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A Comparative Analysis of Single Nation Curriculum with the Previous National Curriculum

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Abstract: *The current paper critically reviews the Single Nation Curriculum to verify the claims made by the document after its launching in 2020 as being the first policy document for educational reformation at the national level after several decades. The analysis compares the document with the National Curriculum (2006) which has been acknowledged as the main reference document in the preparation of the Single Nation Curriculum. The paper analyses various sections of the document, with a focus on English language teaching, to expose that the new curriculum is only an imitation of the previous 2006 curriculum without introducing any significant change in the policy, content, and methodology. The paper hopes to raise awareness among the policymakers and authors of SNC about establishing connections between research and practice, hence augmenting professional development with a focus on improved practices in the area of education and curriculum development.*

Key Words: Single Nation Curriculum, Curriculum, Assessment, Teaching Methodology, Pedagogy

Introduction

Single Nation Curriculum (2020 – henceforth SNC) had been one of the most awaited endeavors for educational reforms by the Ministry of Education in Pakistan since the new government took over with educational reformations on the main agenda. When SNC was launched, the government claimed SNC to be the first curriculum in the history of Pakistan that united the whole nation on a uniform syllabus for all sections of the society. The government's launching of SNC

remained a center of debate for several months. After criticism on various aspects of the curriculum by educationalists and scholars, the focus of the implementation of SNC was changed from the entire education system to the public education sector only. In its Preamble, SNC acknowledges the fact that it consulted, built upon, and updated the National Curriculum for the English Language (2006 – henceforth NCEL) by adding new dimensions and values to NCEL. This paper compares SNC with NCEL and attempts to explore how the former document presents an enhanced

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vision to discard the “decades-old educational apartheid” as claimed in SNC (2020: p5).

While launching a new curriculum built upon the previous one, it is logical to measure the effectiveness of the previous curriculum (in this case, NCEL), in order to find out drawbacks in the existing document and highlight new dimensions and perspectives added to the new curriculum (in this case SNC) for more effective implementation. Therefore, before analyzing various parts of SNC in-depth, we quickly overview the goals and objectives of both curricula in order to identify and understand the improvements that SNC has claimed.

Overview of NCEL

While reviewing NCEL, [Asghar \(2014\)](#) reported that the NCEL claimed to strategically plan a step-by-step guide for teaching English by having each stage logically built upon the previous level. In this regard, NCEL asserted “to provide holistic opportunities to the students for language development and to equip them with competencies in using the English language for communication in academic and social contexts, while enabling them to be autonomous and lifelong learners to better adapt to the ever-changing local and world society, and to knowledge advancement” (NCEL: p1). Asghar criticized NCEL by asserting that though it theoretically gives a systematic and well-connected set of learning goals from grades 1-12, the curriculum could not establish connections between these goals with the type and quality of syllabus that would best suit to achieve the goals set in NCEL. ([Asghar, 2014: p 297](#)) Asghar continues that due to its “specialist approach”, NCEL does not consider learners’ unique background in their vernacular communities nor focuses on “how their struggle to compete in conflicting discourse communities influence their practices of language learning” ([Canagarajah, 2004: 117](#)). [Grave 2008](#), in [Asghar, 2014](#) highlighted that another major drawback of the specialist approach is that, rather than exploring the actual causes of failure, such an approach apparently accuses teachers of being mainly responsible for the failure of a curriculum. Such an approach does not allow any kind of

synchronization among various stages. Though the outcome of such an approach may show good performance at various stages in isolation, it is unlikely to achieve the overall goals and objectives of any curriculum.

While evaluating critical thinking goals in NCEL, [Asghar \(2013\)](#) in another study discovered that only 11% of participants learning through NCEL stated that they attempted comprehension questions in reading tasks in their textbook. However, 89% of participants accepted that they were unable to comprehend the texts and answer simple comprehension questions with certainty, which superficially seem to accuse teachers for their inability to teach the texts effectively. [Asghar \(2013\)](#) noted that the way the textbook presents the activities were clearly designed to deduct pre-determined solutions which hindered the learning and teaching think critically. Asghar continued to assert: that despite the strategies for textbook design being available in NCEL, the document did not suggest how to benchmark the quality of textbooks and how to anticipate the potential consequences on the successful achievement of objectives set in NCEL. As a result, NCEL did not synchronize various stages from policy-making to classroom implementation, which led to the misleading conclusion of inefficient teaching practice rather than addressing the gap between decision making and implementation stages.

Based on the findings in [Asghar \(2013\)](#) and [Asghar \(2014\)](#), it is fair to establish that despite presenting theoretically a balanced, rather ideal curriculum, it ignored the ground realities by leaving gaps between goals and the quality of learning materials available to teachers and learners. It can be argued if policymakers and curriculum developers should consider ground realities or practitioners need to reshape and relearn to meet the goals set by a remote body. Nonetheless, the policymakers cannot be too ambitious to ignore the resources and professional expertise available to implement their policies. Separating the stages of curriculum development and implementing it by two different entities is most likely to result in failure, as happened in the case of NCEL, which was apparently unsuccessful in achieving the goals and

objectives in the classroom.

Overview of SNC

Among several other objectives, SNC highlights two major goals, i.e., holistic development of children in the light of evolving international developments and indigenous needs, along with providing equal opportunities to receive high-quality education for all children. SNC also aims to alleviate disparities in education content across multiple streams and ensure equal opportunities for upward social mobility (SNC, 2020).

In the Preamble, SNC assumed a number of flaws, without valid proof, in the current curriculum and made several claims. SNC states that it is a substitute of "decades-old educational apartheid" that divided the nation. The Preamble also accuses the Pakistani educational system of lacking quality and equality and creating disparities. The Preamble continues to enlighten that more than 400 educational experts from all over the country worked on this document for one year, in addition to a contribution from experts through an international conference that was conducted solely to enrich the expertise and knowledge of the committee. SNC analyzes the NCEL, compares the curriculums of Singapore and Cambridge education, and claims to establish the assessment standards in line with those of Singapore, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom.

The Preamble also asserts that SNC is the fulfillment of "One Nation, One Curriculum". Secondly, SNC referred to various curriculums being used in various schools producing disparity among nations, and SNC would unite the whole nation. Thirdly, SNC claimed to have developed under a broad-based consultation with national and international experts. The Preamble also highlights certain key considerations such as teachings from the Quran, the vision of the Quaid and Iqbal, the constitution of Pakistan, national policies, international commitment, child protection, hygiene, communication technology, climate change, and changing challenges and trends in the 21st century, which were claimed to have incorporated in SNC. The SNC committee claimed

that they revised the 2006 national curriculum (NCEL) under their expert supervision to meet the expectations set before the curriculum committee. SNC is also said to be aligned to modern international trends and cultural values at the core. In addition, invaluable recommendations by the representative of minorities were included in SNC.

The following discussion reviews both documents to find out the modifications and progression added to NCEL to declare it an enhanced and improved version of the previous curriculum.

Preambles of SNC and NCEL

In this section, we will attempt to verify the above claims SNC has made a national scale. Having read all the above claims accredited to SNC, one would logically conclude that all these elements have been partially or totally missing in the previous curriculum, and SNC has remarkably changed and improved the previous syllabus i.e. NCEL. However, an analysis of both SNC and NCEL reveals that all the above assertions are only superficial claims carrying the least element of truth. For instance, the acclaimed key considerations such as 'teachings from the Quran, the vision of the Quaid and Iqbal, the constitution of Pakistan, national policies, international commitment, child protection, hygiene, communication technology, climate change, and evolving challenges and trends of the new era' cannot be seen anywhere in SNC except in the Preface. Either it means that these key elements were already in the old curriculum. Therefore, 400 experts decided to duplicate the contents of NCEL without any addition; or it means that the SNC team did not add any of these key considerations in SNC beyond the claims made in the Preamble.

Review of curriculums of Singapore, Cambridge, and the UK has no traces in any section of SNC implying either NCEL had already incorporated insights from international curricula due to which SNC did not have to highlight it, or the SNC team did not include the insight gained from the reviews of the above-mentioned curricula. In either case, SNC's claim stands false to contribute

to NCEL. The alignment of SNC to modern requirements also stands falsified in the light of the fact that almost all of its contents are a carbon copy of NCEL. Copying a curriculum from a document created about 15 years ago, and declaring that decades-old document aligned with modern trends is rather naïve and immature.

Both SNC and NCEL have “statement of Philosophy as the next heading in section 1. NCEL contains six paragraphs whereas SNC has five paragraphs in this section. More than 400 experts from all over the country seem to agree that statement of philosophy written in 2006 is still valid in 2021 despite the claims that the education system is redundant and needs a thorough revision. Hence requiring no major change, the SNC team endorsed the first and third paragraphs of the philosophy exactly as these two paragraphs appeared in the decades-old educational apartheid-based curriculum. Nevertheless, the esteemed committee rephrased the original text of the rest of the two paragraphs to showcase their linguistic expertise and to accomplish their acclaimed contribution.

Introduction of SNC and NCEL

While discussing the review process of NCEL, SNC claimed that multiple review sessions (later specified two sessions) were conducted “to bring it at par with the changing demands of both local and global demands” (SNC, 2020: 8). SNC continues to claim that review sessions identified pedagogical practices and assessment procedures as areas of improvement. The assessment procedure was found to have a lacked focus on integrated skills, due to which desired objectives in NCEL were further reviewed to bridge up the gap’ (SNC, 2020: 8).

When we analyzed the section on assessment and pedagogical practices in SNC (2020: 70-88) it was rather shocking to realize that both sections were completely duplicated from NCEL (2006, 153 – 165) with the following exceptions:

- i. In SNC rubrics for the assessment of listening, speaking, writing and behavior in class were presented in a more simplified form which is more user friendly (SNC, 2020: 75 –81)
- ii. Subheadings of a few sections were rephrased.
- iii. The section on teacher training (SNC, 2020: 88) was totally copied from NCEL (2006: 165), but the content was written in bullet points rather than in paragraphs as in NCEL.

It is rather disappointing that despite the review committee finding issues with assessment in NCEL in their multiple review sessions, these issues were never addressed and resolved in SNC. The SNC team seemed to be contented with changing the title of NCEL as Single Nation Curriculum, adding some naively created rubrics, and being satisfied with its capacity to be aligned with local and global demands.

The SNC continues claiming to have highlighted certain values such as global citizenship, sustainable development, gender equality, diversity of cultures, languages, and religions, countering terrorism, avoiding social evil and propagating sports and adventure" (SNC, 2020: 8-9) in themes and sub-themes of various classes. A comprehensive review of both documents (Table 1) reveals that most of these values have already been mentioned in NCEL in themes, subthemes, and text types suggested in the document.

Table 1. Acclaimed Values added to SNC

NCEL 2006 (page number)	Acclaimed values	SNC 2020 (page number)
9,17,37,63,96, 119, 142, 144	1. global citizenship	15, 16, 59
146	2. gender equality	15, 16, 60
	3. sustainable development	15, 16,
	4. countering terrorism	Introduction (p 8)
9, 33, 167	5. languages	16,67
164	6. religions	20, 56
17,18,37,63,96, 142, 145, 152, 159	7. cultural diversity	15

NCEL 2006 (page number)	Acclaimed values	SNC 2020 (page number)
148,149	8. sports	61, 62
143	9. adventure	58, 62
	10. Social evils (plagiarism, falsification, aggression, deception, greed, violent protests, etc.)	Plagiarism: introduction Aggression & greed: p 62 violent protests: introduction

As Table 2 shows that except for numbers 3, 4, and 10, the rest of the values that SNC claims to add to the new curriculum were already incorporated in NCEL back in 2006. SNC has only rephrased the language/titles of these values and presented them in a different tabular form. The value of countering terrorism and several categories under social evils were only mentioned in the introduction or the preface and cannot be found beyond these two sections in the entire SNC.

SNC furthermore asserts to add other features such as a progression matrix, sample tasks for listening/speaking/reading/writing, a simple rubric for checking notebooks, five teaching strategies,

and a list of 10 websites for teaching and learning materials. However, the sample tasks introduced in SNC originate from the same teaching approach that has been prevalent in the mainstream public education sector for two decades. The samples cannot be compared with the materials and curriculum of Singapore, Cambridge, and the UK at any level due to their obvious low quality in terms of contents and design. The rubrics that SNC introduced are also debatable in terms of their validity and reliability. The criteria in the rubrics are more judgmental rather than objective. For example, the language used in the rubric for the assessment of listening is vague (figure 1).

Table 1. Sample Rubric for Assessment of Listening Skill (SNC 2020: 75)

	Area of concern 1 pcs	Needs work 2 pCS	Adequate 3 pts	Strong 4 pcs
Attentiveness of listener	The student was not able to concentrate on the listening task and was easily distracted and inattentive.	The student found it difficult to concentrate on the listening task, but was attentive occasionally.	The student was mostly attentive and usually able to listen with good concentration.	The student was able to concentrate fully and listen very attentively throughout the assessment.
General understanding.	Student did not understand enough vocabulary or information to answer the questions.	While the student did not understand a lot of the vocabulary and information, he/she was able to complete some of the questions.	The student showed a good general understanding of the vocabulary and information, with most questions completed.	The student showed a very good general understanding of all vocabulary and information, completing all the questions.
Listening for details.	Student was unable to grasp specific details while listening, and did not include them in the answers.	Although the student showed a limited ability to listen for details, specific information was occasionally included.	The student was able to include most specific information and details in his/her answers.	The student included all the specific information and details in his/her answers.
Accuracy of response.	The student's answers were mostly left out or unrelated to the information given.	The student included a small amount of information however a lot was left out or was not	Answers were mostly accurate and related to the information given,	The content was always accurate and related to the information given.

Area of concern 1 pcs	Needs work 2 pCS	Adequate 3 pts	Strong 4 pcs
	accurate.	with only a few errors.	

Phrases like ‘did not/not able to understand, found it difficult, a lot of vocabulary’ is unmeasurable and each teacher will have a different interpretation of such words. The rubric does not show learning but the teacher’s understanding which could be biased,

inaccurate, whimsical, or sentimental. Such a weak rubric is not possible to be found in curricula of developed countries to which the SNC team gleaned for inspiration.

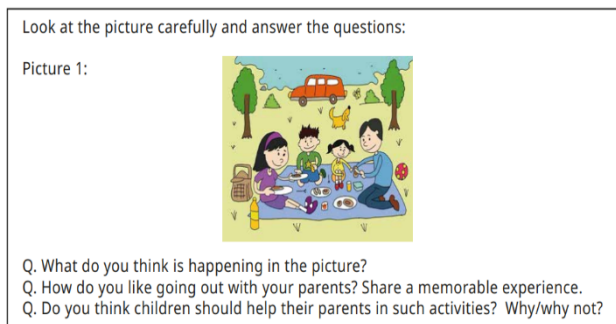


Figure 2: Sample Speaking Assessment Task (Class 3,4 & 5) (SNC, 2020: 76)

Likewise, the sample task for teaching included in SNC is also redundant and far from being aligned with the exposure and expectations of children in the 21st century. As figure 2 shows a sample task for speaking. The image, the context, and the quality of the photograph are the same as can be found in textbooks written in the late 90s. The SNC team did not realize that in today’s era, when authentic materials are inevitable in education, describing a situation that almost none of the students would have experienced in real life would end up in a redundant and boring learning task for both

teachers and students. The vision and pedagogical approach of the SNC team, which was assigned to create a curriculum aligned with modern demands, is evident in these two additions.

Guidelines for textbook writing were also claimed to be added to SNC (2020: 9), however, in the relevant section in the SNC (2020: 82-84), there is only duplication of text from NCEL (2006: 160-164). SNC also brags about contributing with webs resources to support teachers (Figure 3).

Table 3. Web Resources to Support Teachers (SNC, 2020: 68)

S. No	Websites	Grade IV-V
01.	http://www.primaryresources.co.uk/	Word making, sentences, story writing, punctuation, homonyms, homophones, nouns, adjectives, verbs, synonyms, apostrophes, contractions, letters, formal writing etc.
02.	www.eslvideo.com	Using videos for quizzes. Ready-made quizzes are available after viewing of the video.
03.	http://www.abcy.com/kindergarten_computers.htm	For ECE and Class 1
04.	https://www.eduplace.com/kids/hme/k_5/grammar/	Sentences nouns, adjectives, prepositions (Games for students of primary classes)
05.	https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lessons-and-ideas/	Teaching ideas and lesson plans for teachers.

S. No	Websites	Grade IV-V
06.	http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/highlights	Teaching of metaphors, similes, facts/opinions, compound words, etc.
07.	http://funbrain.com/	Teaching support for primary classes
08.	http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com	For speed reading, enhancing reading fluency
09.	http://www.crickweb.co.uk/	Teaching support for classes primary classes
10.	http://www.britishcouncil.pk/	Teaching support for classes primary classes

However, this claim is also superficial and merely a formality. All the websites are either inappropriate in terms of level, context, or contents (S.no. 2, 6, 8, 10) or require purchased subscriptions (S.no. 9) or require computer and internet in class (S.no. 1, 2, 3). Needless to mention that all these websites need access to computers and fast internet with browsing skills and the ability to use hybrid models in the classroom. In addition, using computers in class also requires multimedia projects and computer operation skills as well as constant availability of electricity. SNC introduces IT in education but does not suggest how it can be effectively used in modern classes, particularly in less developed areas, with the same teacher training strategies as suggested about one and half decade ago in NCEL and copied by SNC in 2020. Considering that SNC has only been implemented in public sector schools, it is imaginable how helpful these websites could be for teachers at these schools.

Analysis of the Content List

NCEL divided its contents into eight ‘sections’ likewise SNC distributed the contents in eight ‘chapters’. However, changing ‘sections’ into ‘chapters’ did not affect the textual contents of the chapters which remain the same almost in all the cases. More than 400 experts from all over the country only added insignificant changes to the previous curriculum. For example, the esteemed committee replaced one sub-heading (titled: Background) of section 1 in NCEL with the title of “Vision for the Review of the English Curriculum”.

In the next sub-section on Process of Curriculum Development, our 400 experts again

demonstrated their revolutionary zeal by moving Oral Communication Skills from the third level to the first level, shifting Writing Skills from the fourth to the second level, and downgrading Formal Lexical Aspects of Language from third to the fourth level. This ‘radicalized’ revision in the process of curriculum development is historically remarkable when for the first time more than 400 educational experts sat together to form a single curriculum for the nation. These 400 experts kindly and mutually agreed on keeping the rest of the texts and diagrams in the section of the decades-old curriculum that has been dividing the nation and creating inequality for decades.

In the section of Organization of the Curriculum Framework (Class I-V), SNC seems to have graciously approved the standards established by the decades-old NCEL and copied them exactly as they were in the 2006 version. For reasons of time and space, it is not possible to mention all the minute details to demonstrate how SNC 2020 is superficially slightly different from the decades-old educational curriculum in layout, but at heart, it contained almost 90% of the contents from NCEL. However, the above two examples are sufficient to reveal the claims of the revolutionized nature of SNC, and establish that the new curriculum has copied complete text from the 2006 curriculum from the first to the last page, with some rephrased passages here and there.

Likewise, a comparison of the first two sections of NCEL and SNC (table 2) shows how both documents have no major differences in terms of the contents.

Table 4. Titles of Content List in NCEL & SNC

NCEL	SNC
National curriculum for English language	Single National Curriculum (English)
Preamble	Preface
Table of contents	Table of contents
Sections	Chapters
2.1. Competencies sin English Language	2.5. Competencies sin English Language
2.2. Rationale for Competencies and Standards	2.6. Rationale for Competencies and Standards
2.3. Summary of Competencies and Standards	2.1. Competencies
2.4. Competencies, Standards and Benchmarks	2.2. Standards
2.5. Benchmark Focus	2.3. Benchmark
3. Student Learning Outcomes	3. Progression Matrix
4. Text Types and Themes/Sub-themes	4. Text Types and Themes/Sub-themes
5. Classroom Methodology	5. Classroom Methodology
6. Assessment	6. Assessment
7. Guidelines for Selection and Development of Textbook /Materials Writing	7. Guidelines for Selection and Development of Textbook /Materials Writing
8. Teacher Training	8. Teacher Training

Table 4 shows that SNC has copied NCEL by slightly changing the titles and order of the titles. All these sections of SNC copied 100% texts from NCEL except in Chapter 3 where SNC has entered slightly different student learning outcomes in a different layout. However, it is difficult to discover the outcome of the efforts of 400 experts from all over the country who allegedly claim to compare the curriculums of Singapore and Cambridge Education, and claimed to establish the assessment standards in line with those of Singapore, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom. It is reasonable to expect that a team that specifically aimed to reform “decades-old educational apartheid” (SNC, 2020: 4) must be well aware of the drawbacks of the existing national curriculum. Nonetheless, after comparing both curriculums, it appears that either the team had never seen NCEL before they embarked on the educational reformation project, or they wasted national resources for one year only to prove that the existing curriculum has no major drawback, and they endorsed it under a new title. It is rather shocking that acclaimed national and international participants of the project could not add or remove a single item from NCEL except to offer some rephrased sentences and Microsoft skills to change the layout of the document and make the colour of the national flag as the theme of the layout of SNC.

In order to teach the new curriculum to lead Pakistan towards the glory of the 21st century, the last chapter on teacher training, SNC, again copied the complete text from NCEL. However, the SNC team realized that NCEL wasted extra words in this chapter so they removed the first eight words from the first sentence. Also, to make it reader-friendly, the SNC team divided the whole text of NCEL into bullet points. It would be unfair not to mention that SNC added two innovative ideas regarding teachers' IT training: first, keep the training needs-based, and second, training materials should be tailored (SNC, 2020: 90). In terms of developing textbooks, the SNC seems to believe that it is a uniform procedure all over the world, so our 400 educational experts saved time, and instead of re-inventing the wheel, they copied and pasted the complete section on textbook development from NCEL in the reformed curriculum to lead Pakistani educational system step into the new Pakistan (SNC, 2020: 80-88; NCEL, 2006: 160-164). However, it will be unfair not to give credit to the SNC team for adding a note at the end of chapter 7 on textbook development:

“Note: While designing any formative or summative ‘assessment’, in case of question from any Islamic topic, the alternate question is given for

minority students.” (SNC, 2020: 88)

Though in the reformative zeal, the SNC team overlooked the spelling mistake of the keyword “assessment” in the one sentence they contributed. In the era when several software can be availed to automatically correct grammar and spelling mistakes, such a spelling error in one sentence contribution shows the diligence and devotion of the team who tirelessly worked on this document for one year.

These highlights are only from one part of SNC (i.e. class I – V), which is almost 98% copied from NCEL in terms of goals, objectives, benchmarks, standards, and strategies. It is rather disappointing that valuable resources were used to create this so-called national curriculum which was acclaimed to have reshaped the Pakistani educational system, but the outcome of the whole exercise was a production of a carbon copy of the old curriculum.

Conclusion

SCN is disappointing not only because it explicitly betrayed the nation, but it is rather an embarrassment for our educational experts as well who failed to demonstrate the ability to produce a new curriculum aligned with the demands of current times. All these experts, along with the entire ministry of education, appeared contented with what was suggested one and half-decade ago. Surprisingly, despite bitter criticism of the old educational system and curriculum, they could not add a single item to confirm their claim of updating NCEL. Even if NCEL is assumed as an exemplary curriculum on the earth, implementing the same strategies after about two decades appears rather ludicrous in this age of rapid change. If a decades-old curriculum had to be reinstated after rephrasing a few lines, all the concerned people must justify the resources wasted in the whole venture only to change the outlook of NCEL and present it as a Single Nation Curriculum with claims of reforming the national educational system.

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