

ONE NATION, ONE CURRICULUM
An Ethnographic Account of Single National Curriculum
(SNC)



Shakeel Ahmad

Quaid-i-Azam University

Department of Anthropology

Islamabad – Pakistan.

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Shakeel Ahmad

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Department of Anthropology

Islamabad – Pakistan.

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Formal Declaration

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Islamabad, 16 August 2023

Mr. Shakeel Ahmad

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all the students, who deserve a better education.

ABSTRACT

Launched in 2021, Single National Curriculum (SNC) is one of the three pillars of ‘One system of Education for all’. This study aims to explore SNC from an anthropological point of view. The ramifications of SNC are discussed by voices from inside and outside the academic circle of Pakistan. The research is ethnographical in nature and employs qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs) to collect data from around twenty research participants. The sample was selected through snowballing and purposive sampling techniques. This research problematizes the notion of “One nation, One curriculum” by including authentic critiques of the new textbooks from renowned academic analysts and members of the civil society of Pakistan. The federal decision regarding education seems to threaten the autonomy of provinces and ethnic and religious minorities. This is juxtaposed with the claims for equitable and discrimination-free education to further highlight the irony of imposing a ‘uniform’ curriculum. This ethnographic account attempts to document the counter-arguments to the self-perceived benefits of SNC. The content of the new curriculum is evaluated on the basis of inclusivity and [mis]representation of religious and ethnic diversities of Pakistan. The dialectic of singularity and plurality is also explored in relation to the recently introduced changes in curriculum. In addition to these factors, the arguments serve to question the retrogressive educational measures taken by the government. It is maintained that the quality of education is suffering from inducing narrow-mindedness in students through a single, centralized curriculum. Based on in-depth interviews, Focused Group Discussions (FGDs), and content analysis, this qualitative study will be helpful for multiple stakeholders and policymakers to develop a better understanding of diversity in Pakistan and prevent the population of Pakistan from falling a victim to reductionist curricularized content.

Key Words: *Education, Education policy, Ethnic diversity, Religious minorities, Quality of Education, Single National Curriculum (SNC), Nation, Two-Nation theory, Curriculum, Focused Group Discussions (FGDs)*

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AKU-IED	Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
CFS	Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
CSJ	Centre for Social Justice
ECE	Early Childhood Education
FGEI	Federal Government Educational Institution
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information & Communication Technology
IT	Information Technology
MoI	Medium of Instruction
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
NCC	National Curriculum Council
NEP	National Education Policy
NEPF	National Education Policy Framework
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
OOSC	Out of School Children
PCTB	Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf
RTE	Right to Education Act
SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test

SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SNC	Single National Curriculum
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USD	United States Dollar
USE	Uniform System of Education
WGIE	Working Group for Inclusive Education

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	I
List of Acronyms	II
List of Figures	IX
List of Tables	IX
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Statement of Problem.....	8
1.2. Research Objectives	9
1.3. Definitions of the key terms	9
1.3.1. Single National Curriculum (SNC).....	9
1.3.2. National Integration	9
1.3.3. Social Cohesion	9
1.3.4. Interfaith Harmony.....	10
1.3.5. Out of School Children (OOSC).....	10
1.3.6. Early Childhood Education/ECE	10
1.3.7. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).....	10
1.4. Significance of the study	10
1.5. Outline of the thesis.....	11
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	12
2.1. The Relevant Constitutional Provisions.....	12
2.2. Review of the Educational Policies of Pakistan.....	14

2.3.	Pakistani Curriculum.....	23
2.4.	Review of Literature on SNC.....	25
2.5.	Review of Literature from Educational Anthropology.....	35
3.	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	39
3.1.	Research Methods	39
3.1.1.	Primary Sources	39
3.1.2.	Secondary Sources	39
3.2.	Sampling.....	40
3.2.1.	Purposive Sampling	40
3.2.2.	Snowball Sampling	40
3.2.3.	Sampling Size	41
3.3.	Research Tools.....	41
3.3.1.	In-depth Interviews	41
3.3.2.	Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	42
3.3.3.	Key Informants	43
3.3.4.	Informal Discussions	43
3.3.5.	Content Analysis.....	44
3.4.	Research Design.....	44
3.5.	Data Collection.....	45
3.6.	Thematic Analysis Process.....	46
3.7.	Data Interpretation Method	47

3.8.	Study Sites.....	47
3.9.	Epistemological and Ontological Assumptions	47
3.10.	Theoretical Framework.....	49
3.11.	Ethical Considerations.....	55
3.12.	Research Limitations	55
4.	SNC: INTERFAITH HARMONY, SOCIAL COHESION AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION.....	57
4.1.	Premise of Singularity Vs. Standardization	57
4.1.1.	What should be the direction of education here?.....	57
4.1.2.	Is ideological incorporation a good idea?	60
4.1.3.	Need for Elevating Learning and Access Quality amid Poverty	62
4.2.	The Problematic Representation of Diverse Ethnic and Religious Groups.....	64
4.2.1.	Are the needs of learners properly represented?.....	64
4.2.2.	Indoctrination Vs. Critical Thinking.....	64
4.2.3.	Importance of Choice and Academic Freedom	65
4.2.4.	Broad-based Education Vs. Specialized Education.....	66
4.3.	Counter-productive Education Strategies	67
4.3.1.	Implications of Academic Competition.....	67
4.3.2.	Should we be predetermining the course of education for children?.....	68
5.	DISPARITIES IN THE CONTENT OF SNC.....	70
5.1.	Impact on Minority Students.....	70
5.2.	Impact on Majority Students	70

5.3. In violation of the Constitution	71
5.4. The (not-so) Minor Issues	71
5.5. The Subtle Subversion	72
5.6. Analysis of Disparities in SNC Based Textbooks.....	72
5.6.1. Religious Content.....	73
5.6.2. Glorification of War.....	78
5.6.3. Gender based Disparities	79
5.6.4. Hate Material – War to Mold Minds.....	81
5.7. Distorted History.....	84
5.8. Institutional Discrimination	84
5.9. Breeding Intolerance	85
5.10. Learning to live together.....	86
5.11. Further Marginalizing the Marginalized.....	87
5.12. Exclusively ‘Inclusive’	87
5.13. The Global Context.....	88
5.14. Everyone isn’t on the same train.....	88
5.15. Linguistic Hegemony.....	89
5.16. Serving the Majoritarianism	90
5.17. Ideological Overtones of SNC	91
5.18. Fueling Hostilities.....	91
5.19. Rich Schools, Poor Schools	92

5.20. Can the SNC actually reduce educational inequality?	92
5.21. The Strategic Failure in Education	93
5.22. Fragmentation of Education.....	94
5.23. Uniformity in the Absence of Unity	95
5.24. False Image of Social Cohesion.....	96
5.25. Mentioning Holi and Christmas is not Enough.....	97
5.26. Equating Equality with Homogenization.....	97
5.27. Embracing Diversity Is the Only Way Forward	98
6. ‘DISBELIEVERS’ OR FELLOW CITIZENS?.....	99
6.1. The Direction of Education in Pakistan	100
6.2. The Problematic Representation of Diverse Ethnic and Religious Groups in SNC.....	103
6.3. Counter-productive Education Strategies	105
7. CONCLUSION	107
Recommendations.....	109
Glossary	113
Bibliography	115
Annexure, Interview Guide.....	1277

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Concerns over Violation of the Rights of Religious Minorities.....	103
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Religious content in compulsory subjects	73
Table 2: Content about wars	78
Table 3: Gender related disparities	79
Table 4: Hate Material	81
Table 5: Pictorial and graphic representation of majoritarianism.....	83

1. INTRODUCTION

The 18th amendment to the constitution of Pakistan as per the Gazette of Pakistan (2010) abolished the ‘concurrent legislative list’ and reconfigured the federal-provincial relationship. In the wake of The Constitution (Eighteenth Amendment) Act, 2010 amongst others, the school education including curriculum development was devolved to provinces. Before embarking on understanding the education and curriculum policy, it would not be out of place to develop an understanding of school education of Pakistan.

With a population of 220+ Million, Pakistan is the 5th most populous country in the world¹, and the second-largest country with out-of-school children (OOSC) between the age of 5-16 years², and out of school Girls after Nigeria; the COVID pandemic has accelerated the crisis even further.

By 2047 Pakistan will be celebrating 100 years of its existence; there can be no celebration when its children and girls suffer the absolute lack of fundamental entitlements to free, compulsory, and quality education. Whilst there is a cry globally for salvaging the SDGs 2030 there are profound concerns about missing the targets set by the global community and the Government of Pakistan as a lead supporter. To date, the progressive gaps for gross enrolment of Early Childhood Education/ECE (40%), Net Enrolment Rate (NER), Primary (64%) Middle (37%) and Secondary /Matric (27%) are at scale, with more girls affected than boys, and this ugly reality is unacceptable. The crisis is not just of access (25 million OOSC) but also of abysmally low learning outcomes as ASER 2010-2021, TIMSS 2020, and SAT 2012 show (Jamil, 2022); when it comes to inclusion, access and quality are further aggravated whereby there is little understanding of 15.5% children with disabilities (ASER/MICs,) according to the CFS/Washington Group/UNICEF tool. This further jeopardizes equity to exacerbate the challenges of access and quality amidst a consistently low level of

¹ According to UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) Pakistan is 5th most populous country.

² UNICEF report on Out of School Children.

allocations and spending (1.8-2.4 %) compared to what was promised in the NEP 2009, 7% GDP was suggested and by the UN 4%.

Before the discussion dives into the SNC, it is important to outline some international education systems that have been adopted and implemented as national education systems. It should be noted that education policy is considered a fundamental benchmark of any nation regulating the intellectual growth of a country and acts as an instrument for disseminating and reinforcing the national narrative around the world. It also reflects the socio-economic priorities of the state. The first reference of the educational system is from England³. It is also a national curriculum enforced uniformly across the English island. It is divided into four key stages based on school years with an overarching goal of balanced and broadly based (education) to promote spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development at school and in society.

English education system attempts to focus on relationship education for pupils of primary age (5-16 years), mathematics, English and science from primary age, foreign language teaching from 7 to 14 years of age and computing and technical learning from primary education to 16 years of education. England's education system essentially targets the social and technical growth of the students. It is flexible in terms of opting out of the subjects, especially the ones of religious aspects.

Recently Pakistan's immediate neighbour India also introduced a new national curriculum policy in 2020⁴. It aims at building an education system focused on SDG 4⁵. India prioritizes the goal of inclusive, and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all students by 2030 (National Education Policy, 2020).

This education policy will be uniformly adopted throughout the schools of India. Overhauling the Indian education system is tantamount to a 'restart button' for the

³ Britain's first National Curriculum was introduced in 1989 through Education Reform Act 1988. While the current is based on the Education Act of 2002.

⁴ India introduced its fourth and latest education policy called 'National Education Policy 2020'.

⁵ SDG 4 prioritizes the quality education.

Indian population. The curriculum specifically focuses on technical learning of students, especially in computer science, Artificial Intelligence and programming.

Indian mode of education in this manner is highly capitalism-centered as the country already is one of the leading IT service providers⁶. As far as the education of students towards Indian history and culture is concerned, it reads ‘Knowledge of India will include knowledge from ancient India and its contributions to modern India’. And ‘Specific focus on tribal and indigenous knowledge of ancient India besides the forest management and traditional crop cultivation (National Education Policy, 2020).

All in all, the Indian national curriculum is highly diversified in terms of its subjects and is deeply rooted in regional history which will ensure India’s national integration and cultural growth, apparently⁷.

Now coming back to Pakistan’s educational history and Single National Curriculum. Under the 18th Amendment 2010, education was successfully made a fundamental right granted. Article 25-A states:

“The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law.” (Shah et al. 2013)

Many hopes were pinned on the PTI taking charge in 2018, especially regarding the promises made in the National Education Policy Framework (NEPF), 2018. NEPF promised the policy thrust in four priority areas; putting out-of-school children (OOSC) in schools; enhancing the quality of education; removing educational apartheid by bridging the gap between the prevalent class-based education systems; and placing emphasis on technical and vocational education.

During its campaign for power, having continually talked about the problem of *amir ka bacha* and *ghareeb ka bacha* (child of the rich, child of the poor) going to different school systems, instead, of adhering to NEPF 2018 and making progress in fulfilling

⁶ IT exports of India in 2022 are worth at 225 billion USDs.

⁷ India aims to achieve deeply rooted cultural society by 2040 with this NEP 2020.

the above-mentioned promises, the PTI government moved in an entirely different (apparently fruitless and retrogressive) direction by producing and introducing a Single National Curriculum (SNC). Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government implemented Single National Curriculum (SNC) in *Deeni madaris* (religious seminaries), public and private school systems in Pakistan as a ‘solution’ to a disjointed quality of education which is creating apartheid in society and a polarized conglomerate rather than a nation.

This move has generated an unprecedented debate in the country⁸. The resistance, critique, and enormity of comments reflect the fact that SNC has become a concern for the education school education sector including public, private, low-fee, elite, madrassas, etc. The debate is not over yet because what has come forth is the implementation of SNC from Grade-I to V (Phase-I), and much more (Grade VI-III during Phase II and Grade IX to XII during Phase III) is yet to come. Barring a few voices of support, most of the opinion-eds and commentaries have been deeply critical of SNC on multiple grounds, which are laid out in detail in the chapter on literature review.

Envisioned as one system of education (one curriculum) for all (one nation), in terms of content, medium of learning/instruction, and common grounds of assessment so that as per SDG-4 all student may have a just and equal opportunity to receive a high-quality education (The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022)

The objectives of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) were to ensure that all children have a fair opportunity and equal access to quality education, to promote social cohesion and national integration, to remove disparities in education content across the multiple streams, to pave the way for equal opportunities for upward social mobility, to warrant equity in education besides the holistic development of children in the light of emerging international trends and local aspirations and smooth inter-provincial mobility of teachers and students.

The following key considerations paved the way for the development of SNC:

⁸ SNC is alleged to be an instrument of extremist narrative adherents.

- Teachings of the Quran and Sunnah
- Vision of Quaid-e-Azam and Allama Muhammad Iqbal
- Constitutional framework
- National policies, aspirations, and National standards
- Alignment with the goals & targets of SDG-4
- Emerging global trends in teaching, learning & assessment
- Outcomes-based educational approach
- Focus on values, life skills, and inclusion
- Reverence and appreciation for different cultures and religions in the local and global context
- Promotion of intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, aesthetic, and physical development of children
- Discouraging rote memorization and encouraging project, inquiry, and activity-based learning
- Advancing of 21st century skills including critical, analytical, and creative thinking
- Effective incorporation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- Corresponding to the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)

According to the Ministry of Education and Professional Training Government of Pakistan the Single National Curriculum was planned to be developed and implemented in three phases. During the first phase (March 2021) SNC based textbooks were developed and implemented for grades Pre-I to Grade V. The second phase (March 2022) undertook the development of SNC-based textbooks for grades VI, VII and VIII whereas textbooks for high and higher secondary schools (IX-XII) were to be developed and implemented during the third phase (by March 2023).

As far as the development process of SNC is concerned, the PTI government claimed that proactively multiple comparative studies were carried out to align SNC with international standards. Claiming an ‘across the board’ consultation with numerous stakeholders including all federating units (provinces), Federal Government

Educational Institutions (FGEIs), public sector, private sector, Cantonments & Garrisons, Deeni Madrassahs, Cambridge University UK for English, Maths, and Science, AKU-IED, and LUMS, National Curriculum Council (NCC) claims to have arranged multiple area, regional, provincial and national level workshops and conferences to take into account 'expert opinion' and 'objections'. The inputs and feedback received from these consultations, workshops, and conferences are said to have been incorporated into the SNC. Worth mentioning is the Four-Day National Conference on Single National Curriculum which was held from February 11-14, 2020. In the closing ceremony officials lauded the role of subject specialists and announced that all sectors have unanimously agreed to the draft of the new curriculum. The finalized draft was signed by all the Federating Units representatives, Private Sector, FGEIs, and Ittihad Tanzimat-ul-Madaris Pakistan.

Compared to the earlier implemented curriculum (2006) which is said to have lacked benchmarks and learning outcomes for all/each subject, the SNC is claimed to be based on standards, benchmarks, and outcomes across all subjects. For instance, In the 2006 curriculum up to grade II, the subject of Islamiyat was integrated with General Knowledge and was a separate subject from Grade 3 onwards. Under SNC from grade I up to grade, XII Islamiyat has been incorporated as a separate subject. Previously from Grade 3 onwards in place of Islamiyat, the subject of 'Ethics' was designated for students from minority religions. Now, from grade 1 onwards, the SNC has introduced a new subject of 'Religious Education' separately for seven religious minority groups of Pakistan i.e., Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Bahaism, Kalasha, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism of Pakistan.

In an attempt to be at par with international standards, the content of the SNC for Mathematics and Science has been aligned with the framework of TIMSS content. The content is also aligned with international commitments like SDG 4. Having been developed to focus on equipping children/students with truthfulness, honesty, peaceful coexistence, tolerance, respect, environmental awareness & care, human rights, democracy, sustainable development, global citizenship, personal care and safety-like principles and attributes, SNC is meant to develop critical, analytical, and creative thinking among students through a more engaging (activities-based) methodology

rather than static teacher-centric approach. One more addition to the list of ‘for the first time’ is the incorporation of ICT in the SNC.

Unlike the 2006 curriculum which was limited to government schools and some low-cost private schools, the SNC (despite receiving a lot of resistance and criticism) is being implemented across multiple education streams of Pakistan including government and private schools and Deeni Madrassahs.

A brief comparison with the British national curriculum might draw a similitude with SNC at some levels. For instance, both aim at the development and nourishment of children. However, both are starkly working on opposite poles at the same time as well. The considerations that the British curriculum follows are diverse and flexible wherever needed. The study of religious education is not compulsory for pupils, and the syllabus of religious education is allowed to be based on a locally agreed syllabus (Roberts, 2021). On the other hand, SNC mandates religious education for every pupil in Pakistan. British national curriculum extends beyond the traditional understanding of teaching and learning. Apart from teaching the mandatory subjects of history, science and mathematics, it allows the schools to devise their own curricula on personal, social and economic health. The diversity of curriculum in SNC should have been the main goal.

Compared to SNC, current Indian national education policy is by and large more diverse and foresights long-term goals. Also, SNC maintains a stance for establishing a probable upgraded and modern curriculum in future gradually, while the Indian curriculum has initiated the curriculum on modern goals. SNC in terms of ICT only probably aligns with the Indian education system but is simultaneously not as progressive as India.

After the promulgation of the 18th amendment in 2010, the curriculum became the provincial business. Till now, in provinces, five laws are in place (2012-2017) but almost all lack implementation plan. In the case of Punjab, a perfectly comprehensive

RTE (2014) still awaits to be notified. Only Sindh has the rules of business⁹ in place (2013/15) but no other province has bothered to secure the rules. Furthermore, whilst ICT, Punjab and Sindh have comprehensive Laws reflecting the sector-wide approaches to education, quality, inclusion and protection, the RTE Acts of Baluchistan (2014) and KP (2017) do not reflect the sector plans ambitions, and innovations as finalized by the provinces and their unique challenges. These gaps in the legislation, lack of implementation and going against the manifestos of political parties as promised in the 2018 election campaign, are equally unacceptable.

1.1. Statement of Problem

Fair opportunities, equal access to quality education, social cohesion, national integration, removal of disparities in textbooks, upward social mobility, equity in education, and global citizenship are some of the claims SNC is based on. Concerned quarters (Parents, Academicians, Educators, Civil Society Organizations, Human Right Activists) voiced their apprehensions against SNC through protests, columns, blogs, seminars, advocacy, and lobbying sessions even some civil society organizations approached the Supreme Court of Pakistan in light of Justice Tasadduq Hussain Jellani's judgment (Piracha, 2021). Though some scholarly work themed around different aspects of SNC has lately become part of academic discourse, the country's academic circle (with a few exceptions) remained out of the picture. The absence of an evaluation, analysis, expert opinion, and input from academicians was felt to an extent that a LUMS professor had to write '*Where was the academia during the SNC debate?*' (Siddiqi, 2021)

Available academic work is either based on media mentions, newspapers, and social media or derived out of surveys that cover Punjab overwhelmingly while mentioning very little of Baluchistan, almost zero of Sindh, and a complete absence of insights and opinions from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa what to say of Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir.

⁹ Rules of Business outline every province's authority to conduct and manage its affairs which only Sindh manages to have in place in Pakistan.

This ethnographic account of SNC is an attempt to understand the alternate/counter-narrative by evaluating the role/success of SNC in terms of religious, cultural, linguistic differences, interfaith harmony, social cohesion, and national integration from the perspective of legislators, officials, concerned citizens, textbook writers, reviewers, teachers, and parents.

1.2. Research Objectives

- 1- To examine the role of SNC in interfaith harmony, Social Cohesion, and National Integration
- 2- To identify disparities in the content of SNC
- 3- To explore the extent to which SNC respects & appreciates different cultures & religions in the local and global context.

1.3. Definitions of the key terms

1.3.1. Single National Curriculum (SNC)

SNC envisions one system of Education for all, in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction and a common platform of assessment so that all children have a fair and equal opportunity to receive high quality education.¹⁰

1.3.2. National Integration

Awareness of common identity among citizens of a country is called national integration.

1.3.3. Social Cohesion

It refers to the extent of connectedness and solidarity among groups in society.

¹⁰Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training
<http://www.mofept.gov.pk/ProjectDetail/MzkyNDc2MjMtY2VjYy00ZDA4LTk5OTU0tNzUyNDI3ZW MzN2Rm>

1.3.4. Interfaith Harmony

The term embodies the notion of live and let live, as defined by government of Pakistan.

1.3.5. Out of School Children (OOSC)

Children of school going age that are not going to schools.

1.3.6. Early Childhood Education/ECE

The period of learning that takes place from birth to eight years of age.

1.3.7. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Social Development Goals (such as zero hunger, gender equality, quality education etc.) are globally ratified 17 goals that UN signatories prioritize based on their socio-economic geographies (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.).

1.4. Significance of the study

Besides proving to be an effective addition to Anthropological knowledge under the aegis of Anthropology of Education, the holistic account of provincial, socio-cultural, linguistic, and religious concerns, reservations and apprehensions over the idea, process, and content of SNC will not only bring to the attention the emic perspective but will also facilitate multiple stakeholders to become cognizant of alternate narrative. Bringing valuable input from textbook writers, reviewers, education managers, policymakers, officials, experts, members of the civil society and parents, the effective and all-encompassing curriculum inquiry may either save the SNC from being a failure or the nation from falling a victim to it.

Moreover, encouraging further inquiry and proving to be action research, the findings will sensitize the curriculum developers, textbook writers, and graphic/illustration designers to take into account the social, economic, cultural, linguistic, regional, provincial, and religious aspects of the content/curricula.

This ethnographic work will inform about some necessary but less discussed aspects of SNC which are undeniably and extremely important otherwise. With a confidence that the efforts invested in this study will help the stakeholders develop a much better understanding of the socio-cultural, religious, political and technical complexities in the policy making exercise better. Findings of this study and overall efforts in this direction will bring us closer to the unmet goal of qualitative, free from all forms of discrimination, creative, unbiased, and inclusive education for all the children of Pakistan.

1.5. Outline of the thesis

The topic of the research is introduced in the first chapter. The problem statement, the study's objectives, the research questions, and an explanation of the crucial terms and phrases used throughout the research and thesis are all mentioned. The opening chapter also reinforces the study's importance and potential use to policymakers, academics, and development specialists.

The second chapter outlines all pertinent literature on the subject and provides references to relevant research, studies, and project reports about Pakistan's education policies and SNC. The research's cadence and focus are established in this chapter. A research gap is discovered at the end of literature review- no study has discussed in detail the anthropological concerns over SNC.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this section of the dissertation, the recent education policy of SNC has been contextualized, keeping in view the education policies of Pakistan since 1947. Moreover, the literature review is not only confined to an assessment of the education policies but also the review of newspaper articles, reports, journal articles and other sources available on the topic of SNC is provided. The purpose of reviewing such a diverse range of literature is to familiarize oneself with the motives, consequences, and public response to implementing SNC.

One perception regarding the growth or mutation of a country and the unification of its residents is generally associated with the nature of its educational system. It is said and strongly believed among the advocates of democratic peace as well as dictatorial and anarchical hardliners that education is the fundamental tool to naturalize the idea of national belonging and to identify the fault lines and chasms in the social fabric of a country (Rahman, 2004, p.08). Moreover, since the partition, Pakistan has reconstructed its outlook as a nation by disseminating a wholly new image of an “ethnically monocultural society” through an educational discourse designed by multiple stakeholders for several decades and imparted in form of school textbooks (Muhammad & Brett, 2015, p.75). Such agendas have been instrumental in ensuring social cohesion at the national level by producing a majority of the population as a pro-Islamic nation but at the cost of social, linguistic, religious, and political multiplicity. This has amplified with time and endangers the cultural diversity and livelihoods of minorities in the country.

2.1. The Relevant Constitutional Provisions

The following articles taken from the document of National Assembly of Pakistan can provide an overview of the statutory declarations of the State of Pakistan regarding the fair delivery of educational, economic, and social facilities:

Article 22:

1. No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instructions, 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.
2. In respect of any religious institution, there shall be no discrimination against any community in the granting of exemption or concession in relation to taxation.
3. Subject to law,
 - a. No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any educational institution maintained wholly by that community or denomination.
 - b. No citizen shall be denied admission to any educational institution receiving aid from public revenues on the ground only of race, religion, caste or place of birth.
4. Nothing in this Article shall prevent any public authority from making provision for the advancement of any socially or educationally backward class of citizens.

Article 25: Equality of citizens

1. All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.
2. There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex.
3. Nothing in this Article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the protection of women and children.

Article 25 A: Right to education

The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law.

Article 33: Promotion of social justice and eradication of social evils

The State shall:

- a. Promote, with special care, the educational and economic interests of backward classes or areas;
- b. Remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within minimum possible period;
- c. Make technical and professional education generally available and higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of merit;
- d. Enable the people of different areas, through education, training, agricultural and industrial development and other methods, to participate fully in all forms of national activities, including employment in the service of Pakistan;

Article 38 (d): Promotion of social and economic well-being of the people

The State shall provide basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, housing, education and medical relief, for all such citizens, irrespective of sex, caste, creed or race, as are permanently or temporarily unable to earn their livelihood on account of infirmity, sickness or unemployment;

The abovementioned articles outline the basic rights of citizens as provided by the constitution of Pakistan. True, the law strictly forbids any kind of discrimination based on sex, race, creed or race, what needs attention is the failure of social institutions in executing these constitutional provisions. More than seven decades have passed since the inception of Pakistan but one sees that our educational sector lags behind the envisioned scenario i.e. providing education free of cost and to all children. Therefore, this study will evaluate educational policies, particularly the policy of SNC, on these constitutional promises as well.

2.2. Review of the Educational Policies of Pakistan

Educational policies are one of the most dynamic and ever-evolving policies in the world. Many countries after a period of a decade or two press the reset button of their educational policies. This review sheds light on various educational policies in England and India till the present. Firstly, the British education system had its first-ever national curriculum policy implemented in 1870 but was strictly confined to the elementary education of children. Many other bits of upgradations occurred through the decades

but the significant one termed ‘national curriculum’ was implemented through the Education Reform Act of 1988. This reformation aimed to make the nation rise among the competitor nations. This reveals that the educational policymakers proposed a national curriculum for increasing the prospects of success and development of one’s nation. Another Act came in 2002, then another in 2008 and the latest one was the Education Policy Act of 2011. All the policies moved the educational system of England in an upward direction aligning it with their current needs.

Pakistan’s neighbour India had introduced many reforms since partition such as Nehru’s visionary reforms, the Kothari commission¹¹ and so on. However, its first education policy emerged in 1986. The visionaries and educationists desired a uniform national policy to prepare the people of India for the twenty-first century. While the latest one has recently been launched in 2020 with the vision of building an advanced society by the mid of twenty-first century; technologically and intellectually developed and grounded in the indigenous cultures of India. Given the colonial history of Pakistan and India, the efforts of Indian scholars to re-connect to their local cultures indicate the need for educational policies to cater to the diverse cultures of various groups.

Before the decision of formulating a Single National Curriculum, a total of ten educational policies have been proposed and enacted since 1947. A brief overview of the previous policies is given in the following pages to map out the trajectory of the curriculum as an instrument of social cohesion or disruption. Bernadette L. Dean has illustrated that the curricularized textbooks do not separate Islamic education and citizenship education which endorses exclusivity instead of inclusivity in society (2005, p.35). It should be noted that educational policies were apparently maintained to bring up ‘good, responsible citizens’ of the state but those always ended up producing the adherents of ideologies of respective governments (Althusser, 1972).

In addition to Dean, Mariam Chughtai has analyzed Pakistani educational policies in detail. According to her, the objective of using state-sponsored curriculum materials is

¹¹ Extension of Nehru’s education vision formed in 1964-65.

to reinforce the connection between religion and the state. The content, methodology, and narrative of religious nationalism, which is continuously altering, are outcomes of strategic decisions that may use religion “but are not religiously motivated” (2015, p.202).

Pakistan Education Conference of 1947, the first conference on educational policy, enshrined Islamic studies as a compulsory part of education but only for Muslims. It aimed at educating every Muslim in the newly formed country on the teachings of Islam as Islamic values were considered exemplary models for leading morally good lives (Aslam et al., 2019, p.4). Religious education, supposedly, had an overarching, broad definition that accommodated students according to their faiths. Thus, the initial struggles to inculcate interfaith forbearance through education were inclined a little towards Islamic learning to justify the ideological basis of Pakistan as a Muslim state but were simultaneously moderately balanced in curriculum recommendations so as not to evoke any social disruption.

As a newly formed state, Pakistan faced multiple problems. The government not only paid attention to immediate problems but also addressed the issue of reorienting the colonial education system “on the lines suited to the genius of our people, consonant with our history and culture and having regard for the modern conditions and vast developments that have taken place over the world”, as stated by Quaid-e-Azam in the All- Pakistan Educational Conference at Karachi, Nov. 27, 1947 (Ministry of Interior, Education Division, 1983). The comments of Fazlur Rehman, then Education Minister, also highlight the intended role of education in making all members of the state the citizens of Pakistan, no matter what political, religious, or provincial label a person may bear. Therefore, the first educational conference envisioned an educational system that would empower people to build democratic societies.

The National Commission on Education (Sharif Commission Report) of 1959 set up during the Ayub regime suggested a liberal view of Islamic studies in the curriculum. The report explicitly stated that religion was a personal affair and it should not be affecting the social life of people of other religions. But it mandated Islamiyat as a compulsory subject for Muslim students till grade 8th and as an optional subject,

onwards from 9th grade (Nayyar, 2020b, p.19). However, the discussion on the religious education of minorities was altogether absent in the policy. Moreover, the failure to make technological progress was considered so important that the policy advocated a “differential education system” for leaders and the skilled labour force. It prioritised quality higher education over universal education because it anticipated that the benefits would “trickle down” to the underprivileged. This did not occur, and Pakistan is now among the most disparate and illiterate countries in the world (Dean, 2005, p.37).

The Nur Education Policy of 1970 – named after then Education Minister Nur Khan -- proposed and enacted during the time of Yahya Khan largely remained the same and no changes were made that would undermine the socio-religious harmony of united Pakistan. Then came the era of a new Pakistan, an amputated one, without the Eastern wing. Under the new regime of Bhutto, Pakistan, divided into two states, was struggling to find the purpose of its national life. During that period – in the education policy of 1971-1980 -- a few newer concepts were introduced to the textbooks. For the first time the term, more of a slogan, ‘Ideology of Pakistan’ was invented to gel the nation as one and reinvigorate the sense of patriotism in the masses and laid a great emphasis on the ‘Islamic Identity’ as well (Nayyar, 2020b, p.21). Steps taken would ensure that anything in the curricula would not include anything unacceptable to and inconsistent with the ethics and values of Islam (Ministry of Education, 1972)

Following the military coup that toppled the Bhutto government in 1977, the educational system underwent a radical shift. In 1979, the Government of General Zia-ul-Haq presented a New National Education Policy. The policy’s objectives were the Islamization of society and the development of citizens as devout, practicing Muslims through citizenship education. Zia’s process of Islamization influenced curricula and textbooks in the 1980s and the effects of his decisions are reflected in the education sector even today. Education policy, then, was formed and led by Jamaat-e-Islami which coupled with religious fanaticism has shown extreme resistance towards every attempt to bring change in the discourse even today (Aslam et al., 2019, p.5).

Termed the most dynamic period in the socio-religious and political history of Pakistan, Zia ensured the complete eradication of diversity in the society under the banner of

“giving education an ideological orientation so that Islamic ideology permeates the thinking of the younger generation” (as cited in Saigol, 1994). The policies replete with terms like ‘loyalty to Islam’, duty towards the “Pakistani nation as part of universal ummah” (Dani, 1986, p. 64), and ‘Islam throughout the world’ planted seeds of exclusivity, religious fundamentalism, sectarianism, and ethnic cleansing in the country. The National Education Policy of 1998-2010 set the objective of education as reproducing the Islamic ideology.

Many scholarly probings into the history of Pakistan and its educational policies also argued that those ulama (the learned of Islam) who were not in favour of Pakistan soon agreed to manipulate the Islamic ideology to make the nation a “theocracy” which its modernist leadership had never intended (Talvani, 1996, p.62). Thus, the creation of Pakistan was justified, in textbooks, through two nation theory and Islamic ideology. Marking the state as a theocracy continued to have grave consequences not just for the minorities but also for the students and people of the Muslim majority. The education policy reinforced the ideological basis of Pakistan as follows, “[A]n ideology of Islam forms the genesis of the state of Pakistan. The country cannot survive and advance without placing *the entire system of education on a sound Islamic Foundation*” (Ministry of Education, 1998, emphasis added). In other words, a complete overhauling was done by implementing new policies in line with the ideology of Pakistan and Islamic conservatism (Nayyar, 2020b, p.22-23). Over time Zia’s education policies proved to be more in line with the Cold War agenda of Jihad. The country which was claimed to safeguard the lives, culture, and religions of the minorities by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, turned into an unsafe place for people belonging to different religious or ethnic groups. The minorities and Shia groups were constantly marginalized as the textbooks proved to be biased against the traditions of non-muslims.

Education policies during, as they say, turbulent nineties were under democratic rule and had a chance to review and reverse the divergent policies of Zia-ul-Haq. But no substantive changes came through rather it went deeper on hardlines and extended previous policies. They made it compulsory for students from grade one to begin the *Nazara* Quran (reading of Holy verses) and interpretations of the Holy Quran at secondary and post-secondary levels (Nayyar, 2020b, p.25). The bulk of curricula and

compulsory textbooks provided an impression that “Pakistan is for Muslims alone ... the ideology of Pakistan is to be internalized as faith and hatred towards Hindus ... be created ... [and] to take the path of Jihad and Shahadat” (Kamei, 2018, p.17). Suaihiampou Kamei is right to point out the flawed narrative present in academic discourses that promoted religious extremism and nationalism. The glorification of an armed struggle for spreading Islam by some scholars paved the way for endorsing texts creating “narrow-mindedness” in the minds of the youth (Awan, 2012, p. 50). The governments of Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif, and General Pervez Musharraf firmly carried on the ideological onslaught that General Zia ul-Haq began (Hoodbhoy, 2006, p.8). Parvez Amirali Hoodbhoy and Abdul Hameed Nayyar (1985) exposed the strict directives that authors had to follow while writing about Pakistan:

To demonstrate that the basis of Pakistan is not to be founded in racial, linguistic, or geographical factors, but, rather, in the shared experience of a common religion. To get students to know and appreciate the Ideology of Pakistan, and to popularize it with slogans. To guide students towards the ultimate goal of Pakistan - the creation of a completely Islamised State.¹²

These rigid instructions transformed the historical facts into a narrative replete with ideological constructs justifying the creation of Pakistan on religious grounds. One can observe the manipulative use of slogans to deliver a pro-Islamic image of Pakistan on the World stage. Even though Jinnah advised the newly formed nation to protect the rights of minority communities, the education policies of the subsequent years foregrounded religious fervour as the founding principle of the struggle for independence that resulted in bigotry and discrimination. Modern texts of Pakistani history also depicted Jinnah as “a man of orthodox religious views” who only wanted to make a theocratic state (Hoodbhoy & Nayyar, 1985) but his speeches and remarks on certain occasions did not align with such views. Given the trajectory of Pakistan’s

¹² University Grants Commission directive, as cited in Azhar Hamid, et al. *Mutalliyah-i-Pakistan*, Islamabad: Allama Iqbal Open University, 1983, p. xii-xiii

educational policies from 1947 to the 1990s, the emphasis on the Ideology of Pakistan, national Islamic identity, and Muslim heroes in the academic discourse has given rise to communal antagonism in the society. Even today, many critics disapprove of the national education policies enforcing the non-Muslim strata to read what the Muslim majority deems mandatory.

The curriculum of Pakistan devoid of notable minority representation evolved owing to the dominant Punjabi and Muhajir narrative whereas other cultures and identities are marginalized such as those of Balochis, Sindhis, and Pashtuns. Furthermore, the representation of a unified, national Islamic identity predominantly influenced by the Sunni Muslim narrative created a feeling of agitation among the Shia Muslims who protested in Gilgit Baltistan against the misrepresentation of their religious practices in the form of boycotts, riots, and long-term school closures in 2004 (Muhammad, 2015, p.83). This has been the case for Pakistan in recent years. Along with a biased representation of people of other religions, schools and colleges in Pakistan do not promote humanist values rather religious tenets are deployed by the teachers to provide civics education. Thus, the focus is not on creating democratic people but on practicing Muslims (Leirvik, 2008).

The curriculum in all provinces, today, largely follows the guidelines of 2006 suggestions. The textbooks, in general, include glorifying portrayals of Muslim leaders and depictions of Muslims in pre-partition India as victims of British colonizers, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians while excluding the fact that these religious communities equally suffered when the IndoPak subcontinent was divided. This has created hurdles in the way of interfaith harmony and social integrity of various communities in Pakistan as the textbooks label Hindus and other minorities as de facto enemies. Hindus of Pakistan are portrayed as being the sympathizers of India and Sikhs as the prime enemy of the Mughal period in Pakistan Studies books.

All four provinces tackle the subject of partition of the Subcontinent in a “remarkably similar, decidedly one-sided way”. The students are taught in a way that they think of the history of partition in black-and-white terms. It seems that the Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu communities never shared the same land and so were never on good terms with

one another. History, as many historians and critics around the world have argued, is multifaceted and a complex phenomenon but the language and details deployed in many History and Pakistan Studies textbooks seem to be biased, one-sided and lacking nuance (Aslam et al., 2019, p.ii). Furthermore, the historical narrative is pivoted on the ‘Ideology of Pakistan’ – a concept hardly envisioned by freedom fighters of Pakistan. The schoolbooks of grade ninth openly declare Hindus as prospective oppressors if the British had left the Sub-continent undivided (Aslam et al., 2019, p.21-24). The textbooks in Pakistan have acted in line with the socio-religious institutional authorities providing a slanted perception of history with no other alternatives offered or told. This in turn strengthened the politically motivated agendas of the state (Dunne, 2010, p.221).

The arguments provided in the factsheet, *Education and Religious Freedom*, contend that the textbooks taught in public schools propagate “bias, intolerance, and discrimination” against religious minorities in Pakistan.¹³ The researchers have studied several textbooks from the four provinces and criticized the image of Pakistan represented as exclusively for Muslims. Religious minorities are denied their role in the history of Pakistan which can be seen through their vague and passing mention in the books. This has given rise to communal conflicts, intolerance, sectarian violence, negative stereotypes, and ideological indoctrination (Aslam et al., 2019, p.21; Kamei, 2018, p.13). Two main objectives of History and Pakistan Study textbooks have been identified: justifying the creation of Pakistan and consolidating a national Islamic identity. Despite the judgment of former Chief Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani, a call for adapting the curricula to protect the legal rights of religious minorities, no considerable efforts have been made to implement the 2014 judgment. Instead, majoritarianism fosters insensitivity to “other” non-Muslims and thus, social harmony and peaceful coexistence of different religious communities are lost (Aslam et al., 2019, p.4). As Pakistan is an ethnically and religiously diverse country, it is important to mention that a democratic setting does not presuppose the erasure of diversity rather true democracy should celebrate the differences among various communities in a

¹³ See also the 2011 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

country. So academic books play a significant part in recognizing or refusing the existence of various religious minority groups in Pakistan.

Another 2009 education policy by General Musharraf proposed a liberal school of thought to reform society by fostering a newer concept of moderation and tolerance. But since it lacked a separate key chapter on Islamic education, chaos ensued and nationwide protests by religious zealots were observed who called it a Western agenda (Hoodbhoy, 2006, p.9). Oscillating at extremes and not creating a safe space for minorities has been a norm in Pakistan which has led to the estrangement of the majority of the population from the other cultures and religions thriving in the country.

A new subject, Ethics, was introduced at the school level in 2009 as a part of displaying the liberal outlook of the country. But the subject was provided as an optional one for minorities only and barred Muslim students from opting for it. Also, in practice, there is a lack of teachers of the subject in institutions and consequently, schools force minority children to study Islamiyat instead (Yousafzai, 2016). Thus a lack of proper instruments (teachers in this case) cannot bear the fruits of interfaith harmony and a rigid, sectarian, and intolerant culture persists.

A historic 2010 amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan (the 18th amendment) provided liberty and autonomy to provinces to adapt their education policies and align the curriculum with their cultural identities (Muhammad, 2015, p.80). Earlier, it used to be the sole prerogative of the Federal government to produce and implement the curriculum uniformly in the country. But none of the provinces has taken the liberty to bridge the gap created by the decades-long process of a polarized education system. Though a 2017 education policy emerged with a tag of innovation and fostering interfaith harmony based on Islamic values, it could not provide a master plan or a way forward to promote tolerance and diversity.

The core problem with Pakistani curricula, Pakistan Studies and Urdu textbooks, is that the content is too suffused with religious overtones that it overshadows the voices of and for minorities (Aslam et al., 2019, p. 6-14). This appears to be the case with the ongoing implementation of a Single National Curriculum as well. Multiple critiques on the subject argue against the imposition of a single curriculum across the country

highlighting the contradictory action of the Federal government against the backdrop provided by the 18th amendment. Some even view the policy as a step backwards rather than forwards as the prescribed books might not be inclusive and diverse in their subject matter. Before reviewing the critical feedback on SNC, looking at why curriculum policy is crucial to the development of a people is rendered important.

2.3. Pakistani Curriculum

Education is rightly regarded as a pivot of all the processes by which a person develops her/his attitudes, abilities, and other forms of behaviours of practical value for society (as a person) and the state (as a citizen). What is being taught (curriculum) has an effective role in education. The curriculum is considered the basic pathway to achieving the goals, academic, social, tangible, and intangible, in an educational setting. Experts view curricula as a core input to produce output (members of a society and citizens of a state), thus for them, it is largely because of educational content that we, as a society and nation are already on the verge of an unprecedented surge in religious extremism which is not only a threat to the social fabric but also resulting in regional, provincial, national, and international challenges (Nazeer & Khan, 2021, pp. 18-19).

A curriculum could be classified in different ways. The national curriculum represents the basic ideology of social life; beliefs, ethics, traditions, educational goals and mindset of a nation. In other words, a national curriculum defines the past, present and future of a state. A single curriculum for a whole nation directs the attitudes, behaviours and mentality of the people in a specified similar direction, but on the other hand, the use of various curricula, syllabi and educational systems fused into a single national curriculum creates various prejudices, confusions, complexities, discomfort, and frictions among different sections of society.

As mentioned in the introduction, the policy of a Single National Curriculum was brought forth by the PTI government and its implementation is being done in phases. Given the power of the federal government in deciding the curriculum to be studied across the nation, the influence of politics, elitist ideologies, and majoritarian culture on the quality of education cannot be denied. The Single National Curriculum is one of

the main items of the manifesto of the ruling party in Pakistan (Jahanzaib, et al, 2021). One observes that instead of promoting equity, tolerance, integrity, and pluralist democracy genuinely, the leaders boast of their party's efforts to unify the nation through the introduction of a Single National Curriculum.

Single National Curriculum is the latest step taken following the series of Education Policies of Pakistan. Beginning in 2019, the project promised transformation of the education system by dissolving the 'compartmentalized' educational system and liberating the masses from the hegemony of 'English culture'. Popularly dubbed as the 'Uniform System of Education' it is definitely not what it is presumed today rather it is an updated version of the 2006 education curriculum policy (Khan, 2022, p.48-50). On the one hand, it can provide an effective solution to the issue of the class-based education system with elites opting for the Cambridge education system while lower classes study the same outmoded textbooks. Among other refreshing suggestions SNC offers are the Ethics course availability and a chance to be given for minorities to study their respective religious courses but the non-availability of their teachers is still a challenge for the government. On the other hand, it can be argued that SNC is charted out to institutionalise the sense of one nation and Islamic national identity by only mentioning Muslim heroes of the Subcontinent in the books. Seen this way, the recent policy can worsen the existing dilemma of diversity and interfaith harmony (Khan, 2022. p.171).

Jami Chandio (2020), in the report "Cultural Federalism: Embracing Unity in Diversity in Pakistan", explained and substantiated the arguments on the "diversity issue"¹⁴ in Pakistan by incorporating the discussions of a web panel series taking into account the socio-cultural mosaic, religious diversity, and ethnic and linguistic pluralism. The essence of the quality of educational content is captured in a single statement, "If the kids are friends or not, their books should be talking to each other, if books are fighting so are kids!" (As cited in Chandio, 2020, p.46). Through these words, the cartoonist,

¹⁴ The prefatorial statements of Chandio's report (2020) juxtapose Pakistan's official, founding narrative acknowledging diversity with the ground realities that deny the contributions of minorities to the state.

Shahtoon (or Akhtar Shah), meant to highlight the message our books transmit to the younger generation i.e., hateful words and stereotyping of non-Muslim communities in the textbooks have deepened the chasm between majority and minority groups and will continue to do so if the disparities in the curriculum are not alleviated.

2.4. Review of Literature on SNC

So far, the review section has provided the context in which the policy of a Single National Curriculum emerged. Overall, national education policies adhered to the ideology of the elite strata in the country. Ideological indoctrination together with the nationalist stance marginalized the religious and ethnic minorities not only in the academic discourse but also socially and politically. The spectrum of education policies ranged from one extreme (religious fanaticism) to the other (modernization). Creating a national, Islamic identity remained the common goal of almost every education policy. In this scenario, a review of the literature on SNC is provided in the following pages to better comprehend the policy and its ramifications.

Though multiple articles and commentaries such as that of Dr Nayyar and other notable scholars provided a dismal image of the SNC policy, the suggestions focused more on improving the quality of education in all educational institutes than the policy of SNC. Academics and education experts across the nation are currently debating the recently implemented Single National Curriculum (SNC). While some applaud it as a plan to end the nation's current system of educational apartheid and act as an integrating force, others see it as a threat to national diversity. The SNC is backed purely on the basis of optimism and utopianism. A standardized educational system is argued to encourage equity and give everyone a level playing field. So, the SNC is opposed for sociocultural, institutional, and constitutional reasons (Bangwar, 2021). Rightly so. The arguments can be developed in more detail to provide a complete image of the issues raised by the new policy of SNC.

Dr Nayyar (2020b) explored the education policies of Pakistan from 1947 to 2018 for the addressal of issues of rights of non-Muslim communities. Nayyar bemoaned the fact that earlier educational policies made false claims and elaborated on societal ills without providing clear instructions on how to address them or any clear objectives.

For instance, rote learning has been highlighted as a significant problem in the educational system, but no policy outlined a solution. The author provided a review of the National Education Policy Framework 2018 and found the wish to bring “uniformity” to the curriculum “perplexing”. The impracticality of “evening out” the differences and negative consequences of a single curriculum have been mentioned (p. 32). In a similar manner to other critics, Nayyar predicted the damage to the quality of education if an archaic curriculum is imposed in all educational institutions and called the steps taken in this scenario, “retroactive and disastrous” (p. 33).

The editor of Tribal News Network, TNN (2022), gathered in an article written in Urdu, “Single National Curriculum and the reservations of minority communities”, the voices of several representatives of minorities regarding the imposition of a single curriculum across the country. The article interspersed with the views of field experts, scholars, and social activists, such as Kashif Aslam and Chaman Lal, argued that SNC excluded the heroes and regional histories of minorities. Building on the premise that religion is a private affair, the comments of Dr Aneel Samuel, Ata ur Rehman Saman, Dr Aashir Khokhar, Anjum Altaf, and Zeba Hashmi have been compiled to provide a critique of textbooks propagating the cause of Islamic identity formation. According to the findings of this article, the curricula are rife with hatred and prejudice towards religious minorities, the “others”. More so, the lack of inclusivity in academic books has influenced young minds to the extent that the risk of sectarian rifts increases.

Dr Nayyar in another article (2020a), “Dissecting the Single National Curriculum,” raised questions about the “lofty goals” set by the introduction of a single, nationwide syllabus. The recently introduced policy is considered flawed as the first phase of its implementation caused concern among people. As Dr Nayyar’s concluding remarks in the study on Pakistan’s education policies (2020b) emphasized the importance of teaching critical thinking skills to students so, his article also reviewed the policy of SNC in this light. He pointed out the inclusion of more religious content to produce more useful citizens, promotion of syllabi “antithetical to critical thinking,” focus on quantity of information rather than quality, and formulation of a single curriculum instead of a system of uniform education as problematic. “Only a uniform education would ensure an end to the educational apartheid. But the government has not put

forward any plan for uniform education yet. And it is unclear if it ever will” (Nayyar, 2020a).

While the goal of education for eliminating discrimination is lauded, the reasons for the unfulfilled promises of NEPF 2018 are seen realistically- the country’s financial instability is the root cause for the poor quality of education, especially in low-fee schools. The arguments mentioned the federal government’s constitutional transgression of the 18th amendment, through the policy of SNC, which can lead to the alienation of students from their provincial cultures and loss of unity and social cohesion. The three main systems of education and their curricula are evaluated to reinforce the stance that the quality of education is not going to improve only through the implementation of a uniform curriculum. The article also shed light on the issue of diversity amidst the implementation of the “One Nation One Curriculum” policy.

Hassnain Javed (2020) reinforced A. H. Nayyar’s assertion that a single curriculum would not improve the quality of education in Pakistan. When compared to his claim that the Single National Curriculum (SNC) confirmed that educational policymakers still have a biased belief in what constituted high-quality education, the Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Shafqat Mehmood’s praise of the new policy sounded vague, Javed wrote. The author compared the addition of religious studies in the recently devised curriculum to the controversial American Curriculum of Talibanisation introduced in the 1980s. Most of the reviews of SNC expressed dissatisfaction with the policy and objected to the constitutional transgression of Article 22 (A), the 18th amendment, and the rights of minorities in Pakistan. The article evoked the violent outcomes of teaching religiously coloured syllabi and narrative(s) and the latter half recognized the need to bring a change in the policy to train the young generation concerning the digital age. It disapproved of Shafqat Mehmood’s and Mariam Chughtai’s decision to turn a “Nelson’s eye to the festering issues of access to quality education for ordinary Pakistanis.” Majoritarian wishes should not take over genuine concerns for quality education for all. In this regard, the article proved enlightening for the present research.

Another article on the problems raised by SNC, ““New Curriculum Short-sighted, Shallow in Thought”” (2022), included experts’ opinions about the inclusion of religious material in higher-level studies. The views of the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), Working Group for Inclusive Education (WGIE), Dr A. H. Nayyar, and other researchers maintained that the finalized single curriculum has harmful consequences for society. Dr Nayyar’s remarks on the introduction of theological studies noted that the decision-makers have been “short-sighted and shallow in thought”. CSJ Director Peter Jacob was also disappointed at the Punjab government as the policy was gradually turning the schools into religious seminaries. The contention of Zeeba Hashmi coincided with Nayyar’s as far as the content of the newly approved curricula antithetical to “basic learning principles” was concerned. The critiques took issue with the negation of critical inquiry, argumentative logic, and interfaith harmony in academic texts.

Kalhor et al. (2020) gathered multiple responses to comprehend the influence of the religious narrative on the national curriculum. The findings revealed that the syllabi were manipulated to achieve desired results. It discouraged “the sense of equity, equality and tolerance in all the sections of society” (p. 1082). The academics maintained that a national curriculum centred around a specific religion would fail to induce moral and civic values. This would weaken the social bond among various communities as well. Secondly, it was confirmed that the national identity of a particular community should not be reflected in curriculum design (p. 1083). So, the comments pertinent to the discussion of the national curriculum can lead one to judge the religious content in the recently devised curricula of grades I-V and consider the social cost of enforcing such a one-sided education policy as SNC.

Benazir Shah (2021) maintained in her article, ““Government’s single national curriculum is like martial law”” that SNC was a blatant violation of Article 22 of the Constitution of Pakistan. The research of several educationalists and Peter Jacob was cited that found 9 % content of grade 3 English textbooks, after SNC implementation, as clearly contradicting the constitutional promise. The educationalists and policy experts questioned the discrimination endorsed in the textbooks. Shah’s article enlisted the plethora of evils resulting from SNC by taking into account the perspectives of

public policy experts such as Peter Jacob and parents who viewed the so-called educational reform policy of SNC as undemocratic and imposed against their will (as cited in Shah, 2021). The right of the parents to choose the type of education they prefer for their children under Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was juxtaposed to the Prime Minister's decision. Little space was given to positive responses to SNC. Instead, the concluding part emphasized the "hatred for private schooling" in the government and the low quality of education in public schools. So, the article did not realize the potential advantages of the promises of NEPF 2018, choosing to present a one-sided image of the scenario. When a national education policy is analyzed, a complete picture should be provided to suggest changes.

Kiran Butt has compiled the voices from the academic sector to question the implementation of SNC. Again, the perspectives of Dr A.H. Nayyar and Dr Anjum Altaf are included. Dr Nayyar rightly identified the problem of our syllabi, "We have lost the charm of making students think out of the box." Except for Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) have shown interest in executing the new policy of the PTI government, this has led experts to voice their stance on the enforcement of the same curriculum across the country. Among other questions to be asked from the authorities, the following question was frequently asked by the researchers and academics: How transparent and inclusive was the process of creating the SNC, and how many of the ideas or suggestions put up by various participants and stakeholders were really incorporated? The discussion ended with Peter Jacob's call for a more serious approach to educational planning particularly on the national level.

Aakriti Vinayak (2021) wrote about the SNC policy in Pakistan in an article titled, "Single National Curriculum in Pakistan- a Recipe for Disaster?". The research associate at Vivekananda International Foundation provided statistical evidence of the "dismal state" of the educational sector in Pakistan. The controversies surrounding the decision to impose a single, nationwide curriculum were highlighted. The policy was seen as an attempt to "further Islamize the society". The writer contended that SNC provided little space for the rights of minorities regarding their religious education. Like Shah, Vinayak identified the sexist content of the new curriculum. The question pondered was that "will the SNC resolve the structural flaws in the education system

of Pakistan?”. Therefore, the article demonstrated the failure of Pakistani educational policies to alleviate socioeconomic disparities. Tilak Devasher considered the curriculum to promote “bigotry, violence, and hatred” (as cited in Vinayak, 2021) and so, the future of Pakistan remained uncertain.

In a similar manner to Dr Nayyar and Javed, Amjad Nazeer (2020) viewed SNC as a diversion as quality and access to education were matters of greater importance. The official statements promising an end to educational apartheid and quality education for all were deemed politically deceptive trickeries as the premier and the Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training failed to differentiate the uniform quality of education from the uniform curriculum. The article expressed disappointment at the greater emphasis put on SNC as compared to a Uniform System of Education (USE). The statistics reinforced the fact that our quality of education is not satisfactory. The education governance and learning outcomes of Pakistan’s education sector were compared to those of Finland, Singapore, Turkey and South Korea. As a result of the comparison, the mainstreaming of the madrassa ethos was perceived as a deterrence of “critical thinking and empirical knowledge” and the promotion of fundamentalist tendencies. It has been demonstrated that the more religiosity the fewer chances to tolerate diversity and plurality. The author differed from Mahmood regarding the Medium of Instruction (MoI) controversy by preferring English as MoI in teaching all secular subjects. “English language emancipates from class oppression and tribalism,” contended Nazeer. In addition to suggesting a few changes, the article viewed SNC as “a desperate populist stunt”.

Ali Hassan Bangwar (2021) correctly noted that SNC fell short of offering a “holistic solution” to the worsening quality of education in the state. The article went on to say that those pushing the idea appeared more preoccupied with bringing about national cohesion through curriculum than with resolving the “core educational mess” and termed SNC only a cosmetic initiative. It was obvious that Imran Khan’s current efforts to further Islamize the country and create “Naya Pakistan” were represented by the current developments in education. Khan announced the creation of the Rehmatul-Lil-Aalamin Authority, a council of mullahs and religious clerics, on October 10, 2021. The new authority would closely examine the content of media outlets as well as the

curriculum being taught in schools and institutions. Bangwar's article posed multiple questions about the policy of a single curriculum and its reception in a "multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-linguistic" society like Pakistan. While the ethnic and linguistic diversity of our society was considered, the article could not address the rectification of the diversity issue with respect to SNC.

Safia Mahmood (2020), raised questions about the consequences of SNC in an article, "The Single National Curriculum: bridging gaps, or amplifying it?" and cited critics' views on the policy. The curriculum has been called an "apathetic and ideologically motivated move with no implementation strategy". The interviews of National Curriculum Councils (NCC) members and multiple education experts, including Dr Mariam Chughtai, Dr Faisal Bari, Mr Abdus Sami, Dr Fatima Rehan Dar, Ms Nadia Naviwala, Mr Muhammad Rafique Tahir and Mr Abid Gill were included to shed light on the process and results of the implementation of SNC. Ms Naviwala's effective depiction of rote learning, listening to authorities, and "not taking ownership" (as cited in Mahmood, 2020) and how this would replicate in the child's future life was thought-provoking. Naviwala highlighted the stunted intellectual growth of young minds. Furthermore, Sami discussed the "exclusionary approach" of the government with regard to children learning abilities.

The activity-based learning tasks in the new textbooks were considered impractical as the decision-makers did not take into account the ground realities of people in rural and Northern areas of Pakistan- lack of access to the internet and other facilities. Sami and Naviwala generated a discussion on the insensitive role of SNC in distancing children from their mother tongue(s) while the latter appreciated the diversity in the educational content. Ms. Naviwala's comments on the utopian ideals of SNC resembled Dr Nayyar's analysis of the four-pronged policy of NEPF, 2018. The comments of the field experts stressed the requirements of teaching the latest curriculum. The article identified acknowledging the cognitive, linguistic, and cultural needs of a diverse range of children, including special children, as central to delivering quality education whereas the national curriculum was considered only a small factor in that case. Dr Dar pointed out the gap between privileged and underprivileged students that SNC did not

address. The article provided many significant arguments in response to the SNC and explored the policy for its ideological and exclusionary underpinnings.

Laraib Niaz and Tehreem Fatima put forth recommendations to make the National Education Policy 2022 inclusive in the form of a report. The report analyzed the earlier education policies and curriculum frameworks in Pakistan and found the new curriculum policy exclusive in terms of religious content. Even though the marginalized strata (girls and religious, ethnic minorities) were apparently taken under consideration in the draft of NEPF (Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training, 2018), it was argued that no steps were taken to resolve the issues of the underprivileged. Moreover, the commentary found the state and its policy guilty of producing and propagating discrimination within the education system thereby the claims of eradicating differences in the trifurcated system of education. The Religious Education curriculum, introduced under SNC, has been evaluated as it promoted exclusivist tendencies in society. Niaz and Fatima reiterated the commonly discussed issues of the education sector- citizenship education and the creation of a unified, national image, Islamization of curricula and students, sexist material, and insensitivity to concerns of minority and special children. However, a comprehensive account of what SNC implementation implied was lacking.

Many people have vehemently disagreed with the SNC's ideology, which promoted a majoritarian mindset by propagating a specific set of Islamic principles and nationalistic ideals to encourage unity. Dr Bari stated that religion and patriotism were pivotal to defining the identity of a Pakistani when anything threatened this identity "[T]he state comes back by controlling the narrative and ensuring the narrative remains *unitary and mainstream* ... Any time there is a tussle between the federation and the provinces, we see a narrative control by those running the state" (as cited in Mahmood, 2020, emphasis added). The insecure state machinery tried to centralize the education system and ignored the diverse sociocultural realities of the provinces. As was the case with former education policies of Pakistan, critics problematized the religious and nationalistic content of the current curriculum. The aspect of "narrative control" exposed the hegemony of authorities over the knowledge that produced "moral and ethical" citizens. It was argued that the language textbooks endorsed majoritarian

religious and nationalist ideas. Mahmood concluded that SNC might bring incremental change given its inclusivity and effective implementation. However, in recent years, the ongoing process of SNC implementation displayed insensitivity to the issues raised by ethnic and religious minorities. This issue will be explored in the section of the discussion of the findings.

The social dimension of SNC in addressing educational disparities was also investigated by Maryam Naqvi (2021). The writer penned down the reasons for inequality in education: poverty, cultural constraints, and so on. While the ambitious move of the federal government was criticized, SNC was considered “in principle a good step towards unifying the younger generation”. The emphasis was on how to reduce educational disparities as compared to SNC.

In this regard, Zeeba T. Hashmi further provided feedback on the proposed curriculum for grades VI-VII. The researcher explored the content of textbooks for the integration of peace values, civic values, gender representations, and religious and cultural diversity. Issues regarding each subject’s curriculum were raised. The rubric for assessing the schoolbook(s) identified the inadequacy of the syllabi to impart civic values, social inclusion, and gender equality. Rather the curricula focused on reviving Islamic values and Muslim nationhood and remained insensitive to the plight of minorities and other marginalized groups. The recommendations promoted inclusivity and safeguarding the rights of minorities. Therefore, the pitfalls of SNC were pointed out with respect to the level of ethnic and cultural inclusion in the curriculum. This can serve as a starting point in the discussion on the “One nation, one curriculum” policy.

Nazeer Ahmed Arijjo (2022) contributed an important point to the debate on recent education policy- he confirmed the manipulative role of language in education. The domination of colonized people in the subcontinent through the English language can still be seen in the education sector today. In 1835, “Lord Macaulay successfully westernised education in India” resulting in “linguistic imperialism” and a discriminatory education system in Pakistan.

Another Friday Times article (2022) on the current curriculum reforms communicated the Education Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain’s opinion on SNC. The article cited

Hussain's words, "The word 'single' caused confusion and excluded the diversity education that is an asset to our country's rich heritage." He also stated that curriculum reforms should not be imposed on provinces, invoking Sindh's separation from the SNC as the reason for many private publishers going bankrupt.

Saad Hafiz (2022) found the premiership of Imran Khan disappointing. Khan's government's plan to implement a Single National Curriculum (SNC) as a solution to Pakistan's numerous educational problems was considered troubling. The SNC necessitated more religious education, no 'blasphemous' content, and a mind-numbing, conformist mindset. However, in Hafiz's view, more ideological education would only exacerbate the pressing issue of radicalised youth joining jihadist groups. Also, it would not help Pakistani students compete with students from the majority of other countries. Less focus on science education in the new education strategy was unlikely to produce well-rounded workers, the author contended.

Asghar and Ahmad (2022) made a comparative analysis of SNC and the National Curriculum, 2006 to reveal the baselessness of the superficial claims of SNC. The researchers claimed the recent policy to be just an imitation of the 2006 policy which meant that the so-called new curriculum was not prepared in accordance with the requirements of the modern age.

Shahbaz A. Khan (2022) evaluated the policy of SNC in comparison to the educational strategies of India. Khan agreed with Dr A. H. Nayyar and Dr Pervez Hoodbhoy that the religious and political content in the curriculum should be reduced to the basic level. It was also recommended that provincial decisions regarding curriculum design should be respected.

Ambreen Shahzadi (2022) was of the view that the SNC policy faced criticism for "wrongly portraying and stereotyping women". The articles focused on the gender disparities in the new curriculum and how it shaped the minds of children to the extent that they perceived women in a stereotypical way (2022; Naya Daur, News Desk, 2021a; Naya Daur, News Desk, 2021b). The argument was substantiated by examples from the textbook content to question the superficial promises of SNC regarding inclusivity and equity.

In an online debate between Dr Pervez Hoodbhoy and Dr Mariam Chughtai (an education expert and one of the SNC's architects), the latter made it clear that the SNC is not about equality of education systems, but rather a uniform curriculum standard. So, Dr Nayyar and Dr Hoodbhoy frequently asked, if the policy was not addressing inequalities in our educational system, what was the point of the SNC in the first place?

Amjad Nazeer described the SNC as “chaotic, self-contradictory and misleading”. Moreover, the Friday Times article (2021) observed the bureaucratic obstacles in the way of revision of SNC along with Sindh and Balochistan's reaction to the policy.

M. Yasir Khan (2021) put forth the question “is a unified curriculum alone enough to pave the long path towards the much-needed equity in education?” This question has been asked by multiple educationists, scholars, and stakeholders. Khan drew attention to Nancy Fraser's concept of recognition. According to the concept, the linguistic and ethnic varieties in Pakistan needed to be reflected in the curriculum framework. The gap in education systems was considered too big to be bridged by a uniform curriculum. Hence, a call for redistribution of educational resources.

2.5. Review of Literature from Educational Anthropology

Talking about an anthropological viewpoint regarding education (or educational policies), one must not forget the critical work of Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The author presented his political, educational, and philosophical theories. The oppressed people's stance on education is taken, and critical consciousness is needed for them to enjoy liberation. Freire maintained that pedagogy created an important link between the learner and the teacher so that the learner can hold a dialogue with the learning process. If the oppressed are included in the scope of education, there is hope that the process becomes humanized (Freire 2005). Furthermore, humanization started with the acknowledgement of dehumanization as an “ontological possibility as well as a historical truth” (Freire 2005, p. 43). As far as the student-teacher relationship was concerned, he was against traditional pedagogy as it perceived the children as “containers” to be filled with information. He compared this process to that of banking where the teacher was the depositor and the learner was the receptor. He presented his suggestion that the educational paraphernalia should be such that all are teachers and

students at the same time. Most importantly, Freire diagnosed the problem of the oppressed that the oppressors only challenged the oppressed, not the situation leading to their oppression. The oppressed should practice critical consciousness and dialogical learning styles as a solution. This book might have remained a topic of many educational debates, however, the overall style of the work encouraged political subversion. Freire indeed opposed traditional schooling systems. So, the work presented selective arguments on education and individuals without discussing collective consciousness and educational policymaking. Though the concept of liberation appeared attractive, the work lacks a discussion on how formal education is beneficial/ harmful to the whole human society.

Hamann and Vandeyar's work on the "anthropology of education" took a methodological approach to the anthropological study of educational policies. It largely pivoted on the standard definition of anthropology as "the application of knowledge to the solution of human problems" (American Anthropology Association n.d.). So, for the authors, the solution to humanity's problems was the key goal of educational matters. Vandeyar primarily accessed the South African classrooms whereas Hamann worked at the Georgia research site. The study of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) remained a central subject of the research. The qualitative study explored how the teachers appropriated education policy on ICT (Hamann & Vandeyar 2017). The researcher also discussed the historic end of apartheid and the advent of democracy in South Africa which lent significance to the anthropological mode of inquiry. The second mini-case on Latino newcomers focused on the situation of education in Georgia. So, the researcher studied the implementation and consequences of educational policies by the US government. Lastly, the authors suggested some improvements with respect to the anthropology of education policies. Overall, the investigations centred on the extent to which education (ICT for instance) contributed to the well-being of mankind. However, the study lacked any case pertaining to Asian classrooms and education policies.

Another anthropological study swayed into its scope the "collective" deliberations and educational theory construction. It recalled Lawrence Cremin's urge in 1970 that education was more than schooling. The cultural anthropologist, Herve Varenne,

agreed with the contention and said that education was a sociocultural phenomenon (2007). As the researcher highlighted the absence of theoretical frameworks regarding education as more than lesson activities, the work was basically a theoretical one supported by multiple case studies. Varenne selected two key terms, “effort” and “deliberation” to explore in the analytical article. The work argued that educational efforts extended beyond a traditional education to collective effort-making. In a nutshell, the focus of educational processes should be on collective improvement. Similar to other anthropological works on education, this work did not take into consideration multiple ethnic and cultural viewpoints about curricula design.

The anthropologist, Margaret Mead, closely observed the results of rapid changes in educational policies. She remained sensitive to both tradition and change. She argued for teacher patriotism and an educational system that stayed aware of changes in the world (as cited in Monroe 1992). In another work, Mead observed that anthropology meant transcending one’s own civilization and viewing other civilizations objectively (1927). This is where she shed light on the ethnic/ racial differences to consider before finalizing a policy. She commented elsewhere that the sense of superiority in one ethnic group over the others made them force their language, beliefs, and culture over the others merely distorting the purpose of free schooling (Mead 1963). Her comment is quite relevant to the present anthropological study of SNC insofar that the results of a monopolar implementation of educational policies are concerned. She urged for a “circular” mode of learning instead of a linear one. As a result, works of Mead hovered near a genuine anthropological study of education policies and models, however, the views of participants having various cultural, religious, and ethnic differences were lacking.

To conclude the section, one can see from the review of literature on SNC, anthropological methodology, and education policies of Pakistan, in general, that an ethnographic study of SNC policy has not been undertaken by any scholar or field expert. The works primarily focused on the constitutional transgression of the Federal government in implementing SNC and the issue of representation of religious minorities, women, and children. Less attention was paid to the linguistic diversity of the population. Also, how SNC can be re-modified to cater to provincial and communal

needs remains unanswered. This research seeks to address the issues raised by representatives of various communities and field experts to generate an all-encompassing ethnographic account of “One nation, one curriculum” policy.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present anthropological research gathers the perspectives of parents, academics, researchers, textbook writers and representatives of civil society and various ethnic minorities about SNC. The content of the textbooks to be studied all over the country is examined for the recognition of ethnic diversity in Pakistan. Does implementing SNC ensure an end to educational apartheid, discrimination, and inequity in our society? Is the centralization of education a step toward national integration? What is the role of SNC in promoting interfaith harmony and social cohesion? To what extent does SNC appreciate different cultures and religious beliefs in the local and global context? These are some of the questions that define the direction of this study on SNC.

3.1. Research Methods

The research aimed to document the impact of SNC and its problematic representation of various ethnicities and local values therefore qualitative research methods were considered as most suitable. The research study makes use of different methods and techniques such as detailed in-depth interviews, Focused Group Discussions (FGDs), participants' observations and content analysis to record narratives of different practitioners, educationist, parents and students. Apart from a qualitative study of SNC, primary and secondary data sources of are used.

3.1.1. Primary Sources

Primary sources include the official documents provided by the Federal Ministry of Education and the information collected from the interviews of the key informants and participants. Prior scholarly works on SNC, in particular, and the education sector in Pakistan, in general, are also referred to in this research.

3.1.2. Secondary Sources

The secondary sources contain books, periodicals, journals, magazines, newspapers and the internet. All the resources provided critical insights into the educational policymaking process of Pakistan and helped to deliver a more informed view of SNC.

The issues raised by notable academics, researchers, and field experts are incorporated into the study to interpret the data and reach a more inclusive and practical conclusion

3.2. Sampling

Choosing a sampling technique depends greatly on the goal, and type of the research, what Cohen et al. (2011, 2018) refer to as the fitness for purpose. Since the focus of the study was collecting variant perspectives regarding SNC of different people mentioned above, the research required special focus on those people.

To answer the above-mentioned research questions the researcher used non-probability sampling technique. Non-probability samples are those in which the probability that a subject is selected is unknown and results in selection bias in the study. They include the most commonly used convenience/purposive sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling, etc. (Nigam et al 2013). To access and find those study focused participants the researcher used purposive and snowball sampling technique.

3.2.1. Purposive Sampling

In this sampling technique the participants are selected on the basis of convenience of the researcher or investigator.

Purposive sampling relied on the sound judgment of the researcher in choosing the members of population in Pakistan. It proved to be effective as only a limited number of people served as the primary data sources for the research. According to the needs of this anthropological research, heterogeneous or maximum variation sampling was deployed to ensure the selection of participants having diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and professional expertise.

3.2.2. Snowball Sampling

In this sampling procedure, the initial respondents are chosen by probability or non-probability methods, and then, additional respondents are obtained by information provided by the initial respondents (Nigam et al 2013).

Snowball sampling, also known as chain sampling or network sampling, started with one or more study participants. Following that, it proceeded based on recommendations from those participants. With the help of people who shared a specific trait of research interest with the target population, the researcher utilized the snowball sampling technique to create a pool of participants for the study. This sampling technique was used to access members of geographically dispersed groups of the population

3.2.3. Sampling Size

Four key informant having various ethnic backgrounds were selected as a representative purposive sample. They shared at least one characteristic of the researcher's target population. To ensure non-discriminative sampling, the first group provided further referrals. Thus, several other educationists, researchers, and representatives of Pakistani citizenry were added to the first sample of participants.

3.3. Research Tools

The researcher opted for methodological triangulation in the present study.

In-depth interviews of academicians, civil society representatives, researchers, and concerned Pakistani parents from Punjab, KPK, Sindh, and Balochistan were conducted whereas textbook writers, curriculum reviewers, educational administrators, and multiple subject specialists participated in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

3.3.1. In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, context, program, or situation (Boyce, 2006). In-depth interviews provide much more detailed information about a certain topic.

An in-depth interview is useful as it enables the interviewer to elicit information otherwise unavailable through a questionnaire or even through focus group discussions. Apart from the controversy over religious content and stereotypical representation of women, the interviews evoked the less-discussed details of SNC implementation i.e.

the ideological function of the new curriculum and what the forged homogenization of education systems signifies for the ethnic minorities and even for the majority. Therefore, in-depth interviews pursued the meanings of central themes regarding SNC and generated multiple interpretations of the same subject.

The researcher interviewed 20 participants for this study who had their expertise in the field of education or who had an ample knowledge of SNC. The interviews proved helpful in documenting the challenges and issues people faced or facing due to SNC. In the in-depth interviews, the questions were not worded narrowly, rather the interviews centred on the discussion of multiple aspects of SNC. The interviewees were given ample time and space to discuss the controversial elements of the new educational policy.

Interviews were pre-scheduled periodically and systematically after first meeting with the respondents. This saved the researcher and the respondents a lot of time and effort. A list of questions against every objective was also designed to cover all important themes and sub themes identified in the objectives of the study.

3.3.2. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a good way to gather together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest (Mishra 2016). FGDs are one of most effective tools to investigate how a group thinks about any specific issue or defines a concept in local language. A focus group is a research method that assembles a small group of individuals to respond to questions in a controlled environment. Their perspectives might relay more information about the educational process and teaching of certain subjects in different educational institutions. Overall, the discussion and questions pivoted on the role of SNC in disregarding the diverse range of identities, cultural, linguistic, and religious, shared by some students.

FGD involved on average 5 to 10 participants having backgrounds in the education sector of Pakistan and well-versed in the technical knowledge of the subject at hand. Their discussion was prompted by questions specifically designed for debate on SNC. Four to five questions were designed according to the present apprehensions of the

stakeholders. The discussion was facilitated by the researcher to steer the course of the talk to anthropological concerns over SNC and the socio-cultural scope of the policy.

3.3.3. Key Informants

Key informants are the people who make sense of the culture or any particular situation for the researcher and can speak knowledgeably about the things the researcher wants to know (Bernard, 2006). The researcher chose 04 key- informants which included researchers, teachers, policy makers, and writers. Key informants helped the researcher in building a rapport and trustworthy relationship with respondents and access those individuals that served the purpose of my research study. Following are some brief details about the key informants.

Mr. Peter Jacob executive director of Center for social Justice is a human rights professional, researcher, freelance journalist and trainer. He has been contributing articles for The News International, Daily Times, and The Friday Times. He has been associated with several national and international human rights organizations since 1988 in different capacities.

Dr. Abdul Hameed Nayyar is a Pakistani physicist, author, and a freelance consultant on the issues of education.

Ms.Zeeba T. Hashmi (a research consultant, opinion writer, peace education trainer and founder of Ibtidah for Education

Ms.Baela Raza Jamil (CEO of Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi, public policy specialist and activist. She also served as Technical Adviser to the Federal Ministry of Education

Without the above mentioned key informants different dimensions of SNC could not be understood or conceptualized.

3.3.4. Informal Discussions

Informal discussions play a key role in qualitative research as it create a greater ease of communication and produce more naturalistic data. Through the informal conversations

the researcher listened all the stories narrated by their participants but he is concerned to report the words or sentences used as reliably as possible in order to get valid results. According to informal discussion is a very flexible method and open up a greater range of possibilities for data generation. Also they have the advantage that they can take place almost anywhere (Bernard, 2011).

The informal discussions during this study have played a vital role in validating reasons and rationales behind the implementation of SNC because The researcher and participant both can freely exchange their opinions in terms of informal conversations and talk about topics without hesitation

3.3.5. Content Analysis

Content analysis is a method for analyzing the content of a variety of data, such as visual and verbal data. It enables the reduction of phenomena or events into defined categories so as to better analyze and interpret them (Harwood et al .2003).

The researcher analyzed 61 SNC based textbooks in terms of religious content in compulsory subjects, glorification of wars, gender related disparities, hate material and pictorial or graphic representation of majoritarianism to investigate how much SNC promotes inclusion and diversity? Also how the words or visuals have an impact on students' lives. Content analysis of the textbooks, reports and policies reveal the various cultural and ethical themes in the social context of Pakistan.

3.4. Research Design

An anthropological viewpoint during the research helped combine humanistic and social science strategies. Anthropologists make observations and pursue viewpoints while conducting the study from a variety of vantage points. They observe and converse with individuals belonging to various social groups. They conceptualise and react to the things under study in various ways, depending on their interaction with those phenomena. In this sense, ethnography, which is described as the qualitative process of in-depth exploration of the why and how of culture, behaviour, and human expression, is the method that sets anthropology apart from other disciplines. The use of

ethnographic method employs a variety of data collection tools. This ethnographic study was based on exploring the range of perspectives on the recent educational policy, SNC. In this sense, critical ethnographic research was done to inform the policymakers of the role of SNC in maintaining/disturbing national integration and social cohesion. In order to spot emergent problems and gain an understanding of the data's significance, the researcher could obtain a rich, primarily qualitative dataset that came from investigations and iterative analysis.

As the ethnographic method is used in this qualitative educational research, the researcher was directly involved in the interview process. The context, unique needs and experiences of the learners and other stakeholders of the policy of SNC were considered crucial to the present anthropology of education. To remain attentive to the socio-cultural scope of SNC, the mentioned methodology provided a lens to register the responses of cultural insiders and subject specialists.

Ethnography is a holistic method that avoids decontextualization by attending to how cultural domains constitute and influence one another rather than splicing social life into variables (Boellstorff et al., 2012). According to Boellstorff et al. (2012), validity is increased “because (ethnographers) directly observe and interact with what we want to know; we do not wrench phenomena out of their contexts, thereby rendering them uninterpretable” (Boellstorff et al., 2012, p. 38)

3.5. Data Collection

The notes taken during FGDs and personal in-depth interviews were transcribed later into a Word document. Focus groups can elicit information that is hard to get from individual interviews or for which you need a group understanding (Hoppe et al., 1995; Schensul et al., 1999). five to ten participants contributed to FGD. Their responses could not be separated from the group context. The notes and collective impressions of the issue were written during the discussion. In addition to taking notes, it was necessary to gather more opinions on the subject from people of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Owing to the limitation of time, the scholarly works, researches, reports, and detailed reviews of the single curriculum were also considered advantageous as

these sources offered creative insights into the issues raised by SNC. So, the works by renowned academics and education experts, Dr A H Nayyar, Pervez Hoodbhoy, Zeeba T. Hashmi, and others, have been consulted to present a panoramic view of the miserable situation of Pakistan's education sector.

3.6. Thematic Analysis Process

After the information was collected from multiple participants and interviewees, it was analyzed and interpreted. The process of analysis and interpretation involved disciplined examination, creative insights, and careful attention to the educational themes being explored.

Analysis of the written material noted during and after FGD and in-depth interviews meant assembling or organizing the information according to the thematic categories. To bring order to data and organize the diverse range of commentaries through analytic strategies, the following descriptive categories were devised:

- The direction of education in Pakistan (Centralizing approach vs. pluralist stance)
- Ideological overtones in SNC (Nationalism and Majoritarianism)
- Quality of education and access to education under SNC
- Representation of the needs of learners from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds
- Indoctrination vs. critical thinking
- Importance of choice and academic freedom
- Consequences of academic competition
- Broad-based education vs. specialized education
- Predetermination of the course of education

While these patterns were observed frequently in the responses of the participants and interviewees, the descriptive categories were named with respect to the socio-cultural or anthropological concerns over SNC. A thematic analysis of the information made the report coherent and logical.

3.7. Data Interpretation Method

Interpretation involved ascribing meaning and significance to the analysis. The descriptive patterns are explained and connected among analytical dimensions. This was done to explain the major concerns of the immediate stakeholders on a broader, communal scale. Relationships and linkages between the scholarly discourse and the opinions of Pakistani citizens were explored. The analysis of the information is followed by interpretative comments as a sufficient description and analysis of the research activities had already been written.

3.8. Study Sites

This is a multi-sited ethnographic account of the “One nation, one curriculum” policy. The study sites were various educational institutes in Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, and Hyderabad.

3.9. Epistemological and Ontological Assumptions

The research pivoted on the epistemological theory of relating the voices of marginal groups to academic discourse. Epistemology broadly means the theory of knowledge. In this anthropological research on education policy, SNC, in Pakistan, the ethnographic method provided a closer, relatively balanced position from which to view the cultural scope of SNC. Solely relying on the data of the interviews is considered a “largely perceptual account of what students, faculty and administrators think about ... education, rather than data of *what actually happens* in this domain” (Reeves et al., 2013, p. 1365, emphasis in original), the advantage of ethnographic method deserved to be explicated.

Ethnography is a Greek word. It is made up of two parts, *ethnos* (people) and *graphein* (writing). This method of research holds more importance than the positivist worldview. The ethnographic perspective argued for the centrality of local conditions of human society in the shaping of a worldview, meanings, and human behaviour. Human society could not be defined in a general way, “the ways in which people

construct and make meaning of their worlds and their lives are *highly variable and locally specific*” (LeCompte & J. Schensul, 2010, p.1, emphasis added). In this study, the procedural relationship between ethnography and qualitative educational research to develop an inductive, logical account of a social phenomenon was largely borrowed from the research paper by Reeves et al. (2013).

The problematic slogan of SNC seems to marginalize the “other” cultural, linguistic, and local communities under the guise of uniformity and equality of education for all. The problems of ethnic diversities in Pakistan remain unaddressed. The right of the provinces to design the curriculum according to the specific needs of their population was taken back by the Federal government. The positive role that plurality, diversity, and inclusivity can play is highlighted during the interpretation of findings. Uniformity of curriculum is deconstructed as a monopolistic tool of the state to ensure singularity of thought and identity.

As Hammersley (1985) stated, “the task is to document the culture, the perspectives and practices of the people in these settings. The aim is to ‘get inside’ the way each group of people sees the world” (p. 152). So, the perspectives quoted in the discussion section accounted for the unique worldview each participant had and still, the overlapping themes in the responses crystallized the discomfort of parents, academicians, researchers, and minority groups.

Neither hypothesis was formulated nor tested. Rather, the research remained exploratory. The researcher went into the field and discussed the subject matter without the help of rigidly structured interviews.

As the research focused on educational policy (SNC) and its ramifications, thick descriptions of people, places, actions and so on were excluded in the final report as the central issue was not related directly to cultures but it was how SNC catered or should cater to the needs of diverse groups of people in Pakistan. Experiential and contextual knowledge was primarily gained from this ethnographic study. The views of the citizens of Pakistan were contextualized through the addition of interpretative comments by credible sources of information in the field i.e., scholars and researchers who have evaluated the educational strategies of the state.

It is asserted as an epistemological assumption that reality can be described in terms of the meanings that people attach to communication experiences. There are numerous sources of knowledge that can be used to explore, interpret, and comprehend a subjective social world. The first ontological assumption in this study was that reality is subjective. In this regard, several subjectivities explored the educational issue differently. Unlike other social science methods, it did not attribute a general set of qualities to all members of the human population. Rather, the focus was on the context-specific dimensions of culture.

3.10. Theoretical Framework

As the amount of research done on SNC is less, the educational dilemma required a sound understanding. In this case, the academic works and critical arguments of Saigol, Chandio, Chaudhary, Mouffe, and R. S. Hashmi provided a basic framework to analyze the content of SNC. Saigol's work highlighted the overt and covert forms of nationalism in the textbooks of our country. Chandio in his recent work maintained that pluralism should persist in a society as ethnically and culturally diverse as Pakistan. Saigol's article provided an interesting starting point by revealing the state's one-sided approach to education and history. The comments on the imposition of nationalism on students is further juxtaposed with Chandio's and Mouffe's call for agonistic/ pluralistic society. Furthermore, Hashmi emphasized the politics of ethnicity though in a non-educational setting. Chaudhary's comments on the nexus among state, ideology, and education displayed another dimension of nationalist stance regarding curriculum design. The framework for politics of ethnicity can be adapted to comment on the present educational havoc.

As the review of the literature confirms, SNC has not been investigated for its problematic slogan of "one nation, one curriculum". The analyses of prior education policies and reforms also foregrounded the significance of scrutinizing the promises of the policies and the role assumed by education in different political eras of Pakistan. Though critics and academics in Pakistan have debunked the high-flown rhetoric of SNC to end the educational apartheid in society, the exclusion of diverse ethnic

communities and their cultures from the federal narrative received little scholarly attention.

SNC emphasized Islamic teachings, the need for “a homogenous nation, and Urdu as a subject, ideology, and medium in all textbooks”. It also desired to teach English as a language, not a subject (Torwali, 2020). It should be remembered that language is not apolitical. The case of the fall of Dhaka in 1971 illustrated the severe consequences of marginalizing the language and culture of Bengalis (Malik, 2014). The political imposition of homogeneity across the nation through a single curriculum appears ludicrous. The promises of NEPF, 2018, would not be fulfilled given the poor socio-political conditions of the country. In this scenario, selecting Urdu and English as the two main languages to be studied in all provinces posed a new challenge to ethnic and religious minorities, already living on the margins of society. Urdu has become the ideological tool (Nayyar, 2020) to alienate ethnic groups from their culture and traditions and create a single version of reality “within the confines of officially sanctioned and state-sponsored nationalism” (Saigol, 2010, p. 114). It will be studied that the new curriculum, despite showcasing claims to inclusivity, has further disregarded the voices of minorities in favour of promoting majoritarian interests, nationalism, patriotism, and Islamic teachings. Approached anthropologically, the implementation of SNC seems to deepen the gap among various ethnicities and also between ethnic groups and the state.

An essential aspect of human identity, ethnicity takes varied forms in various communities. It displays heterogeneity in society, whose internal harmony and national integration depend on how different ethnic groups coexist in a pluralistic setting. Birgit Lamm aptly noted that Pakistan is a remarkably diversified region. This holds true for its geographic structure, as well as its sociocultural, political, economic, and historical dimensions, he wrote in the preface to “*Cultural federalism*” (Chandio, 2020). As we know, the curriculum in Pakistan, since 1947, was predominantly influenced by the ideology of Muslim nationalism that came to be known as the ideology of Pakistan, the Two-Nation theory, the education sector could not achieve the goal of a discrimination-free education evident from the education policies including SNC.

The authoritarian mode of implementing SNC to create one nation is juxtaposed with pluralist accounts from various sections of society. Rubina Saigol's critical arguments against the state-sanctioned one-sided approach to education, history, and the future provide an excellent starting point. Saigol (2010) mentioned that schools and public places became the sites of ideological indoctrination to propagate Muslim rituals and nationalist ideology. Seen in a larger context of Pakistan's educational quality, the analysis provides a conceptual framework to decipher the hidden motives of our textbooks and national education policies. By including religious content, SNC not only violated Article 22 (1) of the constitution of Pakistan but also wrongly defined the history of Pakistan along bigoted religious lines.

In this regard, the conflict of ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities with a singular religio-political identity, as defined by the two-nation theory, offers an interesting backdrop to the discussion. Since the creation of Pakistan, education did not entirely take into account the diverse realities of several population groups in Pakistan (Z. T. Hashmi & Alam, 2022, p. 3). This research will highlight social diversity as a key factor in the discussion of SNC. Many writers have condemned the rigid stance of government officials and members of the National Curriculum Council (NCC) who ignored the pleas of minority representatives to change the stereotypical content present in schoolbooks. Sindh's refusal to implement SNC proved that the quality of the national curriculum suffers from the want of inclusivity.

Pakistan and India shared a common history of colonization and independence from the British Raj but the poor quality of education in Pakistan depicts the adverse effects of propagating religious fundamentalism and nationalism through the curriculum. The question explored is how can Pakistan's diversity be used to its advantage rather than seen as a threat and a cause of conflict. Chandio's optimistic approach, embracing unity in diversity, is useful as diversity is not considered antithetical to communal well-being and overall national progress.

The "politics of ethnicity" and "diversity issue" in Pakistan have been discussed by Ms Rehana Saeed Hashmi (2013) and Jami Chandio (2020) respectively. R. S. Hashmi's research focused on the problem of ethnic politics and its effects on national integration

in a pluralist society like Pakistan. The arguments can prove helpful for analyzing the single curriculum policy and its ramifications for the stakeholders, particularly ethnic and religious minorities. The policy needs to be contextualized to see how “the state of Pakistan has always used centralizing and authoritarian policies to create national harmony” (R. S. Hashmi, 2013, p. 15). The usurpation of provincial autonomy regarding education and curricula can foster harmful consequences for society. Many critics condemned the inclusion of religious content in SNC, this research seeks to investigate not only religious content but also the *space* provided to the local cultures and languages of Pakistan in the new curriculum.

Diversity and multiplicity are compelling metaphors and indisputable facts of the modern world. Chandio’s arguments on the political, fiscal, and cultural challenges in federal states (2020) serve as a foundation to uncover the diversity issue in Pakistan. Culture, tradition, language, and religion are essential components of the human personality. Politics cannot disregard this fundamental fact and pick only the aspects that it deems important (Fleiner et al., 2010), “it is more worsened and complicated when federations ignore their spirit and rationale of accommodating diversities in letter and spirit” (Chandio, 2020, p. 10). The pluralistic spirit of Pakistan seems to be threatened by the decision of one curriculum. Pakistan, according to Chandio and Lamm lacks the sense of realization of “unity in diversity”. Chandio (2020) rightly pointed out the unfair treatment of religious and ethnic minorities and suggested,

The educational curriculum should be made free from all kinds of biases based on religious, cultural and gender identities. Considering the diversity of historical backgrounds of all provinces, the forged uniformity in curriculum should be discouraged. Chapters should be included in the curriculum about other faiths and cultural diversity of Pakistan. All the factional distortions about history in the curriculum should be done away with, and science subjects like physics, chemistry, mathematics and biology should be kept away from religious rhetoric. (p. 62)

All these suggestions expose the flaws of the so-called national curriculum. Diversity-driven complexities do not merely exist in rhetoric, but they exist in real injustices and

inequities. The diversity issue is rendered even more important when it exists within the state boundaries. The perspectives of Oommen (2010) and Chandio converge on the problems faced by diverse groups within a state. Diversity within the state's borders becomes problematic for two reasons. One is when racial, social, or cultural differences serve as the ground for group inequality. Two, when various groups believe they are superior to or inferior to one another (Oommen, 2010). These comments are compared to the recent developments in the uniform curriculum policy. It will be argued that reducing the diversity in the book contents will confine the rational faculties of the next generations. They will prefer a black-and-white worldview instead of appreciating the role of diversity in their social life.

Not only religious minorities are disadvantaged but the local cultures, Sindhi, Balochi, and Pashtun, along with the traditions of people of northern areas of Pakistan, are given little importance in SNC. Even without evaluating the contents of textbooks, the slogan, "one nation, one curriculum," can be seen to reinforce the ideology of Muslim nationalism upheld by the state and ideological state apparatuses.¹⁵ While discussing the implications of SNC, Nida U. Chaudhary (2021) focused on the "nexus between state, education, and ideology" (p. 1) and exposed the politics of education insofar that education serves the interests of a narrow group of ruling elite classes- a Marxist evaluation of a class-based education system. The present research builds on the premise provided by Chaudhary in her article (2021)- the use of education as a tool for ideological indoctrination and monopolization of the intellectual life of *the* nation. Substantiating counter-arguments to the celebratory account of SNC, the research will document firsthand information-based opinions and views on SNC's [dis-]advantages for society. It is suggested that the evaluation of SNC, apart from the assessment of tangible progress, should include the study of questions like what is the program good for? Is this program better than others and how can it be improved?

¹⁵ According to Althusser, ideological state apparatuses (ISA) included education and other social institutions that are apparently outside state control but perpetuate the ideology of state.

The national amnesia surrounding the communal histories (of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and other communities) is reflected in the education policies (Saigol, 2010, p. 114), particularly SNC. The inference that “one nation” should study “one curriculum” is, to say the least, fraught with errors. The definition of a nation is crucial to one’s understanding of the past and present. Ammar Anwer (2015) has distinguished modern nation-states from the traditional imperial states where the central government had only limited control over the diversified geographical areas. Modern nation-states claimed sovereignty over a fixed piece of land. “Through governing practices and artefacts, nation-states *diffuse a singular identity* within the bounded space their borders arbitrarily but legally enclose” (emphasis added). Why should people belonging to different religious and cultural identities be forced to internalize a singular, one-sided narrative of the Muslim majority? The participants interviewed during this research explored this question from different angles. Moreover, a pluralist interpretation of what constitutes a nation by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the former Minister of Education of India is incorporated to discredit the nationalist stance of the policymakers and educationists.

The recent education policy is viewed as a manifestation of the politics of singularity and plurality. The former Federal Minister of Education, Shafqat Mahmood, stated that One National Curriculum was the need of the hour. His statement reflected the interest of authorities in creating “one nation” (Government of Pakistan, 2019). The pluralist frameworks of democracy and society as proposed by Chantal Mouffe and Jami Chandio (2020) are deployed in the present study to understand the true nature of democratic decision-making in education.

Mouffe calls for a democratic model under which *different* individuals and communities “co-exist” as opposed to the Western democratic ideal that deems sovereignty as the singularity of national interests- the oneness of the nation. This critique is pertinent to the discussion of Pakistan’s national policies on education. A democratic system of government should not suppress the divergent viewpoints of various social groups to achieve an image of [pseudo-] harmony and “popular sovereignty” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 4).

Heterogeneity does not mean a lack of harmony and social cohesion. This research is framed by arguments for pluralism in society that would ensure greater harmony and peace in the country. SNC seems to materialize the contrary situation. Our culture and history have mostly been defined by inter-community struggles and conflicts. Thus, the story of Pakistan's nation is the story of two communities—two diametrically opposed and eternally irreconcilable religious communities. To include such distorted versions of the past in the curricula was to hope that a country consisting of diverse linguistic, cultural, and religious communities could somehow be “homogenized” exclusively based on religion (Saigol, 2010).

An anthropological view of education shows that education should remain sensitive to the temporal and spatial realities of the students. As long as our schoolbooks defamiliarize the readers with their surroundings, the state of education is not going to improve.

3.11. Ethical Considerations

The research did not harm the participants in any way. The interviews and discussions were framed by the overarching anthropological concern over SNC. The names of the participants are written with informed consent. The participants were informed beforehand of the note-taking process. Transcription and interpretation of the data safeguarded the originality of the comments. To avoid ethnocentricity, a few thematic categories were reiterated in the course of discussions if there was a risk of digression from the topic and a position of neutrality was taken by the researcher.

3.12. Research Limitations

The present research does not provide a detailed content evaluation of different subjects. It is suggested that future researchers identify the disparities in SNC. Also, the perspectives of members of various social groups might seem biased. Therefore, there is a need for observation-based ethnographic research. Moreover, as little amount of academic research has been devoted to the study of SNC, the researcher had to rely on non-academic resources as well.

To conclude this section, it can be said that this ethnographic work will inform about some crucial but less discussed aspects of SNC which are undeniably and extremely important otherwise. With confidence that the efforts invested in this study will help the stakeholders develop a better understanding of the socio-cultural, religious, political and technical complexities in the policy, the discussion will prove fruitful for improving the current state of education according to the needs of all communities in Pakistan.

4. SNC: INTERFAITH HARMONY, SOCIAL COHESION AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION

In this chapter, the perspectives of various research participants have been compiled under three sections. Each section corresponds to one of the objectives mentioned in the first chapter of the dissertation. The first section explores the themes of singularity and higher standards of education with specific reference to SNC. The second section charts out the flaws of SNC as it rules out the diversity factor in education. The third section throws light on the disparities in the new education strategy.

Individuals were approached for in-depth interviews whereas five members participated in each FGD. The FGDs provided an opportunity for the scholars and other concerned people to raise their voices against the imposition of a 'single' curriculum across Pakistan.

4.1. Premise of Singularity Vs. Standardization

4.1.1. What should be the direction of education here?

In response to questions similar to the abovementioned one, the following answers were provided by Dr. Nayyar, Peter Jacob, and Saroop Ijaz. Jawad Ghamdi, Husnain, Waqas and Ramiz participated in a focus group discussion on the implications of SNC. A group of informants, teachers and representatives from CSJ and WGIE shared their opinions on the imposition of SNC without effective collaboration with teachers and other stakeholders.

Dr. Abdul Hameed Nayyar (Pakistani physicist, author, and a freelance consultant on the issues of education) thinks before we delve further into the discussion, there is a need to understand why apartheid and disparities exist across different streams and systems of education. Different people opt for going to different educational institutions as per their needs, and they have different targets set for themselves in future. Some schools provide quality education whereas some lack resources and do not have sufficient paraphernalia for quality schooling. *The need to set similar targets*

was there, but the framework adopted for it is not rational—it seems as if curriculum standards will bring the quality of education of well-performing schools down to the level of schools having poor quality standards. Furthermore, the idea of centralization of education will affect provincial autonomy in education. The progress towards curriculum development made so far would be rescinded, and it would undermine provincial authority. Through SNC, it is apparent that the Madrassah education system—which caters to only about 25 to 30 lac students is being mainstreamed under public conventional schooling, which has about 2.8 million students under its care. The idea of singularity here, may not work.

Peter Jacob (a human rights professional, researcher, freelance journalist and Executive Director of Centre for Social Justice) provided an interesting perspective by questioning the very premise of the “Single” national curriculum. According to him, we need to understand whether the premise for “singularity” is justified. Here, we must further ask if we learnt our lessons from previous similar attempts of nationalization here. The idea of homogeneity over diversity is convenient for authoritarian regimes. *The uniformity that we actually seek should be based on learning outcomes, not on the contents.* We give examples of India having one system of education, but nobody tells that their uniformity is based on learning outcomes. Some policies are tried and tested and need to change with time. For example, China had to forgo a closed economy model to compete with international markets and trends. Policies should be relevant to current trends and times.

A very comprehensive dialogue was held with scholars at Al-Mawrid, which included Jawad Ghamdi, Husnain, Waqas and Ramiz. During this conversation, there was an emphasis on understanding and reaching a consensus on what should be the purpose of education, as it is not just limited to producing a uniform curriculum and syllabus, but also to how students and scholars are nurtured at educational institutes. *For that, it is important to first determine what end results we seek from a particular system of education.* They also expressed concern that the idea of religious nationalism propagated through the education system does not work and negates ground realities.

The representatives of CSJ and WGIE confirmed that during 2020-2021, Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board (PCTB) could not implement the decision of NCC regarding teaching five minority religions as alternatives to ethics and Islamiyat. Instead, PCTB followed the rest of the policy. The speakers termed this as “a selective application of provincial autonomy in adopting SNC”. The mode of implementation in Punjab only adds to the marginalization of religious and ethnic minorities. Though the province has used the right to modify the curriculum, still the needs of various social groups are overlooked for the sake of uniformity of textbooks.

Saim Mahmood, a textbook reviewer, discusses the decision of the Governor of Punjab according to which the study of the Holy Quran is made compulsory for higher education without giving any alternative to non-Muslim students.¹⁶ While questioning the notion of singularity, he asks that should the course be necessary both at school and university level education.

During a discussion with a group of teachers, an interesting perspective arose that during formative years, 5 to 6 years old children have already developed their aptitude for learning. So, the question arises whether education starts with evolving psychology of children or with nurture. At what point should one’s education start? And what should education and its system be like? What learning tools and absorbing faculties should be involved in the process? On the one hand, the School Education Department Punjab announced the hiring of 70,000 Nazra teachers when, on the other hand, there is a huge shortage of instructors for core subjects such as languages, mathematics, and science. Thus, it is inappropriate to sacrifice the learning of core subjects which would contribute to better learning outcomes. In a resource-strapped environment, this step is inadvisable and unjust to children, “denial of their right to quality education and equity”. The policy should be solutions-based, not add to problems. Is there an understanding of what the “problem” is? Also, there is the issue of the child’s inability to make decisions—as parents or the state makes *this decision for them that results in*

¹⁶ This course is already included in middle and secondary education according to SNC/ The Punjab Compulsory Teaching of the Holy Quran Act, 2018)

the conflict between what the child wants in career life and inability to pursue their dreams due to pre-determination of education. To help a child make better decisions, education for the first 12 years should be broad-based.

In the conversation with Saroop Ijaz, a teacher, we came to know that education as a right has been an arduous evolutionary journey. Before it was recognized as a fundamental human right, education was largely a question for the economy—and initial international law instruments on education limited the right to have access to rights with the availability of resources. But this perception changed and rightly so and most international instruments, to which Pakistan is also a party, are bound to make provisions for providing free and compulsory education to children. Under the 18th amendment, this became a fundamental right in 2010. However, free and compulsory education should not mean killing diversity. The idea of centralization of education by taking away the autonomy of provinces over curriculum development would be a direct constitutional violation. *The element of diversity and the right to preserve and maintain religious or cultural identities is enshrined in the constitution and also in the international instruments which Pakistan has ratified.*

4.1.2. Is ideological incorporation a good idea?

In-depth interviews Dr. Hoodbhoy provided an opportunity to probe into past educational policies and the influence of ideology on the curriculum taught across schools. Moreover, Cecil S. Chaudhry, Baloch, Awais, and Shehzad expressed their concern with the problematic ideological overtones in SNC.

Cecil S. Chaudhry, an educationist and civil society representative, also maintains that the intent of the government to equalize educational standards is appreciable, but how will that be implemented needs to be seen. *An attempt at bringing national unity by using religion may end up pronouncing more differences*—the idea of merging Madrassah into the mainstream might not be effective and the quality of public schools might come down. The religious overtones in the curriculum serve to propagate the ideological stance of the state i.e. to unify the diverse systems of education into a homogenous whole.

Naeem Baloch, a concerned parent, stressed on sensitization of vocabulary used for children and blamed successive attempts at indoctrination. However, he also emphasized that there is a need to bring a uniform system of education for children, as there is confusion about standards and a lot of differences are created among children. He further pointed out that there is a need to orient students towards more exposure to reading diverse literature as it would generate a *plurality of interpretations* among the students.

Hafiz Awais, youth peace leader, expresses concern about the isolation madrassah students face as they remain cut off from the rest of the world. Lowering the quality of public and private education would not serve the purpose. Rather, the needs of various segments of society should be prioritized, particularly in educational policymaking.

Irfan Shahzad, an Urdu teacher, views the Single National Curriculum being made as a welcome step. For all people, it is compulsory to go through this and then get on one's specialized education path. From that perspective, it is a correct and welcome step. (Important to mention here is that SNC would be fruitful if only it is strictly broad-based, without ideological indoctrination)

On indoctrination, Rubina Saigol, a Pakistani feminist scholar and educationist, is of the view that the use of religion was political and was used to justify Zia's stay in power (which was illegal), therefore one sees religious content dominating our textbooks. Public schools became easy political propaganda tools because of their widespread coverage across Pakistan. We blame the Bangladesh debacle on "Bengalis being backward and fell to conspiracies hatched by India" but will never mention about democracy failure that Bengalis were deprived of their rights—history is portrayed as one-dimensional in our textbooks. Textbooks are promoting narrow-mindedness, it is like a street with a dead end, and does not allow for diversified views to consolidate.

Dr. Hoodbhoy says the spirit of science has been destroyed by the *ratta system* (cramming) and too much religiosity. Also, proper use of the internet for the attainment of knowledge is not learnt even at higher education levels. *Science and Math need to remain secular*—i.e. free from religion. Lies are being promoted as truth—the research

level is already deteriorating. There is a need to reform the examination system, by scrutinizing the examiners on their subject knowledge. This is not a very expensive exercise—rote learning should be eliminated.

4.1.3. Need for Elevating Learning and Access Quality amid Poverty

The interview of Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy's (a Pakistani nuclear physicist, activist, and teacher) proved to be a comprehensive account of present educational policies. Jamil and Aslam led the discussion during the second FGD on the need for genuine educational reforms. How to improve the quality of education remained a central topic during the group discussion. Moreover, a teacher from a school in Sindh shed light on the decision of the province regarding implementation a single curriculum.

Baela Raza Jamil (CEO of Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi, public policy specialist and activist. She also served as Technical Adviser to the Federal Ministry of Education) has asserted the need to understand what's causing apartheid as well as health and education deprivations (the recent Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) indicates a poverty ratio of 28%) among the low-income groups, and introspection is required whether the curriculum has been responsible for it. While the last curriculum of 2006 needed an upgrade, the real issue of resources needs to be addressed for understanding the poor education quality in the country. The real causes for disparities are understated in our textbooks. The existing reality is that out of 40 million children enrolled at schools, 10% are those who go to the private sector, where madrassah board exams, O/A and IB systems are in place of government matric exams. These are about 8-10% of all students that follow Cambridge or O/A or IB curriculums, but that is just a small ratio. So real change is needed in the schools (public and low-cost private) schools. We need to understand that education apartheid is not only limited to poor infrastructure and poverty but is also caused when access is denied to minorities and other marginalized groups that have their own dynamics. We will need to see if the Single National Curriculum would really be able to take under its umbrella all those who have been excluded from the education system.

Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy is of the view that the idea of “free and compulsory education for all children aged between 5 to 16” should not be misunderstood for uniformity. On the disparities across educational institutes, he has stressed the *need to acknowledge that the standards are naturally lower for those students living in remote areas and the level of understanding will be different for those living in urban areas. The curriculum needs flexibility and rationalization in this situation—imposing uniformity here might kill the purpose of elevating students* from low-income groups. The lower you set the standards; the chances are we might end up disturbing quality across all education institutes. Furthermore, he is of the view that the very attempts of bringing a single curriculum might get into conflict with the 18th Amendment, which gives the provinces full autonomy in curriculum development.

Dr. Monazza Aslam, scholar of education, shares that there is a sheer need to take into consideration that due to the COVID-19 crisis, more drops out are expected, especially girls who are vulnerable not only to economic but also cultural barriers to education. To cater to their specific needs, a more nuanced understanding of education is needed. For her, examples of accelerated learning from case studies in Uganda and South Punjab can be used as excellent examples of learning interventions. Monazza asserts the *need to bring flexible schooling solutions based on the diverse economic and cultural needs of children*. A drop-out girl getting back into school would not be able to stay in tune with the fast-paced regular curriculum. A more nuanced understanding of problems is needed in Pakistan’s context.

Mr. Muhammad Aslam shared his views on why Sindh refused to follow the decision of the Federal Government on SNC. Being a teacher in Sindh for many years, he juxtaposed the immediate local, cultural, and social realities of the province with the narrow range of subjects in the newly introduced curriculum. Imposing Urdu and English as the medium of instruction in all schools across all the provinces of Pakistan can alienate young learners from their ethos. How can the government expect to alleviate the educational disparity through these kinds of measures? The needs of the underprivileged strata should be voiced through better education quality.

4.2. The Problematic Representation of Diverse Ethnic and Religious Groups

4.2.1. Are the needs of learners properly represented?

The two speakers had experience as a teacher and social activists. Butt's suggestion gives a deeper insight into the plight of girls in Pakistan insofar as they are not allowed to get an education at a higher level.

Israr Madni, a textbook reviewer, is of the view that there has been a serious lack of understanding of what challenges students at religious madrassahs face. Furthermore, *there is little talk about other madrassah or religious education networks that are not part of the federation of madaris that are officially represented by five madrassah boards.* The demand for the five Madrassah boards has been to be looked at under the Ministry of Education so their education concerns can be meaningfully addressed as a mainstream issue. Earlier, policies could not be rightly devised because of the confusion over who would be looking into their affairs. Further, he asserts that the madrassahs find it in their interest that the education policy is a centralized one, as giving autonomy to the provinces would mean they lose their hold over the federation of Madaris—Wafaq ul Madaris. *We also see a lack of political ownership of Madrasah students, even though we see many powerful political leaders from religious sectors, we don't see them representing the education concerns of seminary students.*

Hina Pervaiz Butt, former member Punjab assembly, is of the view that while we talk about free and compulsory education, we should also consider the definition of age for a girl. Free and compulsory education needs to be complemented by raising the age of girls' marriage so that they might spend more time at school and make independent decisions about education.

4.2.2. Indoctrination Vs. Critical Thinking

The new syllabus was approached from a critical perspective by Jacob and Samiullah. Their suggestions and critiques during the third FGD with other educationists are as follow:

Peter Jacob pointed out that there was a time when a master's degree holder had enough learning, understanding, and knowledge. Even an intermediate education was considered decent enough with skills for entering basic employment. However, nowadays, we see so many M-Phils and graduates from university who have no subject knowledge and do not possess any intellectual skills of their own. It appears their goal has been to seek well-paying employment, but when it comes to that, they lack academic acumen. The education system is such that even examiners and students are unable to comprehend answers to questions at the university level. On the issue of indoctrination, he feels that many people retort by saying that religious studies should be provided at schools—they ignore the question of whether it should start from the primary level and end at the university level. Imposing religious ideologies will not allow students to understand the spirit of religion—they will resort to only symbols, rituals and trends.

Samiullah, a social activist, said that progressive, critical-thinking teaching strategies are possible in the madrassah setting too where the curriculum is still being regressively taught. The dogmatic content dominates rational and skill-based education. Systematic exclusion of critical thinking hinders the path of innovative pedagogical techniques.

4.2.3. Importance of Choice and Academic Freedom

The scholars focused on the violation of students' academic freedom through SNC. Dr. A.H Nayyar pointed out examinations are based on textbooks—not concepts, that force one into rote learning. Islamiyat subject will revert students back towards rote-learning. The placement of SLOs on Islamiyat doesn't make any sense. *In the old days, there was academic diversity and freedom and textbook diversity was present in the market and approved as per their meeting the curriculum requirement. It was up to the students to choose their books.* In 1959 the powers from publishers were taken, and the books were then produced by textbook boards, (East Pakistan textbook board and West Pakistan textbook board)—it changed the practice of getting examined from the textbooks. Indoctrination through textbooks is always harmful—through new laws, books get banned. Indoctrination has also resulted in students losing their own sense of right or wrong by using their critical thinking—for this, they look towards authority—

through the education system, they want to raise a generation that doesn't question and is subservient/obedient to masters.

Islamic Scholar, Irfan Shahzad further added that conventional schools should not be given the responsibility of taking care of religious education—*as this choice should be left to the child's parents*. They prefer teaching the Quran privately through a tutor that is according to their liking. Why must a school take over this role? Their role should be in only delivering a broad-based education that can enable a child to choose their future—either to go into specialized education or to go towards vocational training.

The experts and civil society representatives expressed concern over the typical, one-sided history in the schoolbooks. Academic freedom should include the opportunity to deviate from the syllabi and introduce “subaltern history”. Institutionalizing freedom of expression would certainly lead to greater social inclusion, tolerance, and peace.

4.2.4. Broad-based Education Vs. Specialized Education

Irfan Shahzad has expressed his concern that children's natural abilities are overshadowed when they are pushed towards specialized education early on, as we see in the case of Madrassah education. According to him, the first 12 years of education should be strictly about exposing a student to basic academic skills and concepts---and they should be able to make a professional or academic career decision only after they have acquired their learning abilities.

Muneeba Saeed, an educationist and teacher trainer, emphasized the importance of skill in the practical life of children. She adhered to the fact that children should be given a chance to decide about their education so that they could learn the required skills to achieve their ambition.

4.3. Counter-productive Education Strategies

4.3.1. Implications of Academic Competition

The long-unresolved problem of education, and unhealthy educational competition, in Pakistan was discussed by Raza and representatives from Al-Mawrid Institute during the last focus group discussion on the loopholes in SNC.

Baela Raza maintained that the pressure of merit faced by students of getting into higher education is unhealthy. It's not like in the olden days when even a second division was considered reasonable, and nobody felt like an outcast. The sheer competition has come with its own set of challenges and burdens, which is taking the spirit of education away. There is the question of intrigue and fear of expression. *The teacher carries with him the culture of silence—not academic freedom—which permeates to children as well who feel discouraged in asking difficult questions—the avoidance must end.* ASER reports have furnished that age and learning have no connection. A 9-year-old here generally should be able to attempt 4th or 5th standard exams, but this is not the case here which means different children have different abilities to learn—we are in the midst of a learning crisis—In a situation where a 10-year-old is not able to read or write, the World Bank has termed it as “Learning Poverty”. In Pakistan, Learning Poverty stands at 75%. This learning loss will be exacerbated with months of school closures—learning losses are expected to rise

Participants from Al-Mawrid Institute were of the view that education should help children become explorers using their curiosity. It is the right of the child to find answers themselves through the tools of learning provided by an education system. It's also important to understand that grades, marks, and competition doesn't help children in becoming inventors or intellectuals. A broad-based education is ideal that can develop basic learning abilities in children, without making them embroiled in religious or political indoctrination.

4.3.2. Should we be predetermining the course of education for children?

Lastly, the discussions and interviews pivoted on the question of predetermination of education.

This view was also reflected by the four guest interviewees from Al-Mawrid, as well as Hafiz Awais. Jawad Ghamdi further provided an interesting perspective that children have already developed their aptitude for learning during their formative years. So, a question then arises whether education starts with their developing psychology or with their nurture. At what point here should one's education start? And what should education and the system of learning be like? What should be the learning and absorbing faculties involved? It is also important for the state not to inculcate ideologies in textbooks. *If we have already decided what we want the children to become, then we will only be creating robots.*

Adding to Jawad's point, Waqas Khan also expressed that *predetermining the course of education for children will limit their professional choices when they graduate.* This is a situation faced by many madrassah graduates, who, due to a lack of broad-based education, are not left with any options to pursue their dreams of becoming scientists, architects, mathematics, or other subjects in which they had an interest.

Husnain Ashraf, a minority representative, also pointed out that there is a lack of guidance counselling for parents to help them make the right decision for their children. Parents mostly follow class-based trends and think the least about their children's aptitudes and inclinations towards arts or science. Parents who force their decision upon children only contribute to creating a non-conducive learning environment. The state is also implicated in the act of enforcing a Single National Curriculum. Education is a structural issue and cannot be improved without being perceived as such. The perspectives of a diverse range of students should be prioritized.

As a result, we can see from these findings of the series of FGDs and multiple in-depth interviews that SNC has indeed become a great cause of concern for parents, educationists, and people of different ethnicities. SNC has caused the scholars to suspect the future of education in Pakistan leading them to think whether ideological

incorporation is a wise idea. The arguments maintained that ethnic diversity is not properly represented in the new textbooks nor is the child's right to academic freedom observed by educational authorities. Therefore, there is a dire need to raise the standard of education in Pakistan by paying heed to the socio-cultural values of *all* people in Pakistan,

5. DISPARITIES IN THE CONTENT OF SNC

The students in the schools have respect and dignity, equal rights, and opportunities through collective and non-discriminatory education. Partially Biased education policy promotes biased material in textbooks that reflect the individual thought of the textbook writer than thorough research, approved by the curriculum review committee which is a major source of discrimination and hatred in educational institutes. Teachers from minorities and the majority are biased towards other religions and sects, they may teach discrimination to the students in addition to the textbooks. The SNC has an overall tendency to teach majority religion, distorted history, war, and hero-worshipping is normal and there are fewer positive examples of minority group people who have contributed towards the creation and progress of Pakistan.

5.1. Impact on Minority Students

Minority students feel isolated because they learn from a very young age that they are second class citizens and have less importance in classroom. Vulnerable, poor minority student have no equal chances to study and develop because there is a social gap created in the classroom which causes an increase in the rate of drop-out and illiteracy. Teachers from majority often reinforce the discriminatory material by their behavior and attitude towards minority student, showing a clear bias towards them and therefore giving majority children already a biased mindset and give them the opportunity to tease or ignore minority community. The result is that especially in government schools the dropout rate is high and minority groups are more vulnerable.

5.2. Impact on Majority Students

Students from the majority community learn from a young age that they and their religion is superior due to which they look down on the minority students. As a result they see them as second class citizens for whom they do not need to have respect. Later it creates problem by becoming violent or violating the very ethical behavior which is reflected in the society. The message they receive from textbooks is that they only have to respect their own religion or sect thus no respect for diversity.

The new curriculum has raised many concerns among educated people. Several academics, parents, and scholars voiced their concerns during the research i.e., through interviews and Focus Group Discussions. The syllabus was analyzed for its lopsided representation of minorities, indigenous languages, and gender.

5.3. In violation of the Constitution

Dr A. H. Nayyar pointed out some major loopholes in SNC. Talking about the enforced singularity in curricula, he referred to textbooks containing religious content and stereotypical images of women. Moreover, he questioned the theme of patriotism that how the textbooks included biased accounts of wars, especially between Pakistan and India. The inclusion of religious content is not only prohibited by certain legal provisions but it also represents and to some extent promotes majoritarianism. He recalled the fact that Pakistan was claimed to be made for safeguarding the rights of minorities. However, the introduction of SNC inadvertently caused the inculcation of hate and bigotry among various social groups.

Additionally, the content of books and children's stories seemed problematic. Many parents and textbook publishers could not simply digest the fact that the main characters of the stories were "males and Muslims". The stakeholders mentioned that this was partly a violation of female and minority rights and partly a biased attitude of the educational authorities in Pakistan. When more than half of the population is female and various religious minorities constitute a considerable part of the total population in our country, the stories and textbook information need to reflect the "diversity" as well. The textbook reviewers debated on the fact that why non-Muslim heroes remained unacceptable to the readers.

5.4. The (not-so) Minor Issues

Mr. Muhammad Aslam further elaborated on the dilemma of the nation. As he discussed the decision of Sindh to refuse the implementation of SNC in schools across Sindh, he praised Sindh Textbook Board's (STB) policies. According to him, STB proved to be more inclusive than other Boards across Pakistan. He appreciated the fact that students from minority groups were at least represented in the textbooks and

classroom discussions. For many years, students from minorities faced the pressure of majoritarianism in schools. Their cultural and religious values were marginalized by the state. The same remains the case with SNC. He put forth the question that how would one feel if one's basic values are not respected by social institutions. As more books and researches identify this problem of ethnicities and minorities in Pakistan, the schoolbooks, if only in Sindh, have started to *include* information about minorities.

Aslam made a comparison of STB to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbook Board (KPTB). He acknowledged the efforts of KPTB to gather feedback from the readers of textbooks but maintained that no question was asked as to whether the content was inclusive in terms of minorities' representation or not.

5.5. The Subtle Subversion

Zeeba T. Hashmi (a research consultant, opinion writer, peace education trainer and founder of Ibtidah for Education) reinforced Aslam's point by providing examples from textbooks that did or did not represent the values of various minority groups. She analyzed the language textbooks for including religious material. Ms. Hashmi further elaborated on the startling levels of religious material in language textbooks by STB, KPTB, and BTB, the Boards of Sindh, KPK, and Baluchistan respectively. She argued that minority groups should be given a chance to study their languages and if there is a need to study official language(s), they should be represented in the course books in an impartial manner.

5.6. Analysis of Disparities in SNC Based Textbooks

The following five tables have been generated after carefully reviewing books from all five boards on the basis of inclusion of religious content, gender stereotyping, hate material, content about war and pictorial and graphical representation of majoritarianism in books of compulsory subjects. The subjects that have been reviewed include: Languages, Social studies, History, Geography, Pakistan Studies, Muasharti Uloom and General Knowledge. Chapters with pages numbers have been identified along the percentage of religious content, hate material, gender stereotyping, war

content and pictorial and graphical representation in each of the books. Inclusion of women in authorship of the books has also been identified in the last column of each table.

5.6.1. Religious Content

Quranic verses, Examples/Stories from Islamic history, religious personalities of Islam.

Table 1: Religious content in compulsory subjects

Subject	Grade	Chapters with Religious Content	Page number	Chapter wise percentage of religious content in book	¹⁷ Gender Inclusion in Authors
English (PCTB)	1	4/11	54-55, 75, 83, 109	36%	Women: 1/1
English (PCTB)	2	4/12	2, 10, 54, 110, 112, 119	33%	Women: 2/2
English (PCTB)	3	1/11	34, 35, 36, 37, 38	9%	Women: 2/2
English (PCTB)	4	7/13	2-4, 6, 7, 12, 21, 49, 50, 54, 56, 71, 84, 109	54%	Women: 1/1
English (PCTB)	5	5/14	2-3, 5-6, 8, 14, 33, 103, 94-96, 98, 100	36%	Women: 1/1
English (PCTB)	6	1/13	1-7	8%	Women: 2/4
English (PCTB)	7	5/14	Inside title, 1-13, 15, 26-36, 42, 107	35%	Women: 2/4
History (PCTB)	7	3/5	9, 55, 56, 85, 99	60%	Women:0/1

¹⁷ There is no minority author in the list of authors in all reviewed textbooks. Hence, only gender inclusion has been taken into consideration.

English (PCTB)	8	3/14 + 2 Review Exercises	1-4, 20, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50-52, 72,	36%	Women: 1/5
History (PCTB)	8	2/5	Inside title, 31,	40%	Women: 2/10
English (PCTB)	9	7/12 + 1 Review Exercise	1-6, 7, 13, 30, 32-46, 63-64, 73-76, 78, 89, 92, 96, 98, 126,	66%	Women: 3/3
Pakistan Studies (PCTB)	9	4/4	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 42, 58, 59, 95-99, 103, 105-107	100%	Women: 0/3
English (PCTB)	10	2/13	1-14, 149-158	15%	Women: 1/1
Urdu (PCTB)	10	6/27	2-10,24-26, 33, 42-46, 124	22%	
Urdu (PCTB)	9	6/20	2-4, 31	30%	Women: 0/5
Urdu (PCTB)	8	7/27	1-2, 7-10, 12, 76, 94, 104, 124, 137,	26%	Women:1/6
Urdu (PCTB)	7	10/25	1-4, 5-9, 18, 34, 46, 51-53, 72, 94-95, 125-127	40%	Women: 1/3
Urdu (PCTB)	6	5/25	1-4, 5-8, 33,63-67, 79-80	20%	Women: 0/4
Urdu (PCTB)	4	5/33	13-18, 80, 81, 102-106, 123,137, 138,139 Inside hard cover	15%	Women: 0/1
Urdu (PCTB)	1	6/15	73-78, 79, 81, 83, 84, 85, 87,88,89,90,91, 120,123,124,134	40%	Women: 0/2
English (STB)	10	3/8	Inside and outside title, 2, 3-5, 7-10, 26, 29, 31, 175, 45, 57, 143,	38%	Women: 2/3

English (STB)	9	5/8	Outside and inside title, 2-9, 25-27, 30-31, 32, 51, 58, 84-85, 134, 138-139, 48, 64, 86-87, 95, 99, 100, 188,	63%	Women: 3/3
English (STB)	8	3/7	Outside and inside title, 25, 89, 96, 112, 21, 103, 130, last hard cover message page	43%	Women: 6/11
English (STB)	7	1/7	Outside title, 93, 147	14%	Women: 3/3
English (STB)	6	2/6	Outside and inside title, 15, 108/111	33%	Women: 3/3
English (STB)	5	2/5	34, 88	40%	Women: 1/1
Pak Studies (STB)	10	3/13	5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 38, 140, 142, 143	23%	Women: 0
Muasharti Uloom (Sindh)	8	1/10	92	10%	Women: 0
Muasharti Uloom (Sindh)	7	1/22	22	5%	Women: 3
Muasharti Uloom (Sindh)	6	2/33	6, 168	6%	Women: 3
Muasharti Uloom (Sindh)	4	2/12	111, 112, 113, 114, 115	16%	Women: 2
General knowledge (Sindh)	1	9/59	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 31, 34, 42,	15%	Women: 4
English (STB)	3	1/6	21	17%	Women: 2/2

English (STB)	2	2/8	1, 57	25%	Women: 2/2
English (STB)	1	1/28	1	4%	Women: 1/3
English (NBF)	8	0/4	Preface	0	Women: 2/2
English (NBF)	7	2/12	Preface, 6-8, 37, 43, 110-117,	17%	Women: 4/4
English (NBF)	6	4/14	7,8, 10, 13, 18, 85, 109	29%	Women: 3/3
English (NBF)	5	6/14	2-3, 5-6, 8, 13, 14-17, 33, 47, 57, 64, 75-77, 80, 96-100, 102, 105	42%	Women: 1/1
English (NBF)	4	6/13	1-4, 6-7, 12, 17, 47, 49, 56, 84, 109	46%	Women: 1/1
English (NBF)	3	1/11	35-38	9%	Women: 2/2
English (NBF)	2	3/12	1, 68, 112	25%	Women: 2/2
English (NBF)	1	3/11	56-58, 88-89, 115,	27%	Women: 1/1
Urdu (NBF)	9	8/19	6-9, 12, 22, 27, 61, 92-94 70, 85-87	42%	Women: 0/3
Urdu (NBF)	8	9/21	8-20, 27-32, 56-57, 76-83, 90, 107,110	43%	Women: 0/3
Urdu (NBF)	7	9/20	8-20, 31, 46, 55, 62-64, 82-83, 88-90	45%	Women: 1/3
Urdu (NBF)	5	9/23	1-20, 33-39, 40, 59, 77-82, 86, 135-136, 139, 151	39%	Women: 1/1
Urdu (NBF)	4	11/23	2-12, 14-20, 28, 33, 48-50, 54, 64, 82,104-108, 126	48%	Women: 0/1

Urdu (NBF)	3	11/22	2-13, 15-21, 30, 33, 59-65, 84-85, 96-100, 111, 134, 147	50%	Women: 1/1
Urdu (NBF)	2	2/22	1-2, 9-11, 15-19	9%	Women: 0/1
English (KPTB)	1	6/11	22, 57-58, 68, 70, 79, 92, 115	55%	Women: 1/1
English (KPTB)	2	8/12	Inside hard cover, 2-3, 15, 68, 83, 112, 119	67%	Women: 2/2
English (KPTB)	3	4/11	35-38, 80, 94, 101	36%	Women: 2/2
English (KPTB)	9	4/15	1-10, 27, 41-47, 65-71, inside hard cover end		Women: 1/2
English (KPTB)	10	4/15	Inside hard cover, 1-7, 4-48, 73, 127-134, inside hard cover end	27%	Women: 1/2
Urdu (KPTB)	1	6/15	74-92, 110, 127-128, 140, 169, last page	40%	Women: 0/1
Urdu (KPTB)	3	11/22	8-20, 30, 33-35, 58-67, 81-82, 84-85, 92-104, 112-114, 128, 147, last page	50%	Women: 1/1
Urdu (KPTB)	4	9/23	1-20, 28, 30-32, 33, 54, 103-109, 126-127, 140-142, last page	39%	Women: 0/1
Urdu (KPTB)	6	7/21	1-16, 28, 34-35, 36-43, 87, 89, 90, 91, 100, 136, inside page	33%	Women: ½
English (BTB)	7	3/13	2-22, 47-48, 91-93	23%	Women: 2/2
Urdu (BTB)	7	6/25	5-13, 37, 39, 66-66, 98, 101, 103, 118-112	24%	Women: 1/3

Source: Content Analysis of SNC based Textbooks by Author, 2022

5.6.2. Glorification of War

Dr Hoodbhoy discussed the ramifications of content about wars (glorification of war, exclusivist nationalism, and negative persuasions of revenge and hatred) in our syllabi. The history textbooks in Punjab contain almost half chapters which glorify war. Similarly, in Pakistan Studies books for Grade 9, 25 % of the chapters portray war and patriotic sentiments in a positive way.

Glorification of war, exclusionary view of nationalism/nationhood, Negative persuasions e.g., revenge.

Table 2: Content about wars

Subject	Grade	Chapters with Content about war	Page Number	Chapter wise percentage of war related content in book	Gender Inclusion in Authors
English (PCTB)	5	1/14	87	7%	Women: 1/1
English (PCTB)	7	1/14	117	7%	Women: 2/4
History (PCTB)	7	2/5	7-9, 17, 22, 85	40%	Women:0/1
English (PCTB)	9	1/12	13, 15	8%	Women: 3/3
Pak Studies (PCTB)	9	1/4	41, 48	25%	Women: 0/3
English (STB)	3	1/6	58	6%	Women: 2/2
English (NBF)	6	2/14	85, 114,	50%	Women: 3/3
English (NBF)	4	2/13	35-37, 44	15%	Women: 1/1

Urdu (NBF)	8	1/21	27-32, 33	4%	Women: 0/3
Urdu (NBF)	7	5/20	22, 40, 46, 49-53, 99	25%	Women: 1/3
Urdu (NBF)	5	1/23	139	4%	Women: 1/1
Urdu (NBF)	4	3/23	40, 64, 85	13%	Women: 0/1
Urdu (NBF)	3	1/22	134	5%	Women: 1/1
Urdu (NBF)	2	1/22	104	5%	Women: 0/1
English (KTPB)	10	1/22	74-79	5%	
Urdu (KPTB)	3	2/22	74, 105-108	9%	Women: 1/1
Urdu (KPTB)	4	3/23	40, 64, 130	13%	Women: 0/1
Urdu (KPTB)	6	3/21	80-83, 106, 122, 124	14%	Women: ½
Urdu (BTB)	7	4/25	39,97, 101, 103, 118-122	16%	Women: 1/3

Source: Content Analysis of SNC based Textbooks by Author, 2022

5.6.3. Gender based Disparities

Acceptance of gender roles (stereotypes; male supremacy, preference of one gender over other), domestic violence.

Table 3: Gender related disparities

Source: Content Analysis of SNC based Textbooks by Author, 2022

Subject	Grade	Chapters with Gender	Page Number	Chapter wise percentage of gender related content in book	Gender Inclusion in Authors
English (PCTB)	8	1/14	60	7%	Women: 1/5
English (STB)	9	2/8	54, 71	25%	Women: 3/3
English (STB)	8	1/7	Most characters are male in the book e.g. 111	14%	Women: 6/11
English (NBF)	7	1/12	54	8%	Women: 4/4
Urdu (NBF)	9	1/19	46	5%	Women: 0/3
Urdu (NBF)	5	1/23	64	4%	Women: 1/1
Urdu (NBF)	4	1/23	67	4%	Women: 0/1
Urdu (NBF)	3	1/22	33	5%	Women: 1/1
Urdu (NBF)	2	1/22	63	5%	Women: 0/1
English (KPTB)	2	1/12	87	8%	Women: 2/2

Urdu (PCTB)	1	Pictures inside and outside			Women: 0/2
General knowledge (Sindh)	1	1/59	28	2%	Women: 4
Urdu (KPTB)	1	1/15	117	7%	Women: 0/1
Urdu (KPTB)	6	1/21	36-43	5%	Women: 1/2
Urdu (BTB)	7	1/25	144-145	4%	Women: 1/3

5.6.4. Hate Material – War to Mold Minds

Hate material refers to undue comparison, negative portrayal, and camouflaged hatred. While the discussion on war representation in textbooks was going on, a speaker from Baluchistan contributed another significant point to the discussion i.e., presence of hate material in schoolbooks. Our education system is still vulnerable to partiality which has led to the social stigmatization of ethnic minorities. Instead of teaching how to love others, our education system seemed to foster negative feelings among different social groups. The content of SNC displayed undue comparisons of Muslims and non-Muslims and was claimed to camouflage hatred for non-Muslims particularly, Hindus. One speaker, a teacher of History, recalled how the book started with a basic definition of history: “It is an organized study of the past which examines the results and effects of the past nations”. She compared this definition with what the book had to offer in the next few pages.

Table 4: Hate Material

Source: Content Analysis of SNC based Textbooks by Author, 2022

Subject	Grade	Chapters with Hate Material	Page Number	Chapter wise percentage of hate material in book	Gender Inclusion in Authors
English (PCTB)	7	2/14	56, 58, 103	14%	Women: 2/4
History (PCTB)	7	2/5	87, 88, 100,	40%	Women:0/1
History (PCTB)	8	5/5	5,11, 12, 13, 14-15, 19, 20, 24, 29	100%	Women 1/5
English (PCTB)	9	1/12	63-64	8%	Women: 3/3
Pakistan Studies (PCTB)	9	2/4	2, 3, 12, 13, 15, 25, 28, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 41, 47, 54	50%	Women: 0/3
English (STB)	9	1/8	88	13%	Women: 3/3
Urdu (NBF)	7	2/20	22, 49-53	10%	Women: 1/3
Urdu (NBF)	5	1/23	40-41	4%	Women: 1/1
Urdu (NBF)	4	1/23	130	4%	Women: 0/1
Urdu (NBF)	3	1/22	134	5%	Women: 1/1
Urdu (NBF)	2	1/22	58	5%	Women: 0/1
Pakistan Study (Sindh)	10		21, 22, 25, 27, 36, 46, 47, 48		0

Muasharti Uloom (Sindh)	8		124, 125, 126		0
Muasharti Uloom (Sindh)	7	1/22	30		3
Muasharti Uloom (Sindh)	5	1/	54		1
Urdu (KPTB)	4	1/23	130	4%	Women: 0/1
Urdu (KPTB)	6	2/21	80-83, 154	10%	Women: 1/2

Table 5: Pictorial and graphic representation of majoritarianism

Source: Content Analysis of SNC based Textbooks by Author, 2022

5.7. Distorted History

Subject	Grade	Chapters with Pictorial and graphical representation of majoritarianism	Page Number	Chapter wise percentage of representation of majoritarianism in book	Gender Inclusion in Authors
English (KPTB)	3	2/11	5, 104	18%	Women: 2/2
English (KPTB)	9	1/15	42	7%	Women: 1/2
Urdu (KPTB)	4	1/23	77	4%	Women: 0/1

These were just a few examples to show the extent to which hatred is inculcated in the young generation. The purpose of our history textbooks seemed to produce an unquestionable image of Indians and other nationalities and a flawless image of Muslims. One could imagine the response of non-Muslim students to reading biased accounts of history. The crucial colonial legacy chapter has also received minimal attention. Instead of exalting individuals, the government should educate history to inform kids about social changes. History education is meant to inform young people about current issues. The history textbook under SNC, however, ignores crucial aspects of Pakistan's independence and social transformation.

In addition, Samiullah said, this curriculum compromises the teaching of human rights, a notion that should serve as a beacon for all citizens. Children must be taught about basic civil rights if they are to become responsible citizens. It enables citizens to gain knowledge about treating everyone in society with respect, regardless of their race, colour, creed, or gender.

5.8. Institutional Discrimination

The representatives from CSJ and WGIE emphasized the violation of legal declarations that ensured a discrimination-free education system. According to articles 20, 25-A, 37

and various other articles of the Constitution of Pakistan, religious bigotry and intolerance in society were to be minimized. The speakers juxtaposed these articles with Article 31 of the Constitution. The latter made it compulsory for the students to study Islamiyat, Arabic, and other religious subjects. This problem is exacerbated by yet another legal provision that prohibited any sort of religious education in schools that directly opposed the beliefs and values of the student. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the policymakers to ensure the well-being of backward sections of society. As is the case with SNC, the participants from CSJ and WGIE were dissatisfied with the representation of ethnic and religious minorities. They compared the national policy to certain international laws and policies regarding impartiality and the right to education. Not only did Chandio highlight the importance of inclusivity and plurality but the speakers in FGDs also placed great stress on making the syllabi inclusive instead of exclusive. Minorities should be given freedom of expression. Their languages and cultures should be considered as important to national life as the Muslim community is.

5.9. Breeding Intolerance

The scholars such as Baela Raza Jamil and Peter Jacob evaluated the textbooks to see how far the content countered extremism. It was said that the NECP (2018) suggested steps to counter extremism but the textbook content foregrounded the majority interests. It was detrimental to the growth of young minds in a way that the students were learning religious intolerance directly from the schools. It remained obvious that Muslim students did not learn about positive ways to interact with students from other communities in the schools. Even if the higher studies were tailored according to the students' choices, the school-level education was vulnerable to nationalistic bias as, under SNC, the curriculum was selected by state authorities. The participants quoted the following extract from the UN-facilitated Rabat Plan of Action: "To tackle the root causes of intolerance ... in the areas of intercultural dialogue [following steps are necessary]—reciprocal knowledge and interaction, education on pluralism and diversity, and policies empowering minorities and indigenous people to exercise their right to freedom of expression" (Para.37).

Another participant, a school teacher pivoted the discussion on intolerance. Citing the examples from textbooks, the speaker pointed out that the students were becoming narrow-minded in their interactions with people of different religious and ethnic values. The students must learn the skill to cohabitate with others and grow as a person. In this case, SNC only posed a serious threat to pluralism in society. Moreover, he suggested removing the content promoting extremism or violence of any kind. He made an interesting comparison of enforced singularity and national integration. Not surprisingly, the new curricula countered the claims of ensuring social cohesion and peace. If one group was perceived superior to other groups and the rights of the minorities were not safeguarded, the bond between the communities would weaken as the concerns of the minorities were not heard anywhere.

Peter Jacob maintained that correct identification of the content in the curriculum which fostered violent extremism and fundamentalism was a “stepping stone” to analyzing the present situation of social unrest. All the content taught in public, private, and madrassah education system needed to be reviewed. The inclusion of new material was again not the sole decision of majoritarian authorities but the parents from minority groups and communities should be heard. The process of removal of any sort of extremist content from the syllabi should be “perpetual and institutionalized”.

5.10. Learning to live together

Among the most discussed disparities in SNC, religious and regional stereotypes were also commonly mentioned. As was apparent from the review of Pakistan’s educational policies since 1947, Naeem Baloch pondered on the theme of citizenship education as well. Citizens of Pakistan do not need to be merely patriotic rather citizenship education stresses “commonalities among all people”. Through awareness of commonality could the various groups collaborate to make a healthy society. Though ethnic differences exist among various groups, by including stories and information about *all* communities, people can feel safe and secure.

Hafiz Awais recommended the preparation of appropriate curricula to promote a “culture of religious and social tolerance”. This was crucial to the development and

solidarity of Pakistan. As long as social intolerance persisted, the chances to attain national peace were considerably reduced.

5.11. Further Marginalizing the Marginalized

Baela Raza Jamil shed light on majoritarianism in SNC. The slogan of uniformity meant only the singularity of voices. This singularity supported national interests and marginalized the ethnic and religious minorities already residing on the narrow borders of society. The content mostly suggested the “supremacy of majority religion or population on other groups in society”. Jamil deduced that this can mean two things: (a) a monolithic image of Pakistani society and (b) an assumption of the non-existence of minorities. To substantiate the arguments, instances from History and Pakistan Studies textbooks were referred to. Many stories and historical accounts have Muslim protagonists who are always pious and trustworthy whereas the figures of Hindus and Sikhs are portrayed as treacherous and hypocrites.

5.12. Exclusively ‘Inclusive’

A participant, also a social activist, found an issue with the number of female authors of schoolbooks. Among 367 authors only 100 were females while none of the names belonged to religious minorities.

A researcher on SNC shared his observations during his visit to a railway school in Quetta. With remarkable donor-supported extra learning tools, their teachers had excellent resources to deploy in the classroom. The teachers provided mixed reviews regarding SNC implementation. Although the principal was deeply concerned, the staff teachers expressed appreciation for the newer interfaith relations content that had been added, which they claimed had not previously been in their textbooks. The true issue, though, would arise when poorly qualified instructors across the province will be forced to implement lesson plans when they themselves are unable to understand even the SLOs in textbooks or the courses well. Regarding the first question on interfaith harmony, though teachers testified that they had never seen a textbook chapter on the subject, technical experts contended that it was only included as “tokenism”. The main

issue, which continued to violate Article 22(1), a fundamental constitutional right, is the inclusion of religious teaching even in compulsory subjects. Additionally, the subjects' civic values are supported by religion, which was another example of how majoritarianism was projected and how those who reject it are made to feel inferior. Social cohesiveness and national integration are desirable goals, but they could not be attained when there are such severe educational, religious, and cultural sensitivity gaps.

So, SNC was just another social engineering project that was certain to succeed in transforming the kids into future docile citizens devoid of the ability to critically think for themselves or challenge the status quo. The assertion that SNC will offer a level playing field is untrue.

5.13. The Global Context

Regarding the second query about the role of SNC in local and global contexts, the researcher was of the view that SNC made no mention of the goal of becoming a global citizen. For instance, the geography curriculum didn't mention our close neighbors or the international political organizations like the SAARC that work to combat the effects of global warming. Geo-cultural knowledge is not given about all of our continents or their inhabitants. The concepts presented are geological in nature, and therefore do not include any information about the human population.

5.14. Everyone isn't on the same train

A youth activist presented a horrible image of the pressures put forth by SNC. He gave the example of a student who could not understand the new curriculum. The activist rightly pointed out that the lack of one essential component, namely a strong, efficient, and unified national educational framework contributed to the poor quality of education in Pakistan. This framework should have superior content and assessments, catering to local needs, and is yet synthesised just enough to give the impression that everyone is on the same train, moving in the same direction, as opposed to being on trollies going in different directions. The framework should be well-coordinated so that various people can learn the significance of being a whole yet different from one another.

The true problem, according to Lahore-based scholar, educator, and author Saeed Ibrahim, is the unfair allocation of resources, which is never talked about. “It’s another lollypop for emotional people, which will soon not only flop horribly but any new government would have no choice but to revoke it,” he added, describing the government’s decision as malicious and unrealistic. The masses were given a new motto or slogan every few years and SNC was one of them. The older students would face problems and could resort to rote learning instead of conceptual learning models. Harris Khaliq responded to this comment in a sarcastic way. Over the years, a potent mixture of the dominant religion and xenophobic nationalism was provided to the populace to ingest.

5.15. Linguistic Hegemony

Naeem Baloch expressed his concerns over the use of Urdu as the Medium of Instruction in education. Students have always struggled academically because of Urdu’s peculiar, challenging, and archaic language and conversational style, which forces them to simply memorize without understanding. He also talked about the drawbacks of SNC. Because SNC cannot promote the cultural environment and languages of all provinces, the next generation would be alienated from the regional languages and their relevance.

Dr Monazza Aslam said that students of varying capabilities could not read the same curriculum. The SNC will act as a barrier if a parent is able to pay for a better education that increases their child’s intellectual capacity. Even if a child is capable and has the capacity to perform better, schools may have distinct pedagogy and ideologies that are incompatible with the SNC. Across the nation, there are variances in infrastructure and availability of educational resources, and some schools provide their kids with cutting-edge technology. Schools with access to these resources might not be able to use them for their pupils if SNC is implemented, performing below their potential. This would eventually stunt the child's growth and have an effect on Pakistan's efforts to develop its human capital. Additionally, it restricts a parent's ability to decide on their child's education, which is problematic. Both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 26 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

(ICCPR) Article 18 (4) require state parties to respect parents' and, where appropriate, legal guardians' decision to provide for their children's religious and moral education in accordance with their own convictions.

5.16. Serving the Majoritarianism

Dr Aslam aptly noted the content of SNC for its ideological and stereotypical representation of females and non-Muslims. Educationists, women, and minority rights activists in Pakistan have become highly outraged at the new SNC's absorption of religion and strengthening of patriarchal rule. The textual analysis revealed that approximately 7.47% of non-religious publications including mathematics, social studies, Urdu, science, and general knowledge created in accordance with the SNC contained allusions to Islam. Approximately 41.6% of the ladies depicted in the school books are wearing the hijab, a head covering used by certain Muslim women but not by the majority of Pakistan's female population, according to the survey.

Baloch configured that the revised standards for Islamic Studies, Hifz of Quranic Surahs and Hadith from classes 1-8 are now required for all Muslim students. This not only pushes religion, which is a personal matter for each person but also keeps the classroom setting one of rote learning for the children. Thus, under the cover of promoting national unification, these educational reforms are a reflection of President Zia ul Haq's Islamization strategy. The indoctrination of conservative religious values at a very young age can result in further radicalization of society in a nation already afflicted by religious extremism and radicalization. Religion-related books tend to support the beliefs of a single school of thought and are not inclusive of other religions or sects.

A teacher cited a chapter, "Eid-ul-Azha", from the new curriculum textbooks. She was sure that not all students could be Muslims so the inclusion of this chapter seemed insensitive to the beliefs of Hindus and other religious minorities in Pakistan.

5.17. Ideological Overtones of SNC

Jacob thought much in line with Rubina Saigol as far as the ideological overtones of SNC were concerned. The proposed SNC demonstrates that it was designed with the ideological goals of the state rather than pedagogical objectives in mind. On top of that, it ignored diversity and plurality in favour of the dominant view of religion. Ignoring the 18th amendment, it also discouraged federalism and promoted centralism and uniformity. He compared Pakistan's educational system to other systems of education around the world. When effective educational systems from all over the world are taken into account, pluralism, diversity, and secularism are encouraged. In addition, it encourages inquiry-based learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving rather than just rote memorization and an overstuffed curriculum to make it seem engaging. The effectiveness of the teaching approach also has a significant impact on a child's learning and development. A child would be on his own and perhaps find it difficult to keep up with the growing amount of schooling without good teachers. Moreover, the amount of budget allocated to education speaks volumes about the quality of education in any country. Developed nations make significant investments in improving their educational infrastructure. On the other hand, lack of funding limits research, technical advancement, and vocational training in emerging nations. Only 1-3 percent of Pakistan's GDP is allocated to education. Therefore, increased funding is required to improve the educational system and revamp existing public institutions.

5.18. Fueling Hostilities

An FGD debated the religious nationalist tendencies of SNC. Some participants argued that the SNC created a "rigid mindset of theocracy" and discouraged pluralistic discussions on education. The curriculum reveals itself to be the indoctrination of a particular religious position, there is a risk of increased sectarianism. In order to promote freedom of expression, successful and advanced educational systems encourage plurality and diversity. Even within Islam, there are different sects, and Shias, Barelvis, Wahabis, Deobandis, and other minorities can be found in countries like Pakistan. Therefore, rather than fostering social harmony and peace, SNC can fuel

ethnic hostilities. In addition to this, history is focused on elevating powerful individuals, particularly war heroes. It utterly disregards the contributions of women, minorities, labourers, and peasants. At the same time, it makes no mention of our predecessors' struggle or the freedom movement.

5.19. Rich Schools, Poor Schools

Dr Hoodbhoy dissected the policy of the PTI government in implementing a 'uniform' curriculum. The differences in education quality across various streams of education do not arise from dissimilar syllabi. Instead, learning disparities occur as a result of students receiving extremely different types of instruction and being judged according to very different standards. He debunked the idea that a heavy dosage of piety will somehow get pupils from Aitchison College and your typical neighbourhood school on an even playing field is untrue. The fabled Mahmood and Ayyaz worshipped together in the same prayer line, forging a bond without severing their master-slave bond. Similar to this, until there is equalisation in school infrastructure, teacher training programs, textbook quality, and internet availability, rich and poor schools will continue to be poles apart. Nobody knows how the required resources will be produced. The only industry under the PTI to experience growth rather than reductions is defense.

5.20. Can the SNC actually reduce educational inequality?

Dr Faisal Bari raised an important question, "should Bulleh Shah not be taught at all or should he be taught to all?" This question initiated the debate on uniformity and diversity of curricula. The people in Sindh may consider different aspects of their culture more important than the Punjabi culture. It is important to understand that, even if we are successful in implementing one curriculum, set of textbooks, or even a set of exams, these problems with access and quality will not be solved. How will one curriculum enable 22 million additional students to enroll? More schools, teachers, transportation resources, and enrollment incentives are needed. The consistency of the curriculum will not have an effect on any of them. What can uniformity do to promote improvements in these areas? The quality of education has a lot to do with the quality

of books, the pedagogy and topic expertise of teachers, teacher motivation, and the quality of evaluation systems.

5.21. The Strategic Failure in Education

Dr Bari proceeds to ask a question in the larger context. Can the SNC actually reduce educational inequality, as it claims to want to do? It is estimated that 10–12% of children worldwide have a handicap of some kind (physical, mental, or learning-related). Will the government guarantee that this SNC is targeted to these kids' needs? Will these kids receive the same rights, or will they continue to be descended from a lower god? Again, little has been done in recent decades to promote inclusive and/or special education, and the SNC will be of no use in this regard. Even if SNC concerns itself with children who are already in school, it is unclear how those students will get equitable quality of education.

Dr Ayesha Razzaque contended that lowering the quality of certain private education institutions to match the quality of education in religious seminaries would cost the students a lot. It eliminates the one competitive edge that our labour force possesses in the international labour market—the benefit of knowing English. A crucial pillar on which our educated middle class stands to compete in the domestic and international white-collar labour market and serves as a catalyst for social mobility will be erased by removing students from English-medium education, and tying their futures to education entirely in Urdu or regional languages.

Anjum Altaf thinks that the education under SNC served the purpose of making the people subservient to their rulers. He compared this situation to Socrates' definition of education. Education, according to Socrates, is more like starting a fire than filling a void. Throughout his career as a teacher, his emphasis was on helping students develop their own sense of self, and he preferred to instruct students using the renowned Socratic Method, which emphasizes learning through questioning. A university professor was concerned that the new syllabi were content-heavy and did nothing else than fill the minds of students without contributing anything useful to their knowledge. We will unavoidably feed our kids whatever ideas are thought "appropriate" at the time to

further the objectives of grownup elites. This is unfair to the children who are unable to object to such manipulation of their lives. Such risks are avoided by the Socratic Method. Anyone who has been educated to examine and evaluate information, for instance, would be sceptical of the notion that virtue can be learned in a classroom; otherwise, the Catholic Church wouldn't be experiencing its current issues. Given what happened to "One Nation, One Language," they would also be skeptical of a slogan like "One Nation, One Curriculum."

5.22. Fragmentation of Education

Dr Naazir Mahmood offered apt feedback on the SNC debate. Instead of supporting the mainstream narrative, encourage vigorous debates and conversations that occasionally forgo the politeness of civil speech if you want to improve the educational system. Some of the seemingly reasonable justifications for the system are actually harmful. Don't forget that intolerance is escalating outside of academia, into the mainstream, and into seminaries. It is replacing any socially liberal and tolerant principles that our cultures may have previously held. In spite of modern computing education, it encourages intimidation and stifles discussion. Mahmood articulated his fear of abusing the 'uniformity' of education. It can cause children's creativity and critical thinking to be muted over time. Authoritarianism and conservatism will continue to succeed tactically, which is essentially proof of strategic failure in education if you let them force their way into your educational system. He warned that the uniformity of education can only be achieved if minorities, parents, and educationists are consulted during the process of national education policymaking. Otherwise, the decision would result in an even more fragmented sector of education.

Faisal Mushtaq voiced his opinion on the un-democratic decision of SNC. The fundamental tenets of any democracy are freedom of choice, equality, and inclusion. If we adopt the populist-political demands for a single national curriculum, standardised tests, rigid testing procedures, and uniform textbooks, we risk sponsoring a divided nation-state and enforcing a one-size-fits-all policy. This raises the crucial question of whether we actually need uniformity in curriculum or unity in learning outcomes. In his opinion, such testing with public education can cost the public greatly. Education is

not about testing, it's about investment for long-term goals. There are two types of federations in the world, hold-together and come-together. We must transition from "keeping the provinces together" to "compelling them to come together" democratically. The dispute within educational responsibility has stigmatised the market, whether it be a public, provincial, or private provider, and education in Pakistan is heavily influenced by distrust and ideology. Our national curriculum calls for unity rather than forced uniformity, and as a society and federation. Furthermore, students should be learning empathy in classrooms rather than suspicion and hatred of other identities and cultures.

5.23. Uniformity in the Absence of Unity

The populist political slogan of a single national curriculum will be the largest social experiment in Pakistani educational history and could be a barrier to innovation, creativity, critical thinking, research, prosperity, and growth. *What good is uniformity in the absence of unity or singularity in the absence of pluralism?* Build trust amongst federating units if the federation believes that the ideology or unity of the country is in danger; otherwise, we will be hatching subjects rather than citizens as a country. Therefore, we should also reexamine the effectiveness of the 18th constitutional amendment.

Farhatullah Babar said states should not impose any ideology on their subjects (citizens). Nature does not compel ideological conformity either. There wouldn't have been as many different religions if God had wanted everyone to adhere to the same belief system. The prohibition on coercion in areas of faith and religion is quite strong in its opposition to imposing conformity. Recalling the profound words of the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) who said, "The differences of opinion (ikhtilaf) among the knowledgeable men of my society are an outcome of divine mercy (Rahma)" might be beneficial. The foundation of all human progress is the diversity of opinion and thought.

Hassnain Javed statistically proved that youth in Pakistan are deprived of quality education. The graduates lag behind others in the job market. The youngest population

in South Asia is in Pakistan, where 64% of the population is under 30. But we perform the worst when it comes to technical and vocational education and training.

Hashmi added that marginalized communities experience a strong sense of estrangement since they are reluctant to enroll their children in public schools due to the stigmatization by school personnel and curriculum. Rustam Shah Mohmand saw the situation as preposterous. In a nation like Pakistan with its ethnic diversity, a unified curriculum would be equivalent to denying the reality on the ground. It would be at the expense of the high-quality education a state would offer its people. A kid has the right to receive instruction in his or her mother tongue for at least the first few years of school. It would be foolish to force him to learn a new language at the expense of other, more crucial courses like math and physics. We look for simple solutions for complicated problems because we haven't been successful in advancing the causes of economic progress, social equality, or democracy. A standard curriculum would not strengthen bonds between different ethnic groups; instead, it would increase mistrust and social unrest. Additionally, forcing a state-controlled oneness on groupings of ethnically diverse people would be an unnatural method. Since there would be a strong emphasis on language skills rather than understanding essential subjects, quality would suffer.

5.24. False Image of Social Cohesion

Dr Razzaq identified four themes in SNC content: Tokenism, Religious content, Implicit religious messages, Indoctrination and Denial. She maintained that the new curricula contained a negligible amount of content on other faiths and cultures. The inclusion of religious ideas violated the rights of minorities granted by Article 22 (1) of the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973. Moreover, the presence of false images of social cohesion and peace leads to the denial of reality. There are 196 Muslim names and 3 non-Muslim names in the primer-grade 5 Urdu textbooks. There are 217 Muslims and 18 names of non-Muslims in English textbooks. The speaker concluded that SNC opposed its own assertion that respect and admiration for many cultures and religions in local and international contexts are its major considerations. Rather, it preaches Muslim supremacy in its place.

5.25. Mentioning Holi and Christmas is not Enough

A participant raised the question that why does the SNC not represent the cultural and religious values of other groups of the population in Pakistan. She was aware that a chapter in English textbooks did mention Holi and Christmas but that was inadequate. As opposed to this, not only *Hamds* and *Naats* are included in Urdu textbooks but the main tenets of Islam are included in Islamiat textbooks. While the non-Muslims have no alternative subject to read, the footnotes also guide the teachers to expel the non-Muslim students from the classroom during Islamiat lecture. How discriminating is this?

Dr Faizullah, also a participant in the FGDs of Jami Chandio, argued that in Pakistan's Constitution and Federal Policy, all national, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural identities, as well as the status of mother languages, should be respected. Diversity should be emphasized and appreciated in Pakistani textbooks. This calls for a paradigm shift at the state level, where it is recognized that diversity is an asset rather than a burden. He stated that we should protect the mother tongue(s) ourselves.

Introducing the term “Socio-political narcissism”, Mr. Babar Khan said that a sense of alienation among people of other faiths in Pakistan has grown, and on the other hand, socio-political narcissism has developed among the extremist or conservative sections of the Muslim population, which is a potential conceptual threat to the democratic spirit of any federal society. Both of these trends can be traced back to biased narratives that are based on the distortion of facts and ground realities.

A group of parents concluded their discussion on SNC that the key point to comprehend is the need for inclusive educational reforms. This way students from any social, religious, or economic background will be respected within and outside the classroom.

5.26. Equating Equality with Homogenization

Ms. Chaudhary opposed the superficial attempts of harmonizing the disparate education systems under SNC. Instead of enforcing a single curriculum that would monopolise the ideas, thinking, and approach of the students, the government should be devoting

valuable time and resources to rearranging the economic power relations among the populace and increasing their chances of accessing the means of production by redistributing the means of production more equitably. Since students should be able to use a range of materials to build their opinions and develop their views, this could consequently result in hegemony over ideas, which from their perspective is not very encouraging. The danger of equating equality with homogenization is highlighted by the combined effects of one educational system and the emphasis on national identity. Rather than being a great equaliser in terms of advancing people collectively at a chance in life, this endeavour is more likely to equalise people by lowering them all to the same level. In this context, education has been viewed and treated more as a political tool to achieve political and ideological ends rather than a process for educating and preparing kids to meet the challenges of their time and give them the skills they need to compete in our default reality, a world that is getting smaller and more interdependent. It appears that the decision-makers may have been overly motivated by self-interest in order to secure their political goals through curriculum control, to the point where it could be argued that this was detrimental to children and a violation of their fundamental rights to receive an education that would enable them to achieve their pedagogical and civic aspirations. The core idea of the single national curriculum is "one nation, one curriculum," which is by itself an exclusive and silencing statement that ignores the variety of identities that are prominent in Pakistan. It also mentions "ending educational apartheid across different streams of education in the country," which is a dubious claim because it links the symptoms to the cause rather than the other way around, which is pretty lazy and maybe dishonest.

5.27. Embracing Diversity Is the Only Way Forward

Dr Nayyar explored the language conundrum in recent years. The child is taken from self-awareness to family, neighborhood, and finally the nation in this re-centralized curriculum. This *leapfrog curriculum will prevent a child from learning about their province or district, which will significantly negatively impact the child's worldview.* The leapfrog appears to be an intentional strategy used by those whose limited interpretation of nationalism is adamantly opposed to the identities of its constituent

nationalities. Remember this well-known proverb while advocating uniformity: Diversity makes gardens beautiful, whereas uniformity has the colour of a desert.

6. ‘DISBELIEVERS’ OR FELLOW CITIZENS?

In this chapter, the findings of the research are analyzed according to the thematic categories mentioned before. The findings are categorized and arranged to shed light on the plethora of problems caused by SNC. The findings are given more meaning so that the disparities in the content of SNC are revealed. Singularity here means the ideological overtones of nationalism apparent by the decision of SNC. This is compared to the diversity issue in Pakistan which required greater amount of diversity in curriculum.

6.1. The Direction of Education in Pakistan

This section focuses on the first objective of this research. In the SNC policy, the implication is that a nation needs to study one curriculum. This notion has given rise to concerns from all sections of society. To develop a panoramic view of the present situation of our educational sector, SNC is explored from various perspectives of the participants of FGD and in-depth interviews. The problems of representation of the ethnic diversity of Pakistan emerge as a central cause of concern. In this regard, the new curriculum is also evaluated with respect to the critical comments provided by R. S. Hashmi, Jami Chandio, and other scholars. While Aslam et al. (2019) have evaluated the curriculum for the negative portrayals of religious minorities, the insinuations of SNC need to be discussed in a larger socio-cultural context.

The singularity of curriculum suggests a reduction of differences within the state to a homogenous whole. The goal should be to raise the quality of education and simultaneously consider the role of each ethnic or social group. In the new curriculum, majoritarianism prevails. Religious beliefs of Muslims overshadow those of minorities. Similarly, the distorted version of the history of Pakistan is propagated through textbooks (Saigol, 2010).

The report by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) and the Working Group for Inclusive Education (WGIE) highlights the confusion in the latest educational policymaking. The comments demonstrate that the new educational policy will make “public education stand next to seminary education which will be a colossal loss to an already challenged education sector” (2022, p. 2). So, uniformity of textbooks would not ensure a better quality of education. Rather, better standards of education should be set and followed across all the educational institutions of Pakistan.

As Peter Jacob’s arguments juxtaposed homogeneity and heterogeneity within a state, the role played by educational policies emerges as a political one. Chandio also highlighted the politics involved in the diversity issue of Pakistan. He stated that our

society has failed to recognize the diversity of the population. So, the policy of SNC reflects the authoritarian style of our pseudo-democratic government.

Nadia Naviwala (2016) in the report on the challenges in Pakistani schools sought to explain why Shafqat Mahmood misdiagnosed the situation of the education sector in Pakistan. Though he had his own views about the equality of educational standards, the ‘uniformity’ of curriculum illustrated the ideological motives of the state. She took issue with the replacement of English with Urdu. Shafqat Mahmood’s statement is quoted: “My feeling is that the first five years should be Urdu. And then from 5th grade to 10th grade – or whatever [years] the experts decide – you teach English as a language. But Urdu has to be your unified language”. Furthermore, Mahmood overestimated the significance of teaching Urdu in schools, “English is not anyone’s mother tongue. Neither is Urdu but at least it’s closer to Punjabi and it’s become a language of communication” (Naviwala, 2016, p. 27). How can a government official prefer Urdu to other mother tongues spoken in different provinces of Pakistan? We need to remember that local cultures and languages are a vital part of our country. They need not be marginalized to promote nationalism. National integration of diverse groups of the population should be our goal.

A review of Pakistan’s education policies is enough to comprehend the limitations of state-imposed “uniformity”. Various experiments to homogenize the people of Pakistan “somehow conflated the true purpose and spirit of education” (Hashmi, p. 3). While analyzing the SNC for ideological overtones, the idea of homogeneity needs to be explored.

The idea of homogeneity discards heterogeneity in a state. It arises out of discontent with the past and diversity, regional variety and political differences.

The idea of a single Muslim nation gained superiority when it was considered a founding principle of Pakistan. The harmful consequences of inculcating the ideology of Pakistan can be seen in the deteriorating quality of education, pedagogy, and curriculum design. It seems that education is pivoted on political doctrines. An overwhelming majority of the participants stressed that the new curriculum would promote religious and political doctrines. They drew analogies to the events of religious

intolerance in Pakistan to highlight the ills of SNC content. The mainstreaming of Madrassah education could impede the quality of education- the syllabus would be “regressively taught and dogmatic content deliberately prioritized” (Nayyar, personal communication). That should not be the goal of education.

The influence of religious and political doctrines over the curricula is such that “history from below” was omitted systematically. The diverse range of voices from non-majoritarian groups i.e. of various social movements was distorted to build a fractured version of our collective potential. The doctrines promoted a single-sided pattern of thinking. “Stereotypes of women and religious minorities discourage critical thinking” (Hashmi, p. 7). Scholars and the interviewees have argued that indoctrination through curriculum overemphasizes the concept of “sacrificing” one’s life in the struggle against the “enemy”.

An overwhelming majority of the participants argued for the separation of religious content from the syllabi. Almost 70 percent of the participants voted for broad-based education. “Broad-based education refers to the first twelve years of education that does not include religious education,” told one participant. While the aptitude of certain students for religious education is recognized by the Madrassah system of education, broad-based education also offers other opportunities. Rather the need for promoting empathy was considered important, particularly in the context of religious intolerance in Pakistan. Moreover, education should also focus on developing life skills and critical thinking skills in students. Ideological indoctrination through the curriculum is contrary to the claims of equity in education.

Given the fact that a large section of the population in Pakistan lives in poor conditions, the quality of education should be raised in the public education sector. Not just the social elites would be catered to, but the majority of people will also be provided with quality education. The quality of mainstream education in Pakistan lags behind the quality of other countries’ education systems such as India. Five to six participants in an FGD emphasized that teacher training programmes are not sufficient in isolation and “should be meaningfully supported by changes in curriculum and examination methods.” The important link that was established was the linkage of improved teaching

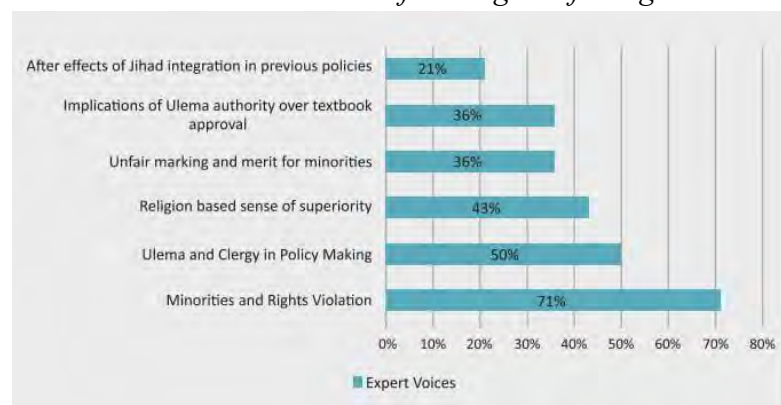
practices and autonomy within classrooms. SNC seems to curb the diversification of syllabi. As a result of this, many academics denounce the unilateral move by the government regarding curriculum design.

Another pertinent point is the continuous depersonalization of education institutions. 21 percent of the speakers brought attention to the low student-teacher ratio in public schools. Naviwala (2016) aptly analyzed the situation of classrooms in Balochistan. Many public schools are understaffed. Similarly, the research participants provided examples of government schools having around fifty students in each class and only a few teachers to manage their education. This would lead to utter disinterest in curriculum, quality education, and students. The singularity of perspective in SNC also raises problems for people of other ethnicities in the educational institutions.

6.2. The Problematic Representation of Diverse Ethnic and Religious Groups in SNC

According to 71 percent of education experts in Pakistan, myriad minority rights violations can be seen in the SNC. It means that minority children’s classroom experience remained vastly different due to “discriminatory teachers and societal prejudice”. The fundamentalist tendency has continued to shape our education policies. We have failed to realize the cultural and religious diversity in Pakistan. A report on SNC illustrates the violation of minority rights as given in the below figure:

Figure 1: Concerns over Violation of the Rights of Religious Minorities



Source: “The Educational Chaos and the Role of SNC,” by Z. T. Hashmi and E. Alam.

These views highlight how the needs of girls and minority religion students are not properly represented in the SNC. Speakers also pointed out that only the Sunni Muslim faith is incorporated into mainstream education, “taking away minority faith students’ constitutional right to be taught their own religion. In the past, rigid educational policies brought forth many problems for the Muslim majority as well.¹⁸ Jihad and religious nationalism are stressed in the textbooks whereas the cultural phenomena of the minorities are completely marginalized. Lack of bias in the new curriculum is insufficient- the schoolbooks should also facilitate the learners with cognitive tools to identify and address hate speech. Classroom environments need to redress structural disparities not exacerbate them.

Ideological indoctrination has been disapproved of by educationists. The claims of inculcating critical thinking skills cannot be fulfilled if the syllabi remain narrowly focused on promoting the ideologies of the state. In this regard, the stigmatization of sex education provides an appropriate example. Education should play its role in creating social awareness against crimes, especially sexual abuse but in our country, education serves as a mouthpiece of political ideologues.

This adds to the discussion of our third research objective. SNC does not seem to appreciate the cultural and ethnic plurality in our society. Instead of inculcating critical thinking skills in the younger generation, policymakers are coagulating a narrow worldview among students.

SNC has repeatedly been subject to allegations of forced singularity. The diverse ethnic and religious groups should have the liberty to choose their subjects. More than half of the speakers emphasized the need for freedom of expression, thought and conscience. Education is “an essential avenue to critically evaluate and express various worldviews.” The diversity of perspectives is vital for improving the quality of education. Diversity affects creativity which cannot exist “without the freedom to

¹⁸ Scholars trace it back to General Zia’s Islamization policies.

criticize”. Academic freedom promises equitable representation. As long as the teachers do not have autonomy while teaching, their interest in the curriculum will not increase.

As discussed before broad-based education provides alternative paths for students of diverse social backgrounds so, in this case, one model of curriculum could not be sufficient for students across Pakistan. The acquirement of specific skills required for professional growth should also be incorporated into the studies at school, college, and university levels.

This can help the students to adapt to different work conditions to succeed in life. Moreover, broad-based education may lead to an appreciation of various schools of thought in the global context by the students. If the learners are not given sufficient space to learn what they love, they would only become one of the *many* followers of nationalist ideology.

6.3. Counter-productive Education Strategies

43 percent of the interviewees stated that the status-quo examination methods were “outdated and unsustainable.” Instead of promoting conceptual learning, they encourage rote learning. The participants noted the unhealthy competition in a classroom and its detrimental consequences on students’ self-respect. By ruling out creativity and critical thinking ability, rote learning is of limited academic use.

The role of parents in overemphasizing the achievement of marks was also explored. This can have severe effects on young learners who become stressed when they cannot memorize the whole book. The quality of education will inevitably suffer in such a scenario as the entire focus is on getting more marks than others rather than an understanding of what has been learnt.

After the decision of SNC was made, the representatives from various education and social institutes put forth their recommendations. However, their suggestions were not incorporated into the new syllabi. It was also pointed out that the feedback of minority stakeholders was “routinely dismissed”. So, the question remains whether a single curriculum could be imposed across the country irrespective of the differences between

the stakeholders and the quality of our education. So, the factors such as unhealthy levels of academic competition and predetermination of a child's educational career prove to be demotivating for the learners.

From the above discussion, it can be safely resolved that SNC implementation has revealed many flaws of the decision to craft a single curriculum. The singularity of content is questioned by participants in various but equally logical ways. The diversity of culture, language, and religion in Pakistan cannot be overlooked when a matter of utmost significance, education of the students and young learners, is decided upon. The scholars and education analysts have observed the stereotypical images of women and religious minorities in the textbooks. This will not only be detrimental to the status these groups have in society but also limit the horizon of majority students. It cannot be stressed enough that despite the claims of SNC to eradicate all inequalities in Pakistan's education sector, the curriculum appears to represent the ethnic and religious minorities inaptly.

7. CONCLUSION

This is a dire warning against the dangers of imposing the new single curriculum based on sober reflection and spoken from the heart. It is shared by many others. The only honest resolution to the disagreement is to submit the SNC to a panel of independent experts in early childhood education and abide by their verdict. The dishonest resolution is to start casting aspersions on the critics and calling them names. But, as we also know from over 70 years of experience in Pakistan, honesty does not come cheap in this country. Young children (*chotas*) are apprenticed to master craftsmen of various sorts to learn their trades whereas less attention is paid to their schooling and education.

The currently proposed curriculum lacks inclusivity. As compared to other standardized systems of education across the world, our education policies appear outdated. SNC directly opposes constitutional article 22 which ensures equity to all religious minorities in Pakistan. The question arose that why are the Muslim leaders and heroes solely highlighted in schoolbooks to be read by non-Muslims? The governmental claims of implementing SNC are not being fulfilled by the recent developments in curriculum design.

The review of literature on Pakistan's education policies since 1947 confirmed that the policies have mostly been influenced by religious and nationalist ideologies. Similarly, the literature on SNC depicted the drawbacks of imposing SNC without following the suggestions of various field experts. Multiple scholars, critics, and civil society representatives have highlighted the range of problems in SNC while some critics have appreciated the introduction of a single curriculum. The literature review section showed that an ethnographic study of SNC policy has not been undertaken by any scholar or field expert. The works mostly focused on the constitutional transgression of the Federal government in implementing SNC and the problematic representation of religious minorities, women, and children. Less critical attention was paid to the linguistic diversity of the population in Pakistan. Also, how SNC can be re-modified to cater to provincial and communal cultures remained unanswered.

The present research deployed a qualitative approach. The anthropological lens provided an opportunity to approach various participants. Parents, academics, researchers, textbook writers, and representatives of civil society were involved in Focus Group Discussions and in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews included open-ended questions. Data collected from conversations with participants were readily transcribed, organized, and further analyzed according to various thematic categories. The purposive and snowball sampling techniques facilitated the appropriate selection of participants. The scholarly works of Saigol, Chandio, R. S. Hashmi, Z. T. Hashmi and Alam, Chaudhary, and Mouffe served as the critical theoretical framework of the research.

The perspectives of various participants in FGDs and in-depth interviews are collected and analyzed to document the alternate narrative by exploring the role of SNC in addressing religious, cultural, and linguistic differences. The syllabus should promote interfaith harmony, social cohesion, and national integration. The content of the textbooks does not promote equality in terms of gender, religion, and ethnicity.

The perspectives of the participants and interviewees have been organized into separate thematic categories. The first section pertained to the singular mode of imposing SNC. The opinions expressed doubts over the standard of education under SNC as far as the

uniformity of curricula is concerned. The experts pondered on the direction of education in the country. Some participants argued for the exclusion of religious material from the schoolbooks. However, SNC included religious teachings that made the curriculum susceptible to ideological influence. As the history of our education policies has shown the overpowering impact of nationalist and religious doctrines on society, analysts questioned the ideological incorporation in SNC. It was maintained that we need to improve the quality of education instead of lowering it for the sake of a Single National Curriculum. The evaluation of the newly proposed curriculum demonstrated the lopsided representation of religious and ethnic minorities. It also lacked guidance on vital life skills and critical thinking habits. As an alternative, Broad-based education was proposed which would allow freedom of choice regarding education. The counterproductive education strategies have given rise to stress, unhealthy competition, and rote learning among students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are some recommendations from for alleviating the disparities in SNC:

Same Classroom Different Learning

Educationists who have kept up with the subject also know that children learn in very different ways — some respond more to aural stimuli, others to visual cues, and yet others to tactile inputs. Some love to put things together, others to take them apart. If allowed freedom, children gravitate to what excites them most. Instead of regimenting all children into a standard format and boring most of them to tears, the first few years are the time when a teacher observes and groups children by how they learn best. Once their learning ability is unleashed, they progress much faster than children raised in the equivalent of chicken coops or cattle stalls.

Socratic Method

Socrates described education as the kindling of a flame, not the filling of an empty vessel. His focus throughout his teaching life was on the acquisition of self-knowledge by the individual and his method of choice was to teach learning through questioning,

the celebrated Socratic Method. For the ancient philosopher, wisdom was the objective of all education.

Objective Learning Model

The purpose of education essentially entails enabling students to be able to freely adjudge the circumstances, scenarios, and real-life cases. The primary goal should be structuring the education curricula in a way that inspires objectivity among the children rather than becoming passive learners of already established narratives in previous books. SNC sweeps away any thought of letting children learn in innovative ways and think. Teaching any kind of information (authoritatively as fact) based on the exclusivity of one class, religion or sect produces ‘others’ within a diverse society, from the consequences of which Pakistan is suffering from. Therefore, while crafting the education policy (especially when it is named Single National Curriculum) it should be devoid of any specifically established narrative at all. Only universal truths such as scientific information should be enumerated as they are written. The rest of the socially constructed narratives be put in a way that does not harden the intellectual boundaries of students. Students should be taught to question and explore the diversity of interpretations be they within or outside the classroom. One nation, if defined according to state boundaries, does not imply the reduction of plurality to singularity. Each ethnic and religious group has its own set of customs, languages, and heroes. The students should learn to respect differences instead of believing in the so-called superiority of the Muslim majority.

Connecting Back to Roots

Manan Ahmed Asif, a Pakistani historian, recounts that Pakistan’s weak historical understanding largely is due to a lack of historical records. After the partition of 1947, every historical record was either burned or was never shared by India. Therefore, policymakers of our country provided a newly concocted design heavy on conservative ideals of two nation theory while disowning its thousands of years old past of multiple civilizations. SNC maintained historical amnesia in its books as well. Only the faded information of the existence of a diverse past exists on the periphery in a line or two. Therefore, the syllabus especially for Pakistan Studies should include how diverse the

past of this greater Indus civilization had been. Spain followed a similar suit a few decades back when they began to own the Muslim past of their country. It benefitted them rooting them into their past and thus building a new and better system. So, inheriting a space with such diverse and rich cultural history opens new avenues for debate and intellectual dialogues as early as the school level. The students would appreciate the diversity around them- harmony in plurality. Living in a state should not suggest that *one* nation lives here, rather many diverse groups can inhabit the same space.

Instituting New Laws

The state should also devise a law that enumerates the rules for reforming the education curricula periodically. Firstly, it should prioritize certain procedures to take systematic surveys and then reorient the curricula based on potentially constructive and relevant trends. Archaism should be avoided in every subject. Regressive ideas should be barred from entering the curricula. It is only possible once laws are in place and implemented uniformly rather than stoking the ego of extremist ideal followers.

This research shed light on the less discussed aspects of SNC to raise awareness among the policymakers and other stakeholders. Further improvements are also suggested to improve the current state of education according to the needs of all communities in Pakistan. On the ending note, the ‘Single National Curriculum,’ is neither ‘single,’ nor ‘national’ nor a ‘curriculum’ – and a mere new name for the ‘National Education Policy’. However, there are countries like England that have a national curriculum but are flexible enough to accommodate the existing socio-cultural norms. But, Pakistani cultural diversity, as stated in previous discussions, does not come into the national syllabus debate at all. Therefore, if there comes another Single National Curriculum, then it should be ensured that it does not act as an instrument of exclusionary narratives but rather be accommodative and fosters tolerance, and teaches the children to discuss differences and diversity. I hope that this research will motivate future researchers to conduct a detailed content evaluation of different subjects and identify the disparities in SNC. It is also recommended that future researchers should use an observation-based

ethnographic method to reduce the risk of bias through the perspectives of various social group members.

I would like to emphasize that education should remain a provincial subject as Pakistan is a society with ethnic, religious, and several other pluralities. Imposing SNC without engagement from stakeholders would only lead to poor quality of education. The rich multicultural history of the land we inhabit today will be marginalized if SNC would not be altered. It is wrong to say that one curriculum will miraculously solve all the socio-economic problems rather it will aggravate the situation. Nida U. Chaudhry is right to point out, “[U]niformity must not be confused with inclusivity”. Only true representation of all minorities can make the syllabus relatively inclusive.

Learners and all members of our society should be taught to embrace plurality so that the risk of ideological indoctrination be avoided. Education should remain a separate sphere of activity from self-serving political and nationalist agendas. Critical thinking and creativity might not flourish as long as education serves ideological hegemony. Now, it is the need of the hour to set the right direction for education. Education is a human right so the students should be facilitated on the way to genuine knowledge. It can be hoped that the exclusivist, elitist, and narrow vision of education in Pakistan will be changed through inclusive education.

GLOSSARY

Amir ka bacha	Term used for children having rich family background
Balochis	People of Baluchistan (province of Pakistan)
Chotas	Young children especially the labour force at hotels etc.
Deeni madaris	Religious seminaries
Ghareeb ka bacha	Term used for children having poor family background
Madrassahs	Religious schools
Madarassization	The conversion of mainstream education institutions into religious seminaries
Muhajir	The Muhajir people are Muslim immigrants of various ethnic groups and regional origins, and their descendants, who migrated from various regions of India after the Partition of India to settle in the newly independent state of Pakistan.
Nazara	Reading aloud the Holy verses of Quran Pal

Pashtuns	The majority ethnic group in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (province of Pakistan)
Punjabi	People of Punjab (province of Pakistan)
Shahadat	Martyrdom
Shia	The Muslims of the branch of Islam comprising sects believing in Ali and the Imams as the only rightful successors of Muhammad (PBUH)
Sindhis	People of Sindh (province of Pakistan)
Sunni	the Muslims of the branch of Islam that adheres to the tradition and acknowledges the first four caliphs as rightful successors of Muhammad (PBUH)
Ratta system	Cramming

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ANNEXURE -1. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Questions	Prompts and Probing
Introduce yourself.	Name, Family Background, Education (formal/technical), age, profession
What do you do for income generation? Provide details.	Activities regarding income generation and their details.
What is lacking in SNC?	
Does SNC transgress the personal boundary of learners and parents?	18th Constitutional Amendment, religious subjects, freedom of choice
How do you view education in Pakistan?	Pakistani education policies, quality of education
Have you come across any textbook recently introduced that you would like to briefly analyze?	The problematic representation of ethnic and religious minorities in schoolbooks
What contributes to the deteriorating quality of education in Pakistan?	

What should be the parameters for setting the standards of education?	Singularity or plurality in curricula
How should classrooms and syllabi appreciate diversity?	Diversity issue in Pakistan
Is our curriculum tinged with ideological bias? If yes, how?	Ideology of Pakistan and Social Studies textbooks
How can learning be improved in the present scenario?	
Is the national curriculum appropriate to be studied all over Pakistan?	Provincial and local cultures vs. central narratives of state