value. In compliance to SNC principles, woman's role in non-conventional arenas such as science, technology, economy, agriculture, industry,

development, sports, arts and creativity also needs to be reflected.

For Pakistani heroes, emphasis has been laid on those from the armed forces and law enforcing civil departments, whereas those prominent personalities have been ignored who strove for peace, democracy, equality, civic rights and social justice.

7.2. Curriculum Analysis of English (Grade VI-VIII)

The English subject, SNC (VI-VIII) outlines 4 key competencies along with social and ethical development as an added competency to be included as one of its themes. Broadly, there are 22 themes subdivided into 224 sub-themes under each grade ie 63 sub-themes for Grade-VI, 78 for Grade-VII and 83 subthemes for Grade VIII. Most themes visible tilt towards promoting social development and civic values ie 55 percent followed by 18 percent of the themes dealing with economic development and its subthemes. Nationalism and patriotism hold a share of 9 percent, along with 9 percent share of science, technology and media. Only one them is dedicated

to cultural diversity and one to gender-equality each having a marginal share of 5 percent.

Certain subthemes, such as education, protection from child abuse and complaint mechanism needed to be emphasized more. Repetition of personal ethics, courtesy and some other themes need to be eliminated or minimized. While adopting these themes into the textbooks, the developers may leave out important topics and subtopics. The textbook development and teachers' support material guidelines provided in Chapter 7 embed tolerance, fairness, gender equity, perseverance and determination with Islamic principles and traditions, which undermine Article 22(1). Personality development traits are an integral part of civic values and education being neutral and universal. In addition, civic values should also be imparted through the examples of local heroes affiliated with the land which may include both Muslim and minority heroes or religious personalities demonstrating a diverse belief system of the country. The 5 types of the text introduced in the curriculum are important but teachers and

textbook-developers need to be provided clearer guideline.

The spirit of nationalism and patriotism based only on the dominant faith may create a sense of alienation among non-Muslim minorities undertaking the compulsory subjects like English. Opposed to the ideal of the equality of citizenship, the tendency may create a superiority complex among majority students. Highlighting the role of Pakistan's minority heroes is important for inclusivity, diversity and equality of citizenship. Under the theme of civic education, state-citizen relation is enshrined but in a cursory manner. Civic and citizenship education must include responsibility of the state towards its citizens along with instilling democratic norms in our young learners. The topic of 'participatory citizenship' inscribes recurrent themes of traffic rules, discipline and forming queues, whereas, how citizens need to act under different governance structures is conspicuously missing.

In the wake of growing extremism, incidents of violence and mob-lynching, peace, multi-

culturalism, multi-lingualism and religious plurality need to be promoted. Faith-based discrimination is mentioned only under a subtheme of ‘avoiding social evils’ while it is one of the major issues of Pakistan and deserves more space along with the promotion of interfaith harmony. Painting, art, handicrafts, music, literature, dance, theatre and heritage-consciousness as being an integral part of Pakistan’s regional identities and cultures, also demand a proportion space.

The young learners need to learn the skills of applying English language in digital spaces early on. The art of browsing for research and exchanging ideas should strategically be taught at schools. Content creation in present times is a modern but easily acquirable and widely used skill but children need to be educated the ethics and conscientiousness as well¹⁶⁶.

7.3. Analysis of History (Grade V-VIII) Curriculum

Technically, History becomes part of the curriculum from Grade-V onwards. To sum up, 4 dominant themes are there with 12 standards converted into

7 learning outcomes which are embedded with 127 concepts. To draw a progressive analysis, themes and subthemes have been looked through the lens of education, ethno-religious diversity, historical objectivity and their implication in society. A precise observation shows 14 concepts falling under the category of democratic education mainly specified for Grade-VIII, whereas, no relevant content was found in Grade-VI & VII. Eminent ancient and other empires are introduced in Grade-VI. Ironically, no themes are there covering the notions of modern-day nation-states, systems of governance and the ideas of rights and responsibilities. Civic education/values have a share of 39 percent while the topics depicting religio-cultural diversity could secure a minuscule share of 2.3 percent out of 127 topics in all.

Under the topic of 'Indus-Valley Civilization' in Grade-VI, the learners need to be communicated that it was one of the earlier civilizations of the world. Excavations made in present day Pakistan discovered 90 percent of all inscriptions from Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa alone, and others from Mehrgarh¹⁶⁷. These cities are known for having

sophisticated town-planning, sewage and drainage systems meant for flood-protection during the monsoon¹⁶⁸. Through this unit, students need to be educated the values of social development, disciplined town planning, social development, hygiene and sanitation. Respect and the importance of preserving ancient heritage and building a connection between the people of the region and native ancestors need to be highlighted. But the 'knowledge and skills component of this unit' expects the learners to *"justify that the people of Indus Valley did not learn the warfare, nor did they developed their trade, therefore were easily defeated by Aryans"*. Communicating this value is not sound for it justifies war. Besides, the justification of 'poorer warfare' doesn't sound adequate as kingdoms and empires with ferocious defence system have also succumbed to overpowering invaders in history. Even though alternatively, justifying war and weaponry contradicts the values of peace, diplomacy and progressivism desperately desired in the country.

In another example, the assertion is made about the Code of Hammurabi generating 'fairness and

justice' that inspired civilization including social norms, mores and principles of justice. On contrary, the truth goes other way round. The Code also systematized exploitation of the weak which should not go without criticism and debate. Students should be taught that, laws can and should also be debated and civilized societies continuous evolving better and better laws. Through the topic of '*Aryan, Kushans and Guptas, Grade-VI*, Ashoka's transition from a warrior-king to that of a preacher for peace and humanity is a great example to inspire the students for the values of peace and tolerance. His pacifism and edicts, hidden in plain sight in present day's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can exemplify the ancient and middle period's preference for people's welfare over military pursuits. The messages of peace and welfarism can be shared from the deciphered edicts in the corresponding textbooks.

The corresponding '*knowledge and skills component*' stresses on Alexander the Great, and his invasion of India. His military conquests are given a greater space, whereas other aspects pertaining to arts, philosophy and scientific enquiry

are largely ignored. The theme attempts to “*justify that Greeks were really democratic, and probing why Plato, Aristotle and Socrates are famous even today*”. However, it is not reflected as a ‘*knowledge goal*’ inserted in this unit. To cultivate the young minds, an understanding of the republic, democracy and other concerned socio-political forms need a proper attention. Potential textbook writers, teachers and examiners need to know, how can that be instilled in the minds of young learners.

The SNC’s proposed curriculum for Grade-VII does not accommodate any theme for religio-cultural diversity.

The chapter of Khulfa-e-Rashideen as part of the “*Dawn of Islam, Grade-VI*”, should better focus on Islam’s political significance and how it assimilated with and adopted from other civilizations as did other faiths in the world. Technically, ‘teachings of Islamic faith’ are instructional subject that should be part of Islamiyat only. The subject, once again, contradicts Article 22 (1) of the CoP. Exercises or lessons compelling non-Muslims to consider it as a

“fair justice” need to be avoided as it violates the spirit of Article 8 (laws inconsistent with or in derogation of fundamental rights to be void) and Article 21 (safeguard against taxation of any other faith communities).

The Role of Muslim Religious Leaders during Crisis, Grade VII, stresses on Islamic revivalism while linking it with the freedom struggle of the Muslims of the subcontinent. Pakistan movement was not necessarily the religious but a political movement striving for the independent homeland for the majority minority group ie Muslims. Names of the religious leaders in this unit need to be reconsidered. The Islamic revivalist struggle was in response to the objective social realities of the time. Highlighting orthodox Muslim leaders with their ‘specific’ views to present day Pakistan - already suffering from sectarianism and religious extremism - risks sharpening faith-based division. In the same thread, favouring the ideology of Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, over the tolerant and multiculturalists Akbar the Great is dangerous as Ahmad held rigid, orthodox and sectarian religious beliefs. His works like Radd-e-Rawafiz even justified

the execution of Shia leaders. As known widely, his letters strictly decried the emergence of Sikhism. Similarly, Shah Waliullah was also an orthodox Muslim who fiercely criticized celebrating Hindu festivals and was particularly against Marathas. The other Muslim personality promoted in this unit is of Syed Ahmed Shaheed Barelvi who promoted Islamic reformation through Jihad - an idea which is anachronistic and dangerous to promote in today's already religiously polarized Pakistan.

The *'Industrial Revolution Unit, Grade-VII'* intends the learners to *"justify that the Europe took the advantage of scientific knowledge and development to create the biggest economic divide"* and *"Predict the current situation of our region if people of the subcontinent had thought of converting their raw material into goods during industrial revolution"*. The first statement might be contended as multiple factors - though their scientific and technological knowledge cannot be undermined - enabled the Europeans to colonize the disempowered but resource-wealthy nations. In fact, it was the East India Company's wealth and weaponry that helped it take possession of many

estates and vast lands across Asia and Africa. The second statement is also speculative, and demeaning to the many revolutionaries and local heroes, who advocated for education and development as an instrument to break the shackles of colonial rule. The '*swadeshi*' movement began in early 20th century calling for boycott of imported goods and preferring locally products.

The 'skills component' under the topic of the *Formation of Muslim League (Grade-VIII)* expects children to '*conclude that the partition of Bengal was the turning point of the Hindu Muslim Unity*' which is no less than distorted corollary. In reality, many of the Muslim landed elites were opposed to the partition of Bengal along with Hindus while like Muslims, some Hindus too were in favour of the partition each having their own socio-economic and administrative reasoning behind. Their positions cannot be judged exclusively on nationalistic basis. Attacking Hindu-Muslim unity purely on communal basis may perpetuate communalism – a tradition that must now be abandoned under the current circumstances of Pakistan that desperately needs unity of its people.

The topic of '*Hindu-Muslim Unity (Grade-VIII) 1912-1922*' seems reflecting a time-defined trend. The issue of Hindu-Muslim unity and differences could have better been communicated by explaining the political causes of unity and differences between All India Muslim League and Indian National Congress. In the *Political Awareness in Subcontinent (1920-30), Grade-VIII*, the 'skills section' intends the learners to "Conclude if the Non-cooperation Movement of Gandhi brought back Hindu-Muslim unity." Unfortunately, this is an opinionated question. Led by Gandhi, the Non-cooperation Movement", simultaneously was one of the biggest proponents of the Khilafat Movement too. Students need to know that the Quaid himself, along with several other leaders of Muslim League and Congress were not supportive of the Non-cooperation and the Khilafat Movement. In 1930, six years after the Non-cooperation, the Civil Disobedience Movement and Salt March were initiated by Gandhi. Like previous political actions, some Muslim leaders heeded the call while others did not. The events like Qissa Khawani Massacre of around 200 to 300 Khudai

Khidmatgar led by Ghaffar Khan and the Hindu leaders' support of Muslim-centric Khilafat Movement reveal that there were many occasions where Muslims and Hindus stood together against the imperial British rule.

Jinnah's strict adherence to legal and constitutional fight for Muslim representation in the dominion and Nehru's incessant refusal to address the largest minority's concern along nationalist lines caused a political friction from which there was no turning back. In fact, the opposing political and ideological positions of the League and Congress cannot be concluded that Hindus were against Muslims or other way round, only for communal reasons. Entering into the 21st century, this impression now needs to change in our education milieu. Political aspirations may not always reflect individual or communal differences.

Under the title, *'New Beginnings: Pakistan after 1947, (Grade-VIII)* also needs to quote the Quaid's first address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 11th August, 1947¹⁶⁹. The speech illustrates the Quaid's vision for Pakistan in the

words, that *“You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed - that has nothing to do with the business of the State”*. He further stressed: *“I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal, and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus, and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State”*. Given its significance in terms of unity and progress of Pakistan the speech must not be missed out”. Undemocratic and dictatorial rules have harmed Pakistan a lot and there must be a mention of that. Lessons learnt from the separation of East Pakistan also need to be incorporated. Ironically, General Ayub Khan is mentioned three times in the ‘knowledge and skills component’ but no democratically elected political leaders or an advocate of human, democratic or citizens’ rights is mentioned though they deserve to be known by the kids.

7.4. Curriculum Analysis of Geography (VI-VIII)¹⁷⁰

Geography, in general, helps the learners to make sense of the world around and be able to explore solutions about the global, regional or local conflicts (including the territorial ones) that affect people at large and the citizens of Pakistan. The subject also introduces children the idea of 'global citizenship'. With references to this subject, UNESCO stresses on building cognitive skills and competencies of the children along with the promotion of communication skills, humane attitudes, values and behaviours¹⁷¹. The Draft Curriculum aspires to develop 'effective inquiry and communications skills', along with helping children 'broaden their perspectives' and acquiring 'scientific knowledge of geography' while inculcating a strong sense of "citizenship" (both local and global)¹⁷². The review in hand has been undertaken, using the lens of civic values, religio-cultural diversity and gender equity. It also scrutinizes, whether aims and objectives stated as part of the 'learning outcome' have been translated into the curriculum, how and how far?

The curriculum comprises three domains ie: (i). Physical Geography with three standards (earth patterns and processes, weather and climate, natural, capital and human resources; (ii). Human Geography with five standards (uses of land forms, settlements, scarcity vs. resources, cultures of settlements, role of science and technology in development); and (iii). Environmental Geography with three standards (environmental changes, managing changed environment and patterns of global economic interactions). About 6 Units are assigned to each Grade that are in turn divided into 160 SLOs. Grade-VI has 53 SLOs, Grade-VII has 46 and Grade-VIII holds 61.

A scrupulous assessment suggests that 75 SLOs (nearly 47 percent) incur civic values communicated through the categories of lifestyle and economic diversity, global citizenship, citizen/social responsibility and social development. 13 SLOs out of 53 (24.5 percent) in Grade-VI, 22 SLOs out of 46 (47.8 percent) in Grade-VII while 40 SLOs out of 61 (65.5 percent) promote civic education and values. Explicitly, no SLOs are found in terms of religious and ethnic

identities or gender parity with respect to human settlement, human resources and human and economic development metrics. Rest of the 53 percent of SLOs pertain to Physical and Environmental Geography without showing any correlation with human or social activity.

8.

Overall Concerns in the Draft Curriculum (Grade VI-VIII)

Seeing through the prism of civic values, democracy, human rights, equal citizenry, plurality, interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence - as stated above – though certain problems have been addressed but many problems are still out there. The standards defined for the provision of ‘knowledge and skills’ still sound problematic in certain places with the risk of serious implications, if the textbook developers and teachers are not carefully guided. For instance, justification and glorification of Muhammad bin Qasim’s attacks through knowledge and skills component somehow entreats minority students to be the secondary citizens. The concept not only out violates the modern-day principles of the equality of citizenship rather contradiction the constitution and the spirit of equal citizenship. In other ways,

instead of assuaging, it may increase anti minorities' prejudice.

Approximately, 58 percent of the curriculum promotes the characteristic of Islamic nationalism, whereas minorities and marginalized groups find no representation. No heroes from other faiths, and ethno-national groups are acknowledged which falls against the notion of a pluralistic Pakistan envisaged by the Great Quaid in his historic August 11th speech. Also, the emergence and evolution of linguistic and cultural identities in the subcontinent is not aptly represented. The phenomenon of religious syncretism and how various societies evolved in history needs to be rationally entrenched in the curriculum. Additionally, all topics on ancient civilizations are jam-packed in Grade-VI, burdening the young learners with new notions altogether. Easing it out, the concepts should be logically sequenced and extended to all Grades till X. The notions of interfaith and inter-communal harmony can also be introduced while introducing ancient civilizational history in Grade-VI and at the point of sorting out the causes of World War - I in Grade-VIII.

An out of proportion thrust on Islamic revivalism in the context of struggle against colonialism needs to be rationalized. Freedom heroes selected for this curriculum belong to a school of thought believing in the ideology of Muslim-nationhood. Non-Muslim heroes, revolutionaries and freedom fighters supporting the cause of Pakistan, including sufi leaders are ignored. Also, the curriculum misses out on minority heroes who endorsed Pakistan Resolution, mobilized for Pakistan Movement and continued to serve this country in multiple fields of life. To promote unity and inclusion, it is important to make a shift from faith-based nationalism to the civic, democratic and progressive nationalism. Religious minorities must be acknowledged as integral part of Pakistan. The notion of equality will help do away with other prejudices often found in our textbooks. In addition, it will cast an equalizing effect on the learners from both majority and minority groups.

Strangely the 'skills sets and competencies' against the History Curriculum are not defined. NCC and the proponents of SNC need to learn from the

UNESCO's Prototype National Curriculum Framework which defines 6 competency areas ie technology, communication, analysis and synthesis, creative thinking, problem solving and working with others¹⁷³. Historical political differences between All India Muslim League and Indian National Congress should not be exclusively played up as religious differences. The fact is, it was the Indian Muslims' struggle against the British colonialism and their apprehensions against the majoritarian rule post - independence, students need to be familiarized with the indigenous religious and cultural identities in this curriculum to impart all groups and ethnicities a sense of belonging and solidarity within our homeland. A learning as well as social environment need to be devised where nobody feels being alien or outsider. The recurrent and overarching policy of excessively focusing on the lost Muslim glory, now needs a shift, and carve out space for new ideas and ideologies.

Women's role as leaders and entrepreneurs is almost negligible. Many a successful woman can be mentioned in terms of their political participation,

independent decision-making, and their contribution in social development. New knowledge and skills already dominating and evolving in the 21st century need to be given their rightful space and importance to open students to new ideas and innovations as part of historical lessons. In present times, students need to be inculcated with the scientific and technological ideas as well as with the ideas of human rights, freedom of thought, expression and freedom of religion and belief.

Pakistan being a disaster-prone country (both natural and manmade), only a mention of the causes of natural calamities (Grade-VI) is not enough. Subsequent infrastructural damage and the loss of life, livestock and livelihood as well as disaster management also need, at least, somewhat elaboration. Under the topic of 'Plains and Rivers' (Grade-VIII) makes a mention of SLOs about human settlement and/or their dependencies as well but the 'knowledge and skills component' completely ignores it. Textbook developers and teachers may ignore it without categorical instructions. Similarly, the SLOs of the

topic of Water Supply (Grade-VII) are not stated under 'Knowledge and Skills'. What is stated as part of SLOs ie 'understanding similarities and differences between different regions of the world to understand consumption and distribution patterns', fails to co-relate it with global citizenship values. The idea of transforming sewage into bio-gas is there but recycling energy and resource conservation is completely missing.

Once again under the subject of Agriculture (Grade-VII), the disconnect between SLOs and the Knowledge and Skills component continues. The latter intends to explain, 'the role of international loans in enhancing agricultural productivity' but there no mention of that in the 'learning objectives' of the unit. Though, it is more relevant under 'finance and economy', but agricultural intersectionality could have been brought with other social factors such as economic disparity between the feudal and the landless farmers, gender disparity and politics on farming. Under the present circumstances and Pakistan's vulnerability to, climate change and its effects on human settlement, life and livelihood as well as

demography should have also been mentioned in the Knowledge and Skill component of Climate Change (Grade-VII). Under the topic of Minerals and Power (Grade-VII), economic progress, resource consumption, revenue generation are emphasized. In fact, they need to be covered under the scope of human geography while discussing demographics to demonstrate the link between human lifestyles and commerce. Its SLOs, “describe economic activities related to natural, capital and human resources” and “understand basic role of global economic system and interdependence with global economy” fail to impart corresponding information on human demography and resource management.

Regarding Grade-VIII, under *Oceans and Seas*, the SLOs speaks of “investigating geographical, climatic, political, cultural, and economic aspects of places using geographic representations and geospatial technologies”, while the same is conspicuously missing in the ‘Knowledge and Skills’ component. Introducing the concept of Cultural and Geo-Political Intersection in Grade-VI was important to build a proper context. Similarly,

sequential knowledge should have been provided under the cultural and political aspects of geography in the previous Grades to save this SLO appearing disjointed. 'Environmental Pollution' (Grade-VIII) does not make a mention of pollution and its effects on health that is rapidly blowing up into a bigger issue. Similarly, the problem of smog, water and river pollution should have been highlighted. Also, there should have been a mention of the political economy of industrialization and industrial pollution along with their impact on human life.

Under the Transport and its Importance (Grade-VIII), the significance of regional cooperation for trade and commerce should have been emphasized to benefit the people of the region. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Silk Route find an indication under the respective Knowledge and Skills component but SLOs simply ignore them. The Unit 6 ie Social and Economic Development (Grade-VIII) is heavily tilted towards the macro-economic terminologies but Social Development has been overlooked. The inclusion of indices such as Economic Development Indexes (EDI) and

Human Development Index (HDI) in the Knowledge and Skills component are higher from this level, thus need to be removed.

8.1. Suggestions to Include New Themes

Being mindful of the global context and circumstances of Pakistan and the region, a few more themes and topics are suggested to be incorporated in the Curriculum of Grade VI-VIII and, where relevant in Grade I-V as well. An important need of incorporating Population Studies and Demographics is felt at this level, inclusive of changes in human behaviour and appearance according to their location and geography. Settlement patterns, migration, adaptation and associated concepts and concerns also need to be explained. Without interactive activities, lessons around geography become dull. Writing geography books demands unique skills to illustrate picturesque plains and plateaus and what is beneath. Characterization and storytelling may also help in this regard. The topic on Human Settlements must include information on types of populations, along with an introduction to the idea of nomadic or gypsy settlements who keep moving

from one area to another for various reasons (for e.g. the Gujjar tribes move down from high pastures to lower plains during winters, and can be mostly seen in urban upper or central Punjab. A foundational knowledge about the Seven Continents and the diversified civilizations also need to be extended to the students at the formative level. The subject will open up children to comprehend the versatile land and geographies around the globe. Similarly, students' orientation to religio-cultural diversity and multiple lifestyles is important that can be included under People and Society. The point is to teach students about human interplay with the environment and cultures.

Though, the idea of Human Resource has been mentioned at several places in the curriculum but seriously needs adequate elaboration. Although, women are making substantial contributors in all fields of social sciences, along with economics and social development, but their representation remains poor all across – that needs to be balanced out. Along with imparting language skills, a key purpose of teaching Urdu and English should be to

develop literary sense amongst students rather than using them as a means for some other purposes. Interesting and eminent pieces of literature - all general – need to be supplemented at all Grades.

Pakistan is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious country. Why ignore or undermine this fact in the curriculum. The young learners must learn and admire the beauty and diversity of their country. They should have a sense of, and respect for one another's language, culture, faith or any other denomination. The very consciousness will inculcate the values of peace, empathy and equality in their minds. The subject must not be treated as a sub-theme for it deserves to be taught as a stand-alone theme in connection with geo-cultural dynamics, the characteristic nature of Pakistan.

The suggested activities against SLOs should have been more open to discussions with learners while maintaining focus findings solutions to the problem. One of the most important gaps, identified is the insufficient or somewhere

guidelines for textbook writers and the teachers, particularly with references to the ethno-religious and cultural diversity. Clear guidelines need to be provided to the potential textbook writers and teachers. Insufficient instructions are provided on assessments and pedagogical framework. The subject of Geography needs to integrate Human Geography in all of its units as, presently, it is inclined more towards economy and climate change. The SLOs around Geography should also address neighbouring countries with whom our mountains ranges are connected as well as it may shed light on environment and development and contribute towards regional piece.

8.2. Political Assertion and Judicial Scrutiny of Teaching the Holy Quran

The MoFEPT and spokespersons of SNC assert that Islamic content in the curriculum has been incorporated complying to the parliamentary provision, known as the Compulsory Teaching of Holy Quran Act (2017). The same was amended and sharpened by the sitting government in April (2021), prescribing teaching of Nazira (recitation) Holy Quran and then Ba-Tarjuma (with translation)

to all the Muslim students from Grade-I to Grade-XII¹⁷⁴. Punjab and KP provinces also followed the suit; enacted in accord and assumed the compulsion. Only Sindh and Balochistan have yet not adopted it.

Side by side, the National Assembly has passed a resolution for using complete entitlement of the Holy Personages in all the textbooks, and SNC's model textbooks too have adopted the norm. Earlier in August 2020, the Senate passed the 'Compulsory Teaching of Arabic Language Bill 2020' that was introduced as private member bill by a PML-N's Senator Javed Abbasi. Seeing the religious trends gaining ground, Majlis Wahdat-ul-Muslimeen (MWM) insists that all *masalik* (sects and schools of thought) should have equal representation in SNC. *"The incidence of Karbala (martyrdom of Imam-e-Hussain and his family) should particularly be made as part of the syllabus as no sect has any reservation on this,"* it demanded. Along with Sunni saints, *auliyah* Allah (religious saints) of Shia orientation should also be

portrayed in the SNC⁷⁵. Much to the experts' surprise things that deal with such a specific and specialized subject like education are put forth by those possessing no knowledge, art or experience of curriculum development – eventually end up with regressive insertions in our pedagogical content.

While speaking at the Convocation of Minhaj-ul-Quran, a private Islamic University, the Prime Minister's advisor on Political Communication⁷⁶ said that, *“the syllabus of educational institutions must nurture students' mindset in line with the Islamic code of life and ethics”*. Besides lauding the University's role in this regard, he reiterated that, *“through Rehmatul-lil-Alameen Authority, the government was engaging Islamic scholars from world over to oversee the syllabus being taught to students in educational institutions”*¹⁷⁵.

Right-wing lobby aggressively backs the ministries and education bureaucracy to not only maintain, rather increase, the Islamic content in non-Islamic

⁷⁵ KII with Mujahid Gardezi, Divisional Head of Majlis Wahdat ul Muslimeen, Multan.

⁷⁶ Dr Shahbaz Gill.

subjects too, wherever possible. The trend, they argue, aptly reflects the provisions in the CoP, Article 31 (1) & 2 (a, b, c)¹⁷⁶ and promotes noble Islamic values and those opposing it are driven by vested interests, waging false propaganda and disinforming the nation¹⁷⁷. Not the larger masses, it is just a small number of English-speaking elites, afflicted by inferiority-complex from the West, who are opposing SNC¹⁷⁸. Undermining their other reservations, Madrasa representatives enthusiastically endorse SNC for its greater stress on Islamic studies, making nazira Quran compulsory and criticising private schools. For Instance, M. Taimoor, Teacher of Arabic Grammar and *tafseer*⁷⁷ (exegesis) stresses that maintaining a balance between religious and secular studies is important; SNC is worth admiring as it is going to realize the ideal and strike a balance in society. Maulana Abd-ul-Hanan Haidri stressed that, *“teaching nazira Quran is must, the form of school or class doesn’t matter. The provision will at least*

⁷⁷ Teacher of Arabic Grammar, Arabic Literature, Tafseer and Philosophy at Dar-ul-Uloom-e-Islami, Islamabad.

produce a generation properly knowing Namaz, Quran and Kalma Shareef”⁷⁸.



Picture 11: From the Office of EDO-Education, Layyah

In response to a public interest litigation (Altamash Saeed versus The Government of Punjab), made in December 2020, the chairman of the PCTB and Secretary (School Education, Punjab) ordered that all public and private school books and supplementary material require a review and approval to identify and eradicate any indecent material from the next academic year (2021-22 and onwards). It was an easy out for the bureaucracy without thinking through the consequences. Thus, where the Amendment Act (2020) authorized MUB

⁷⁸ KII with Maulana Abdul Hanan Haidri, Jamia Khair-ul-Moeed, Multan.

to examine Islamiyat's textbooks, the Department's response to this appeal turned the matters even worse. Under this excuse, the Board's mandate was now expanded to review all teaching stuff of all subjects.

The politicians and the bureaucracy in Punjab both ceded space to the MUB – the space once surrendered, will be hard to reclaim. Instead of the education bureaucracy doing its jobs and arresting the decline, the politically costly legal fights were left to the civil society activists and vulnerable communities¹⁷⁹. So much so that in the Punjab province, Islamic material in the Islamiyat and even in Social Sciences is examined and approved by Mutahida Ulema Board (MUB). Nevertheless, in KP no NOC was desired from MUB as the task of monitoring the syllabus from Islamic perspective was assigned to subject specialists¹⁸⁰.

But the story doesn't end here. Upon the direction of the High Court in late 2021, the Session Judges of Punjab began, in person, monitoring the teaching of Holy Quran in public and private schools. The SED notified to its' schools that, 'with

the Punjab High Court's order (3.11.2021)¹⁸¹, the Judicial Officers were nominated to inspect educational institutions - including public, private and *deeni madaaris* - as to whether the Holy Quran was being taught as a separate and compulsory subject in schools or not. Also, to counter verify the situation, the Executive District Officers (EDOs - Education) and the Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) were also nominated by the Secretary Education to accompany and coordinate with the Judicial Officers at the time of inspection'.

The consequences followed. In Chiniot two of the local private schools were sealed by the respective Session Judge for not educating Holy Quran (nazira) while in Nankana Sahib orders were passed against the principals of three schools for not paying sufficient attention to the teaching of Holy Quran as a separate subject. Also, they were accused of their students keeping some *paaras (chapters)* in their school bags – without a due respect to the Holy Quran. As ordered by the Chief Justice, (Punjab), the District and Session Judges were deputed to visit as many tehsils of the district as possible to oversee compulsory Quranic education

(*nazira and tarjama*) in the public and private schools. The EDOs (Education) then began issuing directives to schools, saying, “*either impart compulsory Quranic education or face the consequences*’. Emulating the practice”, the AEOs (Education) accelerated their visits to schools, almost in every district, to ensure that the order was being complied by. Reportedly, wherever, a school found not teaching Holy Quran, was given a warning of closure or was immediately handed a ‘show cause notice’. Owners of the private schools were also issued a show-cause notices and warned of cancellation of their registration, failing to act upon the order¹⁸².

Private Schools Associations are distressed over the situation as despite agreeing and attempting to teach compulsory Holy Quran, sometimes they struggle with practical problems such as finding a teacher, setting up the time table and adjusting it with a host of other subjects. On top of that, EDOs and AEOs are sending notices to schools asking them “*to be alert as the Judges are going to ask three questions: how many days in a week, do you teach Holy Quran? Which Paara/Chapter children*

are now at? Show your certificate of registration (in case of private schools)”.

Multiple teachers from the private and public schools, from the select districts, shared numerous associated problems. Sharing his experience, one of the SSTs (Subject Specialist Teachers) from a GBHS⁷⁹ from Multan said that, *“we made thorough preparation when the Lower Court’s judge was supposed to visit our school. He was highly satisfied with our progress of teaching the Holy Quran regularly. But from the day after, we closed the chapter as it was not possible to continue the process due to the several practical barriers”*. In the words of another teacher from Khanewal, *“you need not worry. Several such instruction kept coming in our schooling past. Here goes a year or so; everything will fizzle down back to business as usual”*.

A couple of teachers GGSS and GGPS were apprehensive of teaching Holy Quran for some other reasons. Keeping it in their regular bags with and like other books may cause someone raising

⁷⁹ Name deliberately kept anonymous.

his/her eyebrows. Ablution (making wuzoo) every single time to handle the Holy Quran was not possible, if the tap water was insufficient or simply not available in the schools. For girls, they argued, it was not manageable in routine as they naturally go through their menstrual cycle at least for several days a month. Reading Holy Quran with tajweed (exact Arabic accent) is another difficulty that teachers face with. Perhaps, none of the native Pakistani languages supports glottal, velo-glottal, labio-glottal, palato-glottal, pharyngeal, uvular and some velar or palato-velar sounds like *zuaad*, *suaad*, *qaat*, *ghain*, *ain*, *haa*, *khka*. Therefore, for an ordinary child, it is difficult to produce and pronounce those sounds. The debate has already been existing but in the clerical circles of Pakistan. Institutionalizing it in schools might widen its scope and cause bigger controversies.

8.3. Role and Influence of Ulema Board

PCTB has also formed a Textbook Review Committee (TRC) of the MUB to review books of all subjects - including those of social sciences, science and mathematics. Reportedly, the MUB's Textbook Review Committee (TRC) have issued a direction to

SNC or the Publishers to remove the words of 'interest' and 'markup' from the books of mathematics as they are un-Islamic. Reportedly, the religious scholars, who were members of the MUB's TRC, also directed the publishers to not to print any diagrams or sketches in the textbooks of biology showing human figures without clothes¹⁸³.

In KP, unlike Punjab, although MUB is not authorised to review the textbooks but the subject specialists, themselves examine their respective subjects from Islamic point of view. Representatives of the Textbook Publishing Associations are rightly raising the question of hiring highly paid subject specialists by the PCTB, if they are not capable of doing their job and ulema's are further needed to examine their work. But the PCTB spokesperson insists that the Ulema Board is mandated to review all SNC model and recommended books under the PCTB Act. It even warned that action would be taken against those publishers who fail to secure NOC from the PCTB. There is no harm, the Board asserts, in MUB being authorized to review Islamic and social science

subjects as they are going to review only the religious material that is part of any textbook¹⁸⁴.

In fact, PCTB evolved from Punjab Curriculum Authority in 2012 to its present shape through PCTB (Amendment) Act 2020. Earlier the religious clerics had no role in selecting and developing the content of the textbooks. Unfortunately, the role of MUB was also inserted under the same Act of 2020 under section 2(A) stating that *“any textbook or curriculum on religion with contents or matter related to Islam including Islamiyat, History, Pakistan Studies, Urdu, Literature or any other subject material related to religion shall not be published before taking prior approval from the MUB, Punjab and the PCTB shall be bound to take such approval from MUB in Punjab”*. In June 2020, a few weeks after the above legislation, the Governor of Punjab advised Universities to make the studying Holy Quran compulsory at higher levels. No mention of an alternative to the non-Muslim students.

Now MUB has become powerful enough to influence the process as well as content of the

school curricula. Now they are the one's (not the educationists) who decide what is a hate or intolerant material and what is not? Maulana Tahir Ashrafi, the head of MUB claims that they have *“so far cleared 307 books from possible extremist content”*¹⁸⁵.

Admiring the decree of compulsory teaching of naazra Quran at all grades and for all degrees, Governor Ghulam Sarwar tweeted it to be *‘a dream coming true as learning Quran guarantees our progress’*. Also, the Speaker Punjab Assembly⁸⁰ reiterated that *‘religious content in all books and all schools across board shall be scrutinized by Mutahida Ulema Board (MUB)’*. *‘The legislation (of compulsory Quranic education) has closed the doors of sharr (conflict) for ever’*, he asserted. The *Tahuffaz-e-Bunyad-e-Islam Act*¹⁸⁶, Punjab, authorizes MUB and Director General Public Relations to examine and not to allow arrival or publication of any national or international books critical of Islam, politics or history to protect *‘national interest’*. Consequently, the PCTB banned around 100 books, alleging them containing anti-

⁸⁰ Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, PML (Q), Pakistan.

religious or anti-national material. In the words of Ayesha Jalal, the known historian, “*our textbooks are the best example of the nexus between power and bigotry*”. With this backdrop, how is it possible to prevent our curriculum and syllabi from regressive influences now and in future¹⁸⁷?

To embed madrasa-like environment further in schools, the Chief Minister of Punjab, advised education authorities of Punjab, to arrange recitation of Holy Quran and Durood Sharif before the national anthem to invoke Allah’s blessings and keep children safe. Obeying the advice, Secretary Education, notified all schools to comply¹⁸⁸. Things did not stop here. There was a ripple effect. In response to certain schools’ submissions that reciting Holy Quran and Durood Sharif, also desired a-priori rituals say *wuzoo*, wearing a cap or dupatta etc. The Punjab’s Minister for Education, Dr Murad Raas, suggested a way out. He advised both public and private schools to make dupatta and cap as an essential part of their uniform¹⁸⁹. One must ask a question, if it is not *madrasization* of public and private schools, what else could it be?

Perhaps under the emerging influence, direct or indirect, Deputy District Education Officer, Chakwal, issued a notification (December 2021) to strike off and/or transfer all girls studying in the government's co-education schools (VI-VIII) to the exclusively girls' schools. But immediately after, District Education Authority issued another notification, saying the notification was issued without prior permission¹⁹⁰. Yet another similar concern erupted in January 2021. The Directorate of Public Instruction (DPI, Colleges) had had a checklist with a clause under which private colleges were supposed to file an affidavit of 'no co-education' within their colleges. The clause somehow turned into a news for all the private colleges to submit a similar affidavit. However, the Higher Education Department of the province, clarified saying, 'it had not notified any such conditionality for private colleges.' But, the checklist, as per media reports, did contain such a requirement but was never implemented¹⁹¹.

With the ensuing Arabic and Quranic education, cramming tendency is highly likely to go up. In advanced levels, the emergence of *masaalik* and

firqa oriented tensions is just a matter of time. One must not forget that *maslaki* and *firqawarana* differences (sects and schools of thought), as it happened in Zia regime (1977-1988) might occur again. Ultimately, it is the teachers who have to teach the religious content not the ulema involved in developing it. What non-Muslim students are going to be taught, instead, at the advanced levels is yet not clear?

Obviously, the question arises, why the MUB has been bestowed with the role of reviewing textbooks other than Islamiyat. Their influence must remain to their own arena, if at all. How can certain fundamental notions of economics be removed from Mathematics or Economics or any other sciences or social sciences? How can biology be taught without opening the guts and organs in the dissected human body. The same ulema also found faults with the books of mathematics. Don't they know that Pakistan's economic engine runs with the fuel of debt and the country pays millions of dollars in interest every single year. Don't they have their own bank accounts and don't they receive interests? Don't they buy and sell land or

property making colossal number of profits? In fact, they are trying to manoeuvre people through the space that the state of Pakistan has created for the far-right groups operating under multiple hues and colours.

Maryam Chughtai, Chairperson NCC, defends teaching of Holy Quran at schools. *“There is nothing wrong in studying Islam at school as they study it back home, anyway,”* she argues. But she fails defending religious content spotted in social science subjects and certain bits even in sciences. *“These are just the model textbooks requiring some change”*, she responds unconvincingly. While extending her support to the teaching of faith at schools, she forgets that families vary in their faith orientation as well as in degree of their religiosity. Also, they can pick and choose day and time to study Islam. In schools, on the other hand, it becomes a disciplinary matter. In addition, securing marks becomes the primary motive to study it, not the faith itself.

Rather than acknowledging the State’s failure to ensure universal schooling, the Federal Minister for

EPT admires madrassas for providing food and shelter to the millions of poor and destitute children. By pledging that *dares-e-nizaami* shall remain intact – the very system that implanted fundamentalist tendencies in our society – SNC repeats the same old folly. So long as the ultra-conservative environment and imitational logic rules over, dealing with madrasas to embrace board exams will not enable their students to compete with the students of the public and private schools. To sweep the problem under the rug is utterly naive or plain duplicity. Simply speaking, the madrasas' worldview stands apart completely as known by the Minister himself. If the government is sincere by any measure, it should discourage *dars-e-nizaami* and open up equal number of public schools. Otherwise, the situation will reflect the old satire, '*parhey faarsi baichey taeil*' ie *seeking higher education but doing menial job*. Because, their spirit is sceptical of critical thinking and learning empirically¹⁹².

'Higher the religiosity, lower the acceptability of diversity and plurality', is a fact amply demonstrated that our educational gurus refuse to

accept. Due to the same reasons, the degree of intolerance dwindles as we move from madrasas to public schools to private schools. Packing the excessive religiosity in schooling nurtures the risk of madrasa like ambiance in public schools¹⁹³. By observing the excessive Islamic and patriotic content in education, one is convinced that the successive governments and the State of Pakistan are not interested in promoting objective and critical education. The vital institution is merely employed just as a tool to achieve preconceived political ends¹⁹⁴.

9.

Diversity, Inclusion and Minority Rights in SNC

Imbued in the notion of Islam and homogenous nationhood, the self-concocted ideology of Pakistan permeates in our policy's nook and corner – irrespective of socio-cultural, religious and linguistic diversity enculturating Pakistan. Nation-building project that Pakistan hates to withdraw from, is inherently exclusionary and monolithic, at times leading to racism and prejudice. Though SNC has attempted to sublimize the ideological undercurrents in social science subjects, but where the tradition has been shrunk in one arena, it has simultaneously been expanded and overblown in certain other arenas. Inculcating faith and patriotism through SNC are like pouring the old wine in new bottle.

Minorities population is estimated to stand around 3.53 percent in the 1917 Census¹⁹⁵. But it is not the number or the percentage that matters rather

diversity and inclusion that play an important role than just numbers. Rather than highlighting Islam as a binding force – it is democracy, equality of citizenship, human rights and economic development that need to be strengthened to help the country progress. Unfortunately, SNC and SNC-born Model Textbooks fail to promote these values – contrary to the voluminous speeches made by the ministers and the representatives of SNC.

Through SNC, the current government has, nevertheless, corrected a historical wrong by substituting Ethics or Islamiyat with the teachings of their faith for minority kids. Christians, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Sikhs, Bahais, Buddhist and Kalasha children are now going to study a course devised by their own experts. They are no more bound to sit in the Islamiyat's class for they are not going to be examined in it. The, government, however needs to recruit enough number of teachers from the above-mentioned faith communities. But several other steps need to be taken, like the provision of equal respect and enabling school environment, as ensuring rights and equality is a larger cause than

symbolic gesture of acknowledging the existence of other faiths.

9.1. Extending Rights by One Hand and Taking Back by Another

In the very context, it is pertinent to mention what Article 22 (1) of the CoP states: *“No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or take part in any religious ceremony, or attend religious worship, if such instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own”*. In the same vein, Article 20 (a) of the CoP also guarantees that, *“every citizen shall have the right to freely profess, practice and propagate his religion¹⁹⁶”*. Affirming Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and being a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights too, Pakistan is obliged to comply with UDHR’s Article 26 (2) stating that, *“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and according to*

the Article 26(3), *“Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education⁸¹ that shall be given to their children”¹⁹⁷*. In terms of Article 18 of the ICCPR, *“Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching; and “No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice”*.

Despite acknowledging minority children’s right not to study Islamiyat, it is amply demonstrated in the previous section that they are, albeit alternatively through compulsory social science subjects. In certain cases, progressive educationists have also been criticised for illustrating Christians, Hindus, Sikhs or Parsis observing their faith within their own places of worship in a course-book designed for elementary classes¹⁹⁸. Faith education should be left with parents. Ideally, ‘the textbooks need to

⁸¹ Save an education of violence and extremism.

be secular as they are meant to resolve human problems' worldly needs and mundane issues of life, livelihood and general social relations. *"If Islam or Christianity or any other faith, so to speak, is taught at schools, it may create the semblance of a religious seminary⁸²"*, argues the Priest of a Cathedral Church in Multan.

There is more than one way to violate constitutional provisions. Whereas the current transformative stream of curriculum, extends minority-communities their right to study their own faith-texts or teachings instead of Islamiyat or Ethics, in many a case, it either sustains or intensifies Islamic studies as part of the social science subjects. English, Urdu, Pakistan Studies, Social Studies, General Knowledge and other such subjects categorically instruct students about on the faith of Islam. The subject of Urdu Language and Literature, in particular, seems to be a kind of supplementary Islamiyat. So much so, a statement, Islamic maxim or examples are sprinkled here in the margins of physical science subjects as well.

⁸² KII with the priest Naeem Javaid of Cathedral of Virgin Mary, Multan.

While in the compulsory subjects, even if the topic is not religious, examples resort back to Islamic principles or Islamic history. Under the situation, how is it possible for a non-Muslim student to skip her class or avoid studying Islamic content as part of other subjects. Obviously, she has to sit in exams and get through. What else could it be called if not alternative coercion – a clear violation to Article 22 (1) of the CoP and the provisions of UDHR and Minority Rights Declaration, proscribing direct or indirect persuasion or instruction of the dominant faith to those who profess a faith other than Islam.

Clearly while compelling them to study multiple Islamic lessons, SNC compels all minority students to not only study rather commemorate and reproduce the same in exams. To some of the critics, the central government, by superimposing SNC, not only intends to infiltrate its agenda of re-Islamization, as evident by its several other acts and attitudes, rather than establishment's geo-strategic agenda of nationalism, patriotism and its' myopic world view as well – all through the vehicle of the syllabi¹⁹⁹. In a situation where public school's environment is already regressive, teachers turn it

further conservative while preaching or promoting excessive Islamization. It must also be noted that in 2021, around 70 percent of the blasphemy allegations were made only in the province of Punjab. Some of the allegations involved students and teachers too. Therefore, measures as mentioned above, may carry repercussions on religious tolerance, cultural diversity and the rule of law.

Reportedly, PCTB has already failed to implement NCC's decision of teaching five minority faiths in place of ethics in 2020-2021. In Punjab, 18th Constitutional Amendment is being violated at least in case of SNC as PCTB is implementing the directives of the Ministry of Federal Education as it is, without out asserting its autonomy in the area of education.

Addressing the similar concerns Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) and a couple of other Civil Society Organizations have submitted a petition to the Supreme Court of Pakistan – whose verdict is yet to be awaited. Similarly, the land mark judgment

made by Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani (2014) commands respective governments to implement all constitutional provisions regarding the rights of Non-Muslim minorities. In an appeal submitted to the Apex Court (by HRCP and CSJ), the One-Man Commission set up by the Supreme Court, known as Shoaib Suddle Commission, also sought the exclusion of overtly Islamic topics from the compulsory English, Urdu and General Knowledge subjects. The Commission also found it violating the Article 22 (1) of the CoP²⁰⁰. Additionally, in response to a letter written by the Chairman Pakistan Minority Teachers Association (PMTA), Anjum James Paul, to Shoaib Suddle Commission, Chairman of the Commission wrote a letter to the Secretary, MoFEPT (2.2.2022)⁸³ to explain, 'why were they awarding extra 50 marks to the Muslim students in return of studying Holy Quran?' How were they going to accommodate minority students under the same parameters? And what, if any, parallel arrangement, had they developed?

⁸³ The letter is written to the Secretary Education, MoFEPT on February 2, 2022 (No. 1/1-2019 -CII-SCN) in response to the letter written to the honourable Chairman OMC Mr, Shoaib Suddle on 26-01-2022 on the Letterhead of Shoaib Suddle Commission.

In a heavily Islamic environment, that the new curriculum may generate in schools, minority faith students will naturally perceive them to be alien as if they were in a wrong place with a wrong mind set with inappropriate world view. A democratic, plural, diversified and secular social aura, already too thin in our schools, will turn even thinner. Where there is already a strong tendency of inviting or influencing minority students or teachers to embrace Islam, enriching Islamic milieu will further push them aside as odd ones' out.

Ironically, a politically manipulated position was adopted by the National Commission for Minorities (NCM). Ironically, though understandable under the naïve and non-statutory status of the Commission, it distanced itself from the Apex Court's One-Man Commission (OMC) to examine and report on the implementation of Minority Rights Judgement (2014) and excluding all Islamic content from compulsory subjects, other than Islamiyat. As stated by Chairman NCM, Chela Ram Kewlani, *"the Commission did not agree with the OMC's recommendation of shifting the entire*

Islamic content from compulsory subjects like English, Urdu, General Knowledge and Social Studies to Islamiyat. It is rather a means to create interfaith harmony, he argued". In other words, to NCM, the newly introduced composition and content of SNC (including the new curriculum's heavy tilt towards Islam) is perfectly fine with them. *"We endorse it (SNC) unanimously,"* argue the members of MRC. On the other hand, responding to the report, 'the Minority Panel of the OMC wants the religious texts from other compulsory subjects to be shifted to Islamiyat alone. But the Chairman NCM insists that the Commission is the only legitimate forum to assume or not to assume a position adopted by the OMC as it represents Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis and Kalasha communities of the country²⁰¹.

Non-representation or handpicked representation and governmental influence easily explain such a surprising positioning. Driven by the members own interests and a political but non-representative body fails to comprehend the problems of its own community and kids as well. Even if it is headed by a non-Muslim member, the very presence of

Islamic clerics like Maulana Syed Abdul Khair Azad and Mufti Gulzar Naeemi in the NCM, sublimely influences them to not to turn against the predominant faith of the tyrannical majority community. Created without any statutory provisions unlike the National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR)⁸⁴, National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and National Commission on Child Rights (NCRC), the NCM has become a toothless body which is ever scared of putting forth their own rights as enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan.

Of late, Chairperson NCC, Maryam Chughtai seems agreeing with multiple problems identified by independent critics and educationists including excessive religiosity, discrimination against minorities, gender biases, grammatical mistakes, extended exercises and poor quality of model textbook publications. *“But the textbooks may not see the light of the day, before mid-2023”*, she argues. However, it is yet to be seen, how far, if at all, any changes are introduced in the existing curriculum and model textbooks²⁰². Given

⁸⁴ National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR).

contradictory statements issued from a range of official corners, as demonstrated in several sections of this book, nothing seems trustworthy.

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