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Article Title

Cultivating the Competencies: An Examination of Learning Skills in Elementary Education

Abstract

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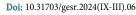</table>

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Cultivating the Competencies: An Examination of Learning Skills in Elementary Education

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The learning skills cover numerous abilities toward learning, understanding, and applying knowledge. These skills generally include critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, and adaptability. This study was designed to determine the extent to which learning skills have been integrated into the Single National Curriculum (SNC) for elementary education and to collect qualitative data about how workable this integration is. A qualitative document analysis approach and interviews of Elementary School Teachers were used to collect data. The findings indicated that learning skills are being integrated into the SNC but, students do not apply them to their daily lives. The reasons for this problem are several: untrained teachers, insufficiency of resources, heavy pressure of society on grades, outworn methods of teaching, less use of technology, community, and parental support, and most importantly, a vast difference between the curriculum design and its actual implementation.

Introduction

Learning can best be defined as a procedure that goes far beyond school lessons to cover life skills that help individuals explore everyday challenges, build up their talents—personally and socially—and develop analytical, problem-solving, and communication skills (Durlak et al., 2011; Voogt & Roblin, 2012; National Research Council, 2018). Similarly, Voogt & Roblin (2012) and the National Research Council (2018) regard learning skills as abilities and competencies highly pivotal for enhancing ways of thinking and learning. Moreover, Mansoor and Din (2023) also emphasized learning skills to be critical to achieving success in the modern world.

These skills are considered the building blocks of learning that vividly influence students' lives since they are prepared to analyze problems, express ideas clearly, work effectively in teams, and think innovatively.

Good understanding and command over information, media, and technology literacy help students prepare to steer their way in the digital world (Trilling and Fadel, 2019). Whereas flexibility and adaptability help them manage the change within, while initiative and self-direction promote independent learning (Hirschi, 2012; Koen et al., 2012), goal-setting (Ginevra et al., 2016; Akkermans & Tims, 2016; Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). Social and cross-cultural skills, as highlighted by the National Research Council in the same book, are based upon their learning to interact more with different groups, which in turn helps the student develop empathy and respect. Productivity and accountability help them learn the responsible way of handling a task, while leadership and responsibility help develop the ability to lead others and make ethical decisions. Collectively, these skills prepare students to face future challenges, succeed academically, and contribute meaningfully to society (Boholano, 2020; National Research Council, 2018).

The research contributions by Edalex (2022) and the World Bank (2023) assumed that critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity were measured as four of the most critical learning skills an individual could have to negotiate the challenges faced in modern-day employment. Information literacy and technological proficiency are crucial elements in almost any contemporary job requiring the effective use of digital tools and data (Bauer & Ahooei, 2018; Huerta & Sandoval-Almazán, 2017) to improve productivity and efficiency within all sectors of the economy (List et al., 2020). In addition, flexibility, adaptability, and self-direction are essential in taking charge of change, and lifelong learning keeps one's career up-to-date and competitive (Hirschi, 2018; Johnston, 2016; Ferreira & Mujajati, 2017). Social and cross-cultural skills advance teamwork and global collaboration, while productivity and accountability imbibe effective and responsible work habits (HubPages, 2022). These reports are evidential for pointing out that it is of utmost importance to enhance learning skills starting from primary level education so that this academic knowledge is further linked up with the field application. Therefore, students coming out will be more practically trained for the future workforce.

To put it another way, it would not be wrong to say that learning skills will help students to survive and raise their emotional intelligence, resilience, and self-awareness, which are essential for the children's mental health and essential in making them have better and more secure future job because they are well recognized in the developing job market and much valued by employers according to the World Economic Forum (2023), McKinsey Global Institute (2022), OECD (2021), Edalex (2022), World Bank (2023), Smith et al, 2023

UNESCO (2023) maintains that a good, solid curriculum is central to quality education and the development of well-rounded students. It is content-based with goals and structure that draw from historical legacies and future aspirations and serves as a guide for instruction so that specific educational objectives are achieved (OECD, 2021; Education Minder, 2023). Although all educational policies mainly support the cause of skills learned in curricula theoretically, challenges like an overemphasis on content, inadequate teacher preparation, and resource constraints, among others, make this hardly a realized dream in practice. Therefore, it is crucial to look at how the learning skills are integrated and reflected in real-life settings to ensure that learning skills are taught and applied effectively Saleem, Admad, Atiq & Iqbal,2021).

The Government of Pakistan first launched the Single National Curriculum (SNC) of Pakistan in 2020 under the theme "one nation, one curriculum" with the primary objective of standardizing learning all over the country, offering equitable opportunities in education, and easing social injustice and economic disparities by unifying the multifaceted educational systems under one single curriculum. The purpose of the study is to review the integration of learning skills in the SNC for the elementary stage and seek opinions from Elementary School Teachers about the extent of real-life relevance these skills have.

The Research Purpose

With the rapidly developing world, the patterns and paradigms of learning are also constantly changing, and there is a dire need to provide students with skills beyond the traditional academic arena. Essential for global success, these 21st-century skills comprise of critical thinking, teamwork, creativity, effective communication, and adaptability. The present study examines to what extent the present elementary school curriculum incorporates this highly important skill set. Keeping in view the critical role that primary education plays in the life of a child and student, many researchers

(Jamil et al., 2024; Mansoor & Din, 2023; Shaikh & Benedetti, 2024) have viewed the current curriculum as not well-attuned to developing these skills. This research aims to explore the presence and effectiveness of 21st-century skills in elementary education; in the first place, identify the presence and effectiveness; and secondly, address the concerns on their inclusion and application in the educational program for young learners.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

1. To find evidence of integrating learning skills in the Single National Curriculum.
2. To seek the opinions of Elementary School Teachers concerning how well learning skills translate to real life.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to achieve the above-mentioned objectives:

1. What is the evidence for the integration of learning skills in the Single National Curriculum?
2. What do Elementary School Teachers perceive about the reflection of learning skills in/ real life?

Methodology

This section covers the research methodology, including details on the population, sample, sampling techniques, instrumentation, and validation processes used in the study.

This study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing content analysis to examine the extent to which learning skills are integrated into the Single National Curriculum. The target population of the study consisted of all Elementary School Teachers (ESTs) in the district of Kasur. To gather insights on how these teachers perceive the application of learning skills in real life, a sample of 25 teachers was chosen using a convenient sampling technique. Content analysis was applied to discover the presence of learning skills in the Single National Curriculum. The researcher developed an interview protocol to seek the opinions of ESTs about the real-life application of those skills. The instrument was validated by two experts from the University of Okara faculty, who have quite an experience in assessment and instrument development. The instrument was finalized based on their inputs. Two mock interviews were conducted to try out the testing of interviews. The respondents in these mock interviews were not part of the actual sample used for the study.

The researchers collected two sets of data for the study. Initially, the textbooks of English for grades VI, VII, and VIII were analyzed to identify evidence of learning skills within the Single National Curriculum. Subsequently, interviews were conducted with the selected sample to gather their views on the application of these learning skills in everyday life. The study utilized two types of data: content analysis and interview protocols. The findings from these data sources are presented below and analyzed thematically.

Objective 1: To find the evidence of integration of learning skills in a Single National Curriculum.

Table 1

Evidence for Learning Skills

Sr. No.	Learning Skill	Sub-Skill	Description	*G-6, **TB, ***P#	G-7, TB, P#	G-8, TB, P#
1	Critical Thinking and Analysis	Comprehension Questions	Exercises that ask students to identify the main idea, make inferences, and summarize texts.	4,18,, 29-30, 39, 47, 49, 57, 59, 67, 70-71, 80, 82, 93, 95, 104, 119	3-5, 11, 36, 45, 54, 60, 67, 78, 80-81, 87, 91-92, 110-111, 122, 127	2-4, 11-12, 14, 20, 22, 25-26, 32-33, 36, 42-43, 48, 49, 50, 51, 57, 58, 62, 69, 73, 80-81, 85, 89-90, 98-99, 110, 115, 119

Sr. No.	Learning Skill	Sub-Skill	Description	*G-6, **TB, ***P#	G-7, TB, P#	G-8, TB, P#
2	Communication Skills	Literary Analysis	Discussions about themes, characters, and settings in stories	2, 15, 28, 29-30, 37, 38, 47, 58, 69, 70,, 93, 102, 103, 117	6, 17, 25, 29, 36, 51-52, 54, 99, 110-111	5,6, 13-15, 12, 23, 32, 57, 70, 78-79, 81
		Writing Assignments	Tasks such as essay writing, crafting narratives, or summarizing articles.	13, 25-26, 67, 78, 99, 109, 115, 116, 123	9, 21, 27, 28, 31, 39, 49, 56, 58, 61, 70, 71, 83, 90, 93, 102, 113, 116, 124-125, 129	14, 21, 28, 30, 36, 37, 41, 42, 46, 56, 75, 84, 87, 103-104, 109, 113, 122
		Oral Presentations	Activities that require presenting book reports or group findings.	13, 15, 18, 28, 29, 37, 49, 50, 60, 71, 93, 117	6, 16, 24, 29, 35, 45, 54, 59, 65, 77, 86, 9, 97, 110, 121, 126	10, 13, 24, 32, 36, 41, 47, 57, 61, 68, 69, 76, 79, 85, 88, 96
3	Collaboration	Group Projects	Working in groups on projects or during literature circles.	15, 16, 28,29, 30, 40, 72, 83, 96, 105, 112, 117, 120	16, 98	10, 13, 47, 50, 61, 63, 67, 84, 93, 97, 109-110, 118
		Peer Reviews	Sharing feedback on peers' writings.	28	--	30, 84
4	Creativity	Creative Writing Prompts	Encouraging students to write poems, stories, or plays.	25, 45-46, 50, 55, 78, 90, 91, 96, 100, 116	5-6, 40, 70, 102, 117, 124-125, 129	8, 21, 30, 41, 46, 56, 84
		Art Integration Projects	Activities that combine art and literature, like creating a visual representation of a poem or story.	--	--	9, 50, 67, 75, 91, 95, 103, 113, 122
5	Problem-Solving	Problem-Based Learning Scenarios	Situations where students must use language skills to solve problems or complete tasks.	12,20,34, 55, 73, 99, 123	19-20, 46, 69, 71, 83	41, 50, 67, 84, 94, 103, 109
6	Information Literacy	Research Projects	Assignments that require students to research topics and present findings.	73, 84	8, 10, 11, 17, 25, 36, 54	10, 32, 51, 101, 106-107

Sr. No.	Learning Skill	Sub-Skill	Description	*G-6, **TB, ***P#	G-7, TB, P#	G-8, TB, P#
7	Adaptability	Handling Diverse Text Types	Adjusting to different formats and contexts of reading materials.	29, 74-75, 111	23, 37, 38, 46-47, 57-58, 66-67, 79, 88	15, 18, 36, 42, 91, 94, 106-107, 115-117
		Responding to New Assignments	Flexibility in tackling new and varied tasks as they are introduced.	9, 90, 116,		15, 18, 36, 50, 55, 85, 91, 94, 97
		Adjusting to Different Teaching Styles	Adapting to various instructional methods and expectations in the classroom.	11, 20, 90	39	1, 15, 82-83, 91, 94

*G = Grade, **TB = Text Book, ***P = Page

The findings presented in the table highlight the integration of 21st-century learning skills within the Single National Curriculum (SNC) English textbooks for grades 6, 7, and 8. This discussion delves into the extent to which these essential skills are embedded in the curriculum and evaluates the effectiveness of their incorporation.

Critical Thinking and Analysis

A crucial standard for measuring critical and analytical skills is vividly evidenced in the English SNC textbook. There are several questions to test students' understanding and literary skills, whether in grades 6, 7, or 8. A large number of such tasks require students to comprehend the main idea of the text and infer and think critically about a passage. For instance, page 4, 18, 29-30, and many other pages in grade 6; 3-5, 11, 36 for grade 7; and 2-4, 11-12 for grade 8. The inclusion of the same activities in all the grades indicates that the development of the student's analytical abilities is given a strong emphasis.

Communication Skills

In the Single National Curriculum, writing through writing assignments and oral presentations are two essential threads. Writing sub-tasks such as writing essays and narratives show a strong presence throughout (e.g., pages 13, 25-26 in grade 6; 9, 21 in grade 7; and 14, 21 in grade 8). Oral presentation activities aim to develop the pupils' ability to express ideas orally. Having these assignments on many pages and at all levels indicates a well-rounded focus on the development of written and oral communication.

Collaboration

The textbooks include collaborative activities—group projects and peer reviews—albeit far more sparingly than other skills. Group projects, for example, find prominence only on pages 15, 16, and 28-30 in grade 6, and in grade 8, only on pages 10, 13, and 47. This, in turn, encourages a collaborative approach to learning. However, the relative sparseness of such tasks compared to individual tasks shows that the curriculum as it is designed does not encourage or allow a great deal of prominence to be placed on collaborative learning.

Creativity

Creative skills are nurtured through writing prompts and art integration projects. Creative writing tasks are abundant in the text throughout the book, particularly in grade 6 on pages 25, 45-46, and grade 8 on pages 8 and 21. The remaining creative work includes art integration projects, and grade 8 is the only time literature is combined with visual arts. It's evident that the curriculum recognizes a vital role: to develop the student's imaginative and artistic potential, which isn't possible in every classroom.

Problem-Solving

Problem-solving skills are developed through problem-based learning scenarios, which require students to apply their language skills to solve real-world problems. These scenarios are distributed across the textbooks, such as on pages 12, 20, 34 in grade 6 and 41, 50 in grade 8. The presence of these tasks highlights the curriculum's focus on encouraging students to think critically and develop practical solutions to complex issues.

Information Literacy

Research projects are an essential part of developing information literacy. These projects are included in the textbooks on pages 73 and 84 for grade 6 and page 32 for grade 8. Assignments like these encourage students to collect, assess, and present information and develop critical research

skills. The inclusion of research projects indicates an effort to prepare students for challenges in the information age.

Adaptability

It is further supported by adaptability, provided for by activities that have students dealing with a variety of text and novelty of assignments. For instance, there are various types of reading materials on pages 29, 74-75 in grade 6 and 15, 18 in grade 8 assigned to the students. That is to say that they develop the adaptability of the students to fit in new modes of operation. These embedded activities mean the commitment to making the student versatile as a learner is guaranteed.

Objective 2: To Seek Elementary School Teachers' Views Regarding Reflection of Learning Skills in Real Lif

Table 2

Reasons for Non-Reflection of Learning Skills in Everyday Life

Sr. No.	Themes	Responses
1	Economic Disparities	▪ You know, it's very hard for these children. Many of them come from very poor families. (Teacher 1) ▪ Honestly, the lack of involvement from parents is a big issue. Many parents in Kasur are uneducated or too busy working. (Teacher 2) ▪ Resource availability is a major issue in our schools. We often don't have enough textbooks. (Teacher 3) ▪ The infrastructure in our schools is severely lacking. (Teacher 5) ▪ Cultural attitudes also play a big role in this issue. (Teacher 6) ▪ Our classroom environments are not very supportive either. (Teacher 7) ▪ Many of our students lack motivation and engagement. (Teacher 8) ▪ Community support is minimal. (Teacher 9) ▪ The economic conditions of our students are a major hindrance. (Teacher 21)
2	Teacher Training and Qualification	▪ Teacher training and qualification are major concerns. (Teacher 4) ▪ The lack of teacher training is a big issue. (Teacher 12) ▪ Our training is often insufficient. (Teacher 18) ▪ The gap between curriculum design and implementation is wide. (Teacher 19) ▪ Teacher training and qualification are significant barriers. (Teacher 20) ▪ The training we receive is often inadequate. (Teacher 23) ▪ Teacher training and qualification are major concerns. (Teacher 24)
3	Resource Availability	▪ Resource availability is a significant issue in our schools. (Teacher 3) ▪ The lack of resources in our schools is a major problem. (Teacher 13) ▪ Our schools are severely under-resourced. (Teacher 15) ▪ Resource availability is a major barrier. (Teacher 17) ▪ Professional support is lacking. (Teacher 22)

Sr. No.	Themes	Responses
4	Societal Expectations	▪ Societal expectations prioritize academic grades over skill development. (Teacher 20) ▪ Parents don't understand the importance of these skills. (Teacher 25) ▪ We need to shift this focus and help everyone understand the long-term benefits of these skills. (Teacher 22) ▪ Society puts a lot of pressure on students to get good grades. (Teacher 24)
5	Outdated Teaching Methodologies	▪ The teaching methodologies we use are outdated. (Teacher 10) ▪ We still rely heavily on rote learning. (Teacher 11)• Our exams focus too much on memorization. (Teacher 12) ▪ The gap between curriculum design and implementation is wide. (Teacher 19) ▪ Professional support is lacking. (Teacher 20) ▪ We need ongoing, relevant training to improve our teaching practices. (Teacher 23)
6	Community Support	▪ Community support is minimal. (Teacher 9) ▪ Policy gaps exist between what is planned and what is implemented. (Teacher 14) ▪ Community support is minimal. (Teacher 25) ▪ Policy gaps exist between what is planned and what is implemented. (Teacher 14)
7	Parental Involvement	▪ Honestly, the lack of involvement from parents is a big issue. (Teacher 2) ▪ Parents don't understand the importance of these skills. (Teacher 25) ▪ We need to engage parents more in the educational process. (Teacher 10)
8	Technology Integration	▪ We have very limited technology integration in our schools. (Teacher 16) ▪ Technology can provide students with access to a vast amount of information and learning resources. (Teacher 17) ▪ Technology can greatly enhance the development of these skills. (Teacher 22)
9	Professional Support	▪ There is a lack of ongoing professional support. (Teacher 17) ▪ Professional support and mentoring programs could help us improve our teaching practices. (Teacher 19) ▪ More continuous professional development and mentoring would help us greatly in fostering these skills in our students. (Teacher 23)
10	Teacher Resistance to Change	▪ Many teachers are resistant to change. (Teacher 18) ▪ We need to support and encourage teachers to adopt these new methods. (Teacher 19) ▪ Many teachers are resistant to change. (Teacher 23)
11	Curriculum Implementation Gap	▪ The gap between curriculum design and implementation is wide. (Teacher 19) ▪ What is written in the curriculum is not always what gets taught in the classroom. (Teacher 20) ▪ This gap makes it hard for students to learn and practice these important skills. (Teacher 21)
12	Language Barriers	▪ Language barriers are a significant issue. (Teacher 11) ▪ Many of our students struggle with English. (Teacher 15) ▪ We need more support for English language learning. (Teacher 21)

Sr. No.	Themes	Responses
13	Assessment Systems	▪ The current assessment systems focus too much on memorization. (Teacher 12) ▪ Exams and tests rarely evaluate skills like creativity or problem-solving. (Teacher 17) ▪ We need to reform our assessment systems to include evaluations of these important skills. (Teacher 18)
14	Policy Gaps	▪ Policy gaps exist between what is planned and what is implemented. (Teacher 14) ▪ Policies might be well-intentioned, but without the necessary resources, training, and support, they do not translate into effective classroom practices. (Teacher 15) ▪ This gap between policy and practice means that the skills we aim to teach often do not get adequately covered. (Teacher 20)
15	Student Motivation and Engagement	▪ Many of our students lack motivation and engagement. (Teacher 8) ▪ They do not see the value in these skills because their immediate environment does not reward or recognize them. (Teacher 24)
16	Extracurricular Activities	▪ There are very few extracurricular activities available that can help students practice and develop these skills outside of the classroom. (Teacher 13) ▪ Increasing the availability and variety of extracurricular activities could help address this gap. (Teacher 14)
17	Classroom Environment	▪ Our classroom environments are not very supportive either. (Teacher 7) ▪ With so many students in each class, it's almost impossible to give individual attention to each one. (Teacher 8)
18	School Infrastructure	▪ The infrastructure in our schools is severely lacking. (Teacher 5)
19	Political Instability	▪ Political instability also affects our education system. (Teacher 15)
20	Disconnect Between Curriculum and Real-Life Applications	▪ The gap between curriculum design and implementation is wide. (Teacher 19)

Table 2 gives a brief description of the participants' responses about the non-reflection of the learning skills in real life. They have given several reasons in this regard. The most frequently given reason is economic disparities. Most of the participants perceive that students come from low-income families where survival is more important than anything else, which includes education. This leaves most of these students working after school to earn something to support their families, which disrupts time and resources that should be allocated to practicing and applying what is learned at school. The economic burden significantly limits the educational attainment of these individuals and, consequently, the development of skills like critical thinking and problem-solving.

This is followed by teacher training and qualification. The majority of teachers have come forward, stating that they did not receive enough training on how to teach modern skills effectively. They often use traditional methods wherein rote learning is more important than thinking or being creative. There are no ongoing and relevant professional development opportunities for teachers to learn how to encourage these skills in their students.

Another critical barrier, according to the respondents, is resource availability. In some schools, there are no basic teaching materials, let alone additional resources like workbooks or internet access. Scarce resources make it hard to teach the curriculum and don't let the students practice and develop specific skills. Adequate resources are necessary

because, in any other case, teachers and students will hardly fulfill the goals set in the curriculum.

Societal expectations are regarded as one of the strongest problems with high importance given to academic grades instead of skill development. A large number of parents, teachers, and the community tend to prioritize marks or grades in examinations and ignore the importance of critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. This social pressure forces students to aim for top marks instead of hands-on skills; thus, the skill is stopped at inception. The other factor is that the use of traditional teaching methods by many teachers, which emphasize rote learning and memorization, promotes the challenge further. As a result, they do not develop critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Changing such entrenched teaching methods would take a lot of effort and training, which many teachers are not privy to.

Another significant barrier that significantly hinders the development of these skills is community and parental support. That support, according to the data garnered from the teachers' responses is very little. The broader community often does not understand the importance of skills like critical thinking and problem-solving, focusing instead on traditional education methods. This lack of support means that students do not receive the necessary reinforcement outside of school. Many parents, either uneducated or too busy working, fail to prioritize their children's education and do not see the value in these skills because they never learned them themselves. Consequently, without adequate community and parental support, it is difficult for students to practice and reflect on these skills at home.

Integration of technology too in schools is very minimal. Classrooms are devoid of necessary technology apparatus and facilities such as computers or the internet, both being critical to developing information literacy and adaptability. And where there is no technology, students have very few opportunities to learn the same. There is also a critical lack of professional development opportunities for teachers. After initial training, there is no follow-up assistance or mentoring, and most teachers are left in the dark to figure out how to do everything independently. Resistance to change by the teaching fraternity is also a hitch in trying to make progress, as most teachers are used to the old ways and do not readily embrace new strategies that aim at skill development; as such, they become an impediment to implementing the new curriculum.

There is an unfathomable gap between curriculum design and implementation, as what is written in the curriculum is not always what gets taught in the classroom, making it difficult for students to learn and practice these important skills effectively. Language barriers also pose significant challenges, with many students struggling with English, the medium of instruction, making it hard for them to grasp and apply the concepts being taught. The current assessment systems focus too much on memorization, rarely evaluating skills like creativity or problem-solving, so students do not feel incentivized to develop these abilities. Additionally, policy gaps exist between what is planned and what is implemented; without the necessary resources, training, and support, policies do not translate into effective classroom practices.

These factors collectively hinder the reflection of learning skills in everyday life, despite their presence in the curriculum.

Findings

The study offers important reflections on how 21st-century learning skills are integrated into Pakistan's Single National Curriculum (SNC) for elementary education. A detailed analysis of the SNC English textbooks for grades 6-8 shows that critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, problem-solving, information literacy, and adaptability are well-represented. These skills are developed through exercises like comprehension questions, literary analysis, writing assignments, oral presentations, group projects, creative writing prompts, problem-based learning, research projects, and adaptability activities. However, the practical application of these skills faces several significant challenges, including:

- Students from low-income families prioritize survival over education, limiting their ability to practice and apply learning skills.
- Many teachers lack adequate training to teach modern skills effectively, relying on traditional methods that focus on rote memorization.
- Schools often lack basic teaching materials and supplementary resources, making it difficult to implement the curriculum effectively.
- There is a strong emphasis on academic grades over skill development, with parents and the community prioritizing exam scores.

- Many teachers continue to use traditional methods that do not encourage critical thinking, creativity, or problem-solving.
- Both are minimal, with many parents either uneducated or too busy to support their children's education.
- Most classrooms lack computers or internet access, essential for developing information literacy and adaptability.
- There is little to no follow-up support or mentoring for teachers after initial training.
- Many teachers are reluctant to adopt new strategies that emphasize skill development.
- There is a significant disconnect between curriculum design and classroom practice.
- Many students struggle with English, the medium of instruction, making it difficult to grasp and apply concepts.
- Current systems focus too much on memorization and do not evaluate creativity or problem-solving skills.
- There is a disconnect between planned policies and their implementation in classrooms.
- Many students do not see the value in these skills due to a lack of recognition and reward.
- Limited resources and infrastructure restrict the availability of activities that develop these skills.
- Overcrowded classrooms and high noise levels hinder effective learning.
- Many schools lack the basic facilities necessary for a good learning environment.
- Frequent policy changes disrupt the educational environment.
- Students struggle to see the relevance of what is taught in real life.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are suggested to improve the applicability of life skills in real life:

- With a clear focus on modern teaching methodologies that promote critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving, there is a dire need to establish comprehensive and continuous professional development programs. Research supports the need for ongoing professional development to enhance teaching practices and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018).

- The government and educational institutions need to ensure adequate funding and scholarships, free textbooks, and after-school support programs to deal with the economic challenges encountered by students. Additionally, establishing partnerships with local businesses and NGOs could help provide resources and support for underprivileged students. Evidence suggests that financial support and community partnerships can significantly improve educational access and performance (Reardon, 2019).

- This too is equally essential to equip the schools with adequate teaching materials, including up-to-date textbooks, workbooks, and digital resources. Investment in school libraries and access to online educational platforms would greatly benefit both teachers and students. Access to diverse resources is crucial for effective teaching and learning (OECD, 2019).

- The government and the institutions should conduct awareness campaigns to educate parents and the community about the importance of skill development alongside academic achievements. Hosting workshops and seminars to engage parents and help them understand the value of these skills can also be another way to tackle this challenge. It is, as Wilder (2013) put forward, parental involvement is critical for student success and skill development.

- It is crucial to encourage teachers to move away from rote learning and adopt interactive, student-centered teaching methods. This can be facilitated through training programs and by providing teachers with access to modern educational tools and resources. Student-centered learning approaches have been shown to enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Weimer, 2013).

- Parental and community involvement in the educational process through regular meetings, workshops, and collaborative events should also be ensured and coordinated by the schools. This can help create a supportive environment for students to practice and develop life skills. Strong school-community partnerships enhance educational outcomes (Epstein, 2018).

- It is necessary to provide schools with technology such as computers, internet access, and digital learning tools. Training teachers to effectively use technology in

the classroom can enhance learning experiences and help develop information literacy and adaptability in students. Technology integration in education improves student engagement and teaching (Tamim et al., 2011).

- The importance of mentoring programs and ongoing support for teachers cannot be denied. They help them continually improve their teaching practices. Regular feedback and collaborative learning opportunities can foster a culture of continuous improvement. (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

- In order to reduce resistance to change, creating a supportive environment where teachers feel encouraged to experiment with new teaching methods can prove to be helpful. Highlighting successful case studies and providing peer support can also help in this transition. Effective change management strategies can help overcome resistance (Shahid, Saleem & Farooqi (2023).

- To ensure that the curriculum is practically implemented, regular monitoring and feedback are needed. Schools should be provided with the necessary resources and support to bridge the gap between curriculum design and classroom practice. Effective implementation strategies are essential for achieving educational goals (Fixsen et al., 2015).

- Students have to face numerous difficulties with English. These can be easily overcome by providing students with additional language support through supplementary classes or language labs. Teachers should also be trained to use bilingual teaching methods where necessary. Language support programs are crucial for English language learners (August & Shanahan, 2010).

- It is crucial to ensure a positive transition from a focus on memorization to evaluating creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills is essential. Developing new assessment tools that measure these

skills can incentivize students to develop them. Alternative assessment methods can better evaluate student learning (Wiggins, 1998).

This will bridge the gap between the curriculum and the application of these skills in life, making sure that not only do students learn these skills but also put them to practical use.

Conclusion

This paper inspects from a critical lens the integration and implementation of 21st-century learning skills in the Single National Curriculum of Pakistan to probe its effective implementation at the primary level. For instance, the SNC English textbooks for the sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade levels show that it has satisfactorily represented critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, problem-solving, information literacy, and adaptability. Still, quite serious challenges have been noted for it. These include economic disparities, teachers who are not adequately trained, inadequate resources, a focus by society on grades, old teaching techniques, little support from the communities and parents, low use of technology, and differences between how the curriculum has been designed and how it is put into action.

To evade all such obstacles, it is suggested that the governments and the institutions should work in collaboration to ensure better training of teachers, an increase in educational resources, modernization of teaching methods with the use of technology, involvement of community and parents, reformation in assessment systems, and consistent policy implementation. This approach aims to bridge the gap between what the curriculum intends to teach and how it is actually applied in real life. A holistic education—one that values skill development as much as academic achievement—better equips students to successfully overcome any future challenges. In this way, we can ensure not only that our children excel in their studies but also that they emerge as complete individuals ready to contribute meaningfully to society.

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