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Analysis of Single National Curriculum in Relevance to Early Childhood Care and Education

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a thematic analysis of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Pakistan. It investigates the perceptions of primary school teachers regarding ECCE and the availability of essential resources and infrastructure following the SNC's implementation. A descriptive quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a questionnaire to gather data from a sample of 14 primary school teachers at a Government Girls Primary School in Rawalpindi. The study highlights the positive reception of the SNC's official materials by teachers. However, it also identifies significant challenges, including a lack of suitable furniture and amenities in classrooms and insufficient access to well- equipped libraries. The findings underscore the importance of teachers providing opportunities for student choice and decision-making for holistic development. The study concludes that while the SNC has made progress in providing curriculum materials, there is a critical need for investment in physical infrastructure and resources to fully realize the program's objectives. This research analyzes the Single National Curriculum (SNC) with a focus on ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) in the context of Pakistan.

Keywords: Ecce, early childhood care, education, significant challenges

Introduction

Education plays the role of building a state in the developing country shaped through the education pillar that builds the curriculum, policy, and standards, ensuring unity and

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ideological preservation. The education system in Pakistan remains stratified and divided into different branches with various curricula, mediums of instruction, and assessment standards which has created vast educational and social inequalities (Government of Pakistan, 2008). As a result, there has been unequal access to educational opportunities and a reinforced class-based system. To solve this persistent problem, the government planned the Single National Curriculum (SNC) which serves to create a unified educational framework to ensure all children have access to quality educational opportunities. With the intent of building social cohesion and national integration, the vision of the SNC aims to close gaps of inequity across schismatic educational cleavages (Karim, 2021). The new curriculum also aims to cultivate critical and creative problem-solving skills in children while ensuring their holistic development, aligned with global standards and domestic aspirations, shifts away from mere rote learning.

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is an integral part of the educational system. It is defined as a holistic approach to nurturing a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development from birth, encompassing the child's development comprehensively.

The enduring impact of early education on brain development as well as subsequent academic performance illustrates the relentless importance of rigorously structured early childhood programs, reinforcing the child's ability to learn and the quality of their well-being throughout life (Li, n.d.). It aids in the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills, enhances reasoning and problem-solving capabilities, and aids in preparing children for formal schooling. In Pakistan, ECCE has been part of the National Education Policies since 2009, particularly addressing the comprehensive development of children (Government of Pakistan, 2003).

Statement of Problem

Pakistan has long struggled with pervasive inequity in the education system, in turn exacerbating social and economic inequities. Such inequities have created a disparity within the region for career opportunities and social mobility. The introduction of the SNC by the government was an attempt to resolve this issue. On the other hand, the successful SNC implementation is reliant on the existence of adequate resources and infrastructure. The main problem this study seeks to address is to analyze the degree to which resources and infrastructure have been provided to schools post the implementation of the Single National Curriculum for Early Childhood Care and Education.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

Analyze the perceptions of primary school teachers regarding early childhood education under the SNC.

Assess the availability of resources and infrastructure in schools for the Early Childhood Care and Education program.

Research Questions

Following are the questions of the study:

What are the perceptions of primary school teachers regarding the Single National Curriculum for Early Childhood Care and Education?

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To what extent are resources and infrastructure available for the Early Childhood Care and Education program in primary schools?

Significance of the study

This study stands out for a number of reasons. To begin with, it concerns the SNC for ECCE's primary concepts and workings, which this study intends to illuminate. Through the analysis of the teachers' perceptions alongside the resource status, the study aims to address important factors in policy and resource allocation. As for the implications of the study's findings, they are relevant for all the concerned parties, including the policymakers, the parents, and the school leaders, to help them understand the ground realities relating to the implementation of the ECCE program. The results of the study are applicable for the teaching professionals in as much as it can assist them in understanding the complexities associated with their functions and enabling them to perform better towards quality education. All in all, this research enhances a grasp of critical aspects for the all-rounded growth of young children in the country of Pakistan.

Delimitation of the Study

This research was delimited to the primary level teachers of a single Government Girls Primary School in Rawalpindi.

Review of Literature

The review of the literature pointed out that the presence of a common education system with a shared curriculum, medium of instruction, and methods of evaluation is crucial for fostering equitable education opportunities. The SNC intends to work towards reducing educational inequities and fostering social cohesion (Karim, 2021). The past of early childhood education (ECE) reflects a history of progress from neglect to a more systematic recognition of the need for young children's special development. People like Froebel and the McMillan sisters were the forerunners to a more organized early learning (Lambert & Clyde, 2000).

The importance of early childhood education (ECE) has been substantiated by research in neuroscience and economics, as it benefits brain development, academic achievement, and offers For example, Li (n.d.) points out that early brain development underpins cognitive and emotional skills, and ECCE is a central element of a child's well-being. Shi (1989) notes that early education

systems in some countries, such as China, have been shaped by political and cultural factors to align early education provision with national development objectives.

There have been compelling, global campaigns for peace education (Reardon, 2002) and this issue has been incorporated into the curriculum as a means to foster tolerance and harmony. International lenses on early education from studies by Olmsted and Weikart (1989) have shown successful ECCE models include elements of both structured learning and playful learning. Educating citizens in a global age requires citizen engagement with post-national identities, as Velez (2021) points out: the SNC establishes connections among all its constituents to promote national unity. UNESCO (2015) topics and learning objectives establish an international reference point for the components of a holistic curriculum that are reflected in the SNC.

Studies have also illustrated trends and challenges in ECE for developing countries. Examples noted by Hunzai (2007) of the trends in early years education in Pakistan

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illustrated some of the same persistent issues that reflect challenges noted in this study such as inadequate teacher training and lack of supportive resources. This provides" evidence for the importance of study's like this one to assess if new initiatives, in this case the SNC, provide substantive responses to longstanding issues.
Hafsah's and Zahyah's (2020) reported findings on the Malaysian ECCE curriculum provided another parallel perspective reminding us of the importance of educationist perspectives in determining the effectiveness of a curriculum.

Conceptual Framework

The fundamental principles of the Single National Curriculum for ECCE serve as the foundation for the study's conceptual framework, which focuses on three main areas:
Availability of Official Materials: Textbooks, curriculum guides, and other official resources are made available to assist educators and learners.
Infrastructure and Learning Environment: The tangible assets that make up a productive learning environment, such as appropriate classrooms, furniture, and access to technology and a library.
Holistic Development Approach: The teaching strategies that support the ECCE philosophy of holistic development, such as offering students options and decision-making opportunities.

Methods and Materials

Research Method

The study used a descriptive research design along with a quantitative approach in order to address the questions of the research. Due to the effectiveness of this design for describing the main characteristics of a population. In this case it also utilized information from the state of the school resources and the assessing teacher perceptions. Moreover, a survey method was also used in order to collect data, allowing the teacher researcher to systematically assess and gather numerical data that could be analyzed statistically to identify patterns and trends.

Sample of the Study

The study population comprised all 15 primary school teachers at a Government Girls Primary School in Rawalpindi. This particular school was selected for its accessibility and to function as a concentrated case study. A straightforward random sampling method was employed to choose a sample of 14 teachers from this group. This method made sure that every teacher had the same chance of being chosen, which gave an unbiased picture of the teachers' experiences at that school.

Tool of Research

A self-created questionnaire that was meant to gather quantitative data was the main tool for the research. The questionnaire consisted of a series of closed-ended questions pertaining to educators' perceptions of the SNC for ECCE and the accessibility of resources. To ensure the quality of the instrument, its validity was established through expert opinion from experienced educationists who reviewed the questionnaire for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. We confirmed the instrument's reliability by calculating a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.71, which shows that the internal consistency is good.

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Data Collection

The researcher personally collected the data in a very careful way. The researcher went to the school in person to give the questionnaires to the 14 teachers who had been chosen. This direct approach made it easy for participants to get answers to any questions they had right away, and it also made sure that all 14 teachers filled out and returned the questionnaire. The process was done in a way that was both cooperative and efficient so that it didn't get in the way of the school's daily activities.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the information gathered from the questionnaires. In particular, percentages and frequencies were computed for every question on the survey. The researcher was able to present the findings in tabular form by using this analytical method, which gave a clear and succinct summary of the data. A clear explanation of teacher perceptions and resource availability was provided by the use of frequencies and percentages, which made it simple to determine the most frequently given answers.

Results

Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Official material for ECCE programs is provided to schools	Yes	13	92.9%
	No	1	7.1%
Classrooms are equipped with suitable furniture and amenities	Yes	3	21.4%
	No	11	78.6%
Students are given opportunities to make choices and decisions	Yes	11	78.6%
	No	3	21.4%
Suitable material is provided to support children's holistic development	Yes	8	57.1%
	No	6	42.9%
School environment encourages creativity and critical thinking	Yes	10	71.4%
	No	4	28.6%
ECCE textbooks are updated or revised frequently	Yes	9	64.3%
	No	5	35.7%
Teachers have access to technology in ECCE	Yes	11	78.6%
	No	3	21.4%
Schools have a well-equipped library	Yes	5	35.7%
	No	9	64.3%
Digital resources are available	Yes	10	71.4%
	No	4	28.6%
School has access to computers or devices	Yes	11	78.6%
	No	3	21.4%

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Thematic Analysis

Analysis of the qualitative data using thematic analysis uncovered significant themes regarding the implementation of the SNC. The predominant theme that emerged from the data was the glaring contrast between the successful implementation of the first step of providing curriculum material for the new program and the glaring gap in meeting the physical resources needed for the physical manifestation of the actual curriculum. The data suggests a strong positive theme for the official curriculum materials being provided to schools for implementation, with a vast majority of teachers affirming their availability. This infers that there was success in this step of the policy's implementation.

In sharp contrast to the positive trend, a negative theme also emerged for the physical resources, as this element has not been successful, and the result of this data is vital to this program. The result for the physical infrastructure for the SNC as implemented shows a majority of teachers affirming the lack of suitable furniture and amenities in the ECCE classrooms as well as a majority of teachers reporting the lack of well-equipped libraries for their schools.

The results point to the gap between the curriculum and the actual physical environment that needs to be in place to back the policy and the first step taken by the government to ensure success. A physical classroom environment where a teacher does not have the furniture and learning and play materials necessary to provide a child-centered, activity-based environment is a significant deterrent to the smooth implementation of the SNC. For instance, the lack of child-size tables and chairs will not allow students to work and play together, limiting their exposure to an environment where collaboration is encouraged in their early development. Furthermore, the lack of a well-stocked library for students to explore, learn independently, and develop a culture of self-teaching robs the program of meeting its goal of creating a love for learning.

Findings

An overwhelming majority of teachers (92.9%) indicated that official materials are being provided for the implementation of ECCE programs.

A large majority of teachers (78.6%) stated that ECCE classrooms lack suitable furniture and amenities.

A strong majority of teachers (78.6%) indicated that students are given the opportunity to make choices and decisions in the classroom, which is a key element of a child-centered, holistic approach to education.

As evident from the survey results, less than 60% of the teachers or a little more than half of them (57.1%) are of the opinion that the holistic development of the students is ensured by providing the teachers with suitable material.

The majority of the teachers or 64.3% of them reported that ECCE textbooks are changed/updated/revised regularly.

Most of the teachers or 78.6% of them confirmed having the opportunity to use technology and equipment; digital resources are available (71.4% of the teachers). Availability of a well-equipped library was the most critical question to which only 35.7% of the teachers responded in the affirmative.

A great majority of teacher researchers (71.4%) believe that the environment of the school is conducive to higher order thinking skills and encourages critical thinking and creativity.

The findings showcase a very significant gap in the actual physical resources that are

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required to effectively implement the curriculum, regardless of the digital tools and the successful provision of official documents.
Regarding the availability of resources for holistic development, teachers' opinions are split almost evenly between those who think they are adequate and those who don't.

Conclusion

The conclusion that can be made from the study is that the implementation of SNC for ECCE in the school Seyed for the research project is a success and a failure at the same time. On the one hand, the program can be considered a success because it has ensured that all the classes receive the official materials for the program, and teachers are making efforts to let students be engaged in making decisions (practice student choice). On the other hand, it is a program failure since the lack of physical facilities such as the availability of furniture, classrooms, and a well-equipped library do not allow the program to be 100% in place. If there is a mismatch in a physical environment, the whole system of positive efforts by teachers to make the program run the right way will fall apart.

Discussion

The results of the study, unfortunately, do not show any significant difference between the researched problem of infrastructure challenges in ECCE and the challenges that the public sector of education is facing in developing countries in general (Hunzai, 2007). That is why despite the introduction of SNC that has merged the curricula of various systems of education in Pakistan and ensured the provision of official materials, there is still a considerable problem with infrastructure which has become the most considerable obstacle in the way of students.
As many as 78% of the teachers have reported that they do not have suitable furniture for students in the classroom, and 64% said that there is no good library for the classes. The reasons for such a mismatch between the provision claimed by the government of Pakistan for the infrastructure in the school and the actual results can be multiple, but they have one thing in common – the teachers for ECCE in the public sector of education in Pakistan are the ones who pay the price of such inconsistencies. The most positive result of the survey is that the teachers are trying to provide the children with a good opportunity to make their own choices, and the good level of access to technology and equipment shows that the pedagogical practices of teachers are also subject to change.
However, a rich, physical environment that includes a well-stocked library and sufficient classroom facilities must be combined with these digital resources for children's development to be genuinely holistic. According to the data, the current state of affairs indicates that although the curriculum (software) is in place, the infrastructure (hardware) is falling behind.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered in light of the results and conclusions:
The improvement of elementary schools' physical environments should be a top priority for the government and educational authorities, with a particular emphasis on providing appropriate furniture and amenities for ECCE classes.
In order to supplement digital resources, substantial sums should be set aside for the establishment and stocking of well-equipped libraries with a varied collection of books

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and educational materials.
ECCE texts and resources must be regularly reviewed and revised.
Large-scale future research should be conducted to assess how SNC can be implemented for ECCE, in a wider range of schools, including both private and urban settings, to Facilitate with a more comprehensive national perspective.

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