

INVESTIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING NATIONAL SINGLE CURRICULUM IN BALOCHISTAN: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF DISTRICT QUETTA

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Abstract

This study has examined the socioeconomic issues that impede the enactment of the National Single Curriculum (NSC) in Quetta, Balochistan. The objective of the research was to evaluate the systemic obstacles to curriculum change in the view of educational managers and school personnel. The study has used the stratified sampling strategy, whereby it has used structured questionnaires made up of Likert scales, where the sample involved 313 stakeholders of the education sector. The group was composed of 20 district-level managers, 113 school principals, and 180 teachers of public schools. The research was conducted on socioeconomic, infrastructural, and culturally relevant limitations of curriculum implementation. Results showed that there was a great variance in the stakeholder groups as regards important challenges of the implementation process. Systemic challenges were identified by managers and included aspects such as rural-urban funding disparities and cultural exclusion. Principals cited the lack of infrastructure and the relevance of curriculum to the local contexts. Teachers were complaining of the harsh conditions under which they operated, such as self-funding of the supplies, and due to poverty, dropouts. Correlation analyses revealed that there was good agreement among the stakeholders about infrastructure shortages or management, and on the problem of socioeconomic barriers as a great barrier to implementation. The relevant recommendations were the equal distribution of resources and cultural adaptation of the curriculum.

Keywords: *Single National Curriculum, Educational Managers, Principals, Teachers, Socioeconomic obstacles, Chi Square, Pearson Correlation.*

Introduction

The adoption of a standard national curriculum is a very crucial move as it helps to make education to be both equitable and eventually of quality in a country. In Pakistan, an act known as the National Single Curriculum (NSC) is being introduced which is designed to eliminate the learning-slant between schools by putting in place a common centre of learning to all schools, both, governmental, as well as, non-governmental. Success of such initiatives is, however, contingent on region-specific socio-economic conditions which is very diverse even at province level. Balochistan is the largest and least developed province with its own peculiar circumstances in taking the NSC especially in Quetta. This paper examines socio-economic factors that are limiting the successful inception of the NSC in District Quetta, throwing light on structures requiring policy focus.

Balochistan has a very poor education system with low enrolment, poor infrastructure and shortage of teachers coupled with financial instability and security issues. The NSC that aims at ensuring uniformity and contemporary pedagogical practices is faced with opposition in parts where the educational infrastructures remain irrelevant. The case of Quetta, an urban center, also reveals these challenges as it is a city with diverse socio-economic groups, of which many are internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other marginalized groups. The gap between the policy goals and the actual situation begs the point of how economic issues, cultural issues, and governance problems play roles in the implementation of curriculums.

It is critical to carry out a socio-economic analysis of the NSC implementation challenges being experienced in Quetta. The school poverty, parental literacy level and availability of the market in the form of private tuitions are some of the factors which are important to determine educational results. There is also the issue of an untrained teaching profession, lack of state investment in schools, and the tradition of elite privately run schools which add to the difficulty in implementing a uniform curricular program. At the same time, this paper discusses these dimensions drawing on empirical evidence pointing out the gap between national educational policies and local realities in Balochistan.

By examining District Quetta, this paper will present the useful findings that will enable policymakers to strategize around the structural impediments to curriculum implementation. The results will add to the current debate on education reform in Pakistan because it shows that there should be different ways of implementing reforms as opposed to wholesale reformulation. Finally, the research aims to promote the supportive measures which can take into consideration the socio-economic limitations of Balochistan and pursue the equal education within the NSC program.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze stakeholder perceptions regarding the challenges of National Single Curriculum in Quetta.
- To identify the socioeconomic and cultural barriers affecting curriculum implementation in the education system.
- To evaluate the degree of alignment among stakeholders on critical implementation issues and policy recommendations.

Literature Review

Recent research shows a challenge as to how to enforce uniformity of curriculum in the socio-economically deprived areas of the world especially in Pakistan. A study by Hussain and Ali (2022) on the implementation of the National Single Curriculum (NSC) revealed that the less privileged provinces and states are faced with unfair advantages in terms of infrastructure, teacher workload, and resource distribution in favor of less privileged provinces such as Balochistan. Their study underlines that unless curriculum reforms at policy level are backed by fundamental needs there will be inadequacies in reform efforts i.e. teacher training, classroom materials etc. In the same manner, Khattak et al. (2023) present the argument that economic instability and low parental literacy in Balochistan interfere with the ability of the communities to connect with the NSC, as the families choose the current survival to meet needs over education. All these studies imply that structural inequalities should be worked out so that standardized curricula have a chance to achieve the success.

Additional work highlights the situation that governance and localized resistance play an essential role in the implementation of the curriculum. The qualitative study by Akhtar and Rind (2023) in Quetta showed that textbook distribution and workshops to teachers are delayed due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and political instabilities, which cripple the implementation of the NSC. Their results are consistent with international sources, including the one provided by UNESCO (2023), the report on low-income regions, which revealed poor institutional coordination as a significant obstacle to educational change. More so, Baloch and Jamal (2024) mention cultural clashes in Quetta as regional communities who feel that NSC is working against their tradition and local languages and confront the administration with passive resistance. This literature presents the argument that the top down policy requirements overlook socio-cultural context issues, which increase the challenge of implementation.

It has also been indicated by emerging scientific evidence that the issue of security concerns plays a pivotal role in hindering the reforms in education in Balochistan. According to a study by Sadiq and Mengal (2024), militancy, forced displacements that occur frequently

in the Quetta district have grossly reduced the functionality of schools in the district and it is almost impossible to implement the system of NSC on a regular basis. According to their study, it was found that about 23 percent of the surveyed schools in the district had suffered temporary unavailability because of security threats in the previous one year itself. This aspect of security seems to complicate the already existing impediment of curriculum transformation on socio-economic grounds. This problem is yet further aggravated by what the authors call educational migration, referring to the tendency of better-off families to send their children to schools (in other provinces), thus virtually deprives the local schools of resources and a peer leadership that would facilitate the implementation of NSCs.

Current technological research provides ways of going forward despite these difficulties A UNICEF (2024) pilot program in Quetta proved that mobile learning platforms could overcome some of the infrastructure constraints, especially in relation to girls in conservative societies. Nevertheless, according to Ahmed (2024), the provision of these digital solutions presupposes the availability of stable electricity and the internet which are not available in 60 percent of Quetta public schools. In the meantime, the results of similar context, like the formulation of curriculum recently in Afghanistan conflict zones by Omar (2023) allude that community-based monitoring structures, which align with implementation fidelity and increase local ownership of the NSC, may be established. However, despite its potential, these technological and governance innovations are limited by the fact that education sector alone will not solve the issues in Balochistan that are embedded in the interaction between security, economic, and geographic factors.

Lastly, researchers put forward location-based remedies to counter such obstacles. Khan (2023) suggests decentralization in curriculum adjustments or, in other words, this would enable the province of Balochistan to preserve the local knowledge whilst ensuring that national standards are adhered to. In the interim, a World Bank (2024) policy brief states that investing in digital infrastructure and collaborations between the state and the private sector are the solutions to resource gaps in Quetta. Those are the suggestions repeated by indigenous researchers as well, such as Zehri (2024), who demands community-based awareness campaigns in order to support the community around NSC goals and unite them with the expectations of the parents. In unison, the recent literature has emphasised that the success of the NSC in Balochistan depends on how it can deal with the socio-economic disparity, enhance governance, and develop local ownership, which is multidimensional force which he/she has not been able to apply.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is a combination of both structural functionalism and socio-ecological systems theory to examine the NSC implementation issues in Quetta. The structural functionalism (Durkheim, 1893; Parsons, 1951) explains how the poor institutional infrastructure in Balochistan that is characterised by teacher shortage, lack of reasonable facilities as well as bureaucracy inefficiencies are violating the intended role of the national strategy commission, which is bonding a unifying national policy. In the meantime, the socio-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) offers a multi-tiered approach, which demonstrates the simultaneous influence of factors on the micro-level (household poverty, the level of parental education), meso-level (the relations between schools and their communities), and macro-level (not only the ways in which the provincial governance is established but with security challenges too).

The integrated model describes the nature of the mechanisms as to why uniform policies do not work in the marginalized areas: inadequacy in terms of structures does not allow the implementation of the policy properly, and local socio-economic and cultural conditions introduce even more obstacles. Such dual-sided approach is highly beneficial when it comes to

Balochistan, a region that has been historically marginalized and is still ridden with instability, yet this must be put to the background of the current issues of policy-making. This framework is used to explain further the need to analyze the presence of systemic weaknesses alongside the presence of context, which provides a holistic view of the curriculum implementation lapses in conflict-affected, and economically disadvantaged contexts.

Methodology

This research paper took a mix-methods approach to examine the issues of implementing the National Single Curriculum in the Quetta district, specifically the views of managers of education, principals, and teachers. Questionnaire design and data collection was done using three role specific questionnaires that were sent out to 20 educational managers, 113 school principals and headmasters, and 180 teacher respondents in the public schools of Quetta. Likert-scale questions were used in the questionnaires to gauge the perceptions of barriers to NSC implementation, whereas the questions, the answers to which should illustrate their perception of the NSC implementation barrier, have been designed as open-ended questions to allow one to extract dry qualitative information. Educational managers were interviewed on their perception of policy interpretation, and the allocation of resources; principals on their delivery problems at school level; teachers on their problems of delivery in the classroom and training demands.

Semi-structured interviews of 15 participants in each of the stakeholder groups were conducted to complement the quantitative materials with the stories of their life experiences with NSC implementation. The stratified sampling method enabled the academic types of the schools and geographical location of schools in Quetta. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics on quantitative answers, and thematic analysis on the qualitative answers and triangulation of stakeholder groups to achieve converging and divergent ideas. This methodological approach has yielded a broad picture of the multi-level issues of NSC implementation between creation of a policy to delivery in the classroom, and it has done so without compromising the unique professional perspectives of the various stakeholder groups. It was also carried out during 2023 over a period of six months with due regard to ethical aspects of the research such as informed consent and confidentiality safeguards to all subjects.

Findings and Results

Manager's Perspective

The study of the perspective held by the educational managers provides a vital piece of information about systematic problems with implementation of curriculum and allocation of resources. There was abundant agreement on some critical issues, especially around the ludicrous and fundamental structural inequities in the school funding system since managers were in unanimous agreement (mean=4.45 out of 5 on the scale, $22.0=2(3)$, $p<0.001$) that rural schools were consistently underfunded vis-a-vis urban schools. The need to have higher local involvement in the design of curriculum had also strong support (mean=4.40, 20.80, $p<0.001$) implying that managers saw it fit that they have to involve the community in the design of curriculum since this would provide contextually relevant learning materials. The facts indicated a high degree of concurrence (mean=4.25, $2=18.8$, $p<0.001$) that economic imbalances among districts constitute significant barriers of the implementation of the National Single Curriculum and therefore prove how regional imbalances negate the cause of education standardization.

When it comes to the cultural representation, managers concurred that, (mean=4.10 15.2 $p=0.004$), the national curriculum is insufficient in integrating the cultural diversity in Balochistan, indicating the need to make the curriculum more inclusive. The idea that teacher training programs are adequately funded within provincial budgets was not at all accepted by the managers (mean=2.05, 26.0, $p=0.003$), meaning that all of them are not satisfied with the

available budget funding on training. Localized curricula was hotly debated on its financial feasibility (mean=2.45, 2=4.0, $p=0.406$) and the distinction of the infrastructure problems that Balochistan contains (mean=3.30, 2=2.0, $p=0.736$) with evident lack of agreement on these concerns. All of this evidence attests to the lack of necessity in policy changes that could clear up funding discrepancies, reinforce local involvement in curriculum development, and improve the integration of regional cultural ideas, among pointing at areas where more research is necessary to learn about the disparities in attitude towards specific issues among education administrators.

Table 1 *Chi-Square Analysis of Managerial Perspectives on Curriculum Implementation*

Statement	Mean	SD	Chi-square	P-value
The rural schools receive less funding as compared to urban schools.	4.45	0.83	22.0	.000
The teacher's training programs receive sufficient funding in the Provincial budgets.	2.05	1.23	16.0	.003
Economic disparities between districts hinder the implementation of National Single Curriculum.	4.25	0.91	18.8	.000
Balochistan faces unique infrastructure challenges.	3.30	1.26	2.0	.736
Localized curriculum is financially unsustainable for most of the public schools.	2.45	1.23	4.0	.406
The national curriculum does not integrate Balochistan's cultural diversity.	4.10	1.07	15.2	.004
Local involvement in curriculum design could improve curriculum significance.	4.40	0.82	20.8	.000

Principal's Headmaster's Perspective

The perspective of the principals demonstrates the serious doubts regarding the infrastructural issues, socioeconomic obstacles, and curriculum relevance whereas the strongest support is expressed in many other disturbing issues. There is a high consensus ($\mu=3.81$, $\chi^2=47.2$, $p<.001$) that schools do not have basic facilities such as classroom and textbooks with high level of agreement but great differences in response ($SD=1.38$). The influence of poverty on the dropout rates is common knowledge (5.44, 30.1, $p<.001$), whereas this standard deviation being rather large (1.47) indicates some variance in the manifestations of poverty across schools. Principals also somewhat agree ($\mu=2.85$, $\chi^2=13.2$, $p=.01$) that the problem of teacher absenteeism is connected with bad conditions of work but the mean and SD is low ($\mu=1.56$) and indicates that this is not always true.

Although school home distance has been considered a sort of restriction (mean 3.19), there was no statistical hearing in showing any result that reflected great preferences on either side based on the small p-value (.072). There is a weak agreement parents put economic survival first ($\mu=3.04$, 2=10.3, $p=.036$) on a scale which is just significant. Strikingly, the least disagreed upon issue is when principals strongly differ (i.e., 2.38, 2=30.8, $p<.001$) that the national curriculum reflects local customs with high consistency in their criticism. The political/religious leaders also have some effect on curriculum perceptions ($\mu=3.12$, 4=12.4, $p=.015$) although the mean is not too high and the p-value is significant which means that its influence is situational.

Table 2 *Chi-Square Analysis of Principals/Headmasters Perspectives on Curriculum Implementation*

Statement	Mean	SD	Chi-square	P-value
Our School lacks basic infrastructure facilities (e.g., classrooms, textbooks).	3.81	1.38	47.2	.000
Poverty influences the Student's dropout rate in our school.	3.54	1.47	30.1	.000
Teacher absenteeism is linked to poor working conditions in our school.	2.85	1.56	13.2	.010
The school home distances limit a student's access to study resources.	3.19	1.52	8.6	.072
Parents prioritize economic survival over children's education.	3.04	1.54	10.3	.036
National curriculum is relevant to local customs and traditions.	2.38	1.50	30.8	.000
Political and Religious leaders influence perceptions on national curriculum.	3.12	1.48	12.4	.015

Teacher's Perspective

The deep-seated systemic problems with teachers and students are indicated in the results of the teacher survey. The most common complaint noted by teachers is poor pay (2.28, 65.38, $p<.001$) with three quarters disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that their wages meet the basic needs and thus 76% had to make personal payments to purchase classroom resources (3.39, $p<.001$). They also point at grave student poverty where there certainly is broad agreement that majority of the students cannot afford uniforms ($m=3.47$) and many drop out of school to help their families ($m=3.50$) which are also found to be extremely significant ($p<.001$). The results present a bleak outlook of classrooms that are not properly funded and where teachers and learners are governed by financial deprivation making it very difficult to teach or learn using the curriculum. These challenges are then worsened by the high travel expenses that are reported ($\mu=3.49$), which in essence serve to cut even further into the meager take-home pay of teachers.

Notable social and infrastructural barriers are also illustrated by the data. Teachers somewhat agree with the existence of gender difference ($\mu=3.19$, $p=.001$) (although with a fair level of variability ($SD=1.43$)) indicating that this is an issue that has different presentations in different communities. Although the weaknesses of the school buildings are identified ($m=3.26$, $p=.002$), they are not as acute as the immediate financial limitation of teachers and households. All these factors such as poor compensation to poverty among the students to the lack of infrastructure form an intricate mesh of complications that compromise the quality of education. Such findings are very powerful because they indicate that any attempts toward curriculum reform should be supplemented by the similar advancements in terms of teacher compensation and services that support students so that the results of such activities can be effective.

Table 3 *Chi-Square Analysis of Teachers Perspectives on Curriculum Implementation*

Statement	Mean	SD	Chi-square	P-value
My monthly salary is sufficient to cover my basic needs.	2.28	1.40	65.38	.000
I purchase teaching materials (e.g., charts, stationery) with my own money.	3.39	1.33	31.44	.000

My travel costs from home to school are too high.	3.49	1.32	38.17	.000
Most of my students cannot afford their uniforms and stationery.	3.47	1.36	34.89	.000
Many students drop out for work to support their family incomes.	3.50	1.35	38.11	.000
Parents prioritize boys' education over girls' due to perceived economic returns.	3.19	1.43	18.78	.001
The School building is insufficient for student's strength.	3.26	1.41	16.22	.002
Parents in my community cannot afford private tutoring.	3.29	1.43	24.11	.000

Pearson's Correlation

The Pearson correlation model also shows striking succession in alignment of stakeholders: Managers, principals and teachers are highly consistent on the issue of infrastructure deficit ($r=0.79-0.91$, all $p<0.01$), reflecting unanimous acknowledgment of serious resource average, Managers, principals and teachers also maintained an almost perfect agreement on the socioeconomic inequality (principal-teacher $r=0.94$, $p<0.001$) such as poverty and dropout rates among students. But major mutations occur in the area of inequalities of funding (consistently negative correlations, $r=-0.15$ to -0.43), and curriculum relevance (manager-principal $r=-0.84$, $p=0.001$), there with the concerns of managers on the rural underfunding and cultural neglect in stark contrast to the more positive evaluations of principals. These wired views, coupled with the middle level of agreement between the manager and the teacher of socioeconomic factors ($r=0.68$, $p=0.042$), indicate that although stakeholders come together on overt economies of scarce resources, there still lies deep cracks regarding financial equity and localization of curriculum that must be narrowed between policy interventions. The insignificant results of the financial relationship between the roles ($p>0.05$) also raise a clear point of the necessity of the enhanced cross-role communication to overcome the perception differences in prioritizing resource distributions.

Table 4 *Pearson's Correlation*

Thematic Area	Manager-Principal R	Manager-Teacher r	Principal-Teacher r
Infrastructure Deficit	0.82 (0.002)*	0.79 (0.006)*	0.91 (<0.001)*
Funding Inequalities	-0.15 (0.712)*	-0.43 (0.192)*	-0.08(.827)*
Curriculum relevance	-0.84 (0.001)*	-	-
Socioeconomic Barriers	-0.73 (.025)*	0.68 (.042)*	0.94(<0.001)*

Discussion

The research findings on the funding differences correspond well with global studies on the one hand and disclose the peculiarities of Balochistan on the other hand. The perception of educational managers regarding inequality in funding between the rural and urban areas is high with $M=4.45$, which is in line with the Brazilian studies of education equity (Alves et al., 2021) with 34% less funding in the area of peripheral schools. Nevertheless, the teacher perspective ($M=3.39$ in case of self-funded materials) becomes more dramatic than the one in the RMSA report for India (2022) which revealed that only 58% of teachers stated that they bought supplies. The infrastructure issues of the principals ($M=3.81$) are more critical when compared to those of similar conflict-affected areas such as Yemen (UNICEF, 2023) indicating that Balochistan has even more severe concerns than other regions where the crisis also occurs. The

low managers-teachers correlations ($r = -0.43$) are compared with those in South Africa (Van der Berg, 2021), which has proved more consistent between the two related groups. This is based on the World Bank (2022) recommendations regarding equity-based funding formulas with the addition of the need of emergency teacher support funds that can be seen in a post-earthquake Nepal (Shields, 2020).

The continual curriculum relevance tensions carry with them the national debates of their local significance. The argument of managers in support of localization ($M=4.40$) echoes the case of Ethiopia and mother-tongue instruction success (Hough et al., 2022), and the educational leaders with their doubts ($M=2.38$) can be compared to the situation in Malaysia rural states (Azman, 2021). The issues related to cultural integration ($M=4.10$) are higher than in Pakistan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (SAHE, 2023) implying that the diversity of Balochistan requires special care. Noteworthy, the disagreement between the manager and principal is more substantive than the one practicing curriculum decentralization in Indonesia (Bjork, 2022). This is probably because of the context of security in Balochistan. Effective practices of the Mori education system in New Zealand (Penetito, 2021) can be taken as a model of localization, which may resolve the issue of economics viability ($M=2.45$), to which a similar approach of phased implementation in Colombia (Rodríguez, 2022) can be used as an example. The evidence undermines the inferences in certain literature around the world (such as in the UNESCO 2021 global monitoring report) regarding automatic gains of localization, hinting at how conflict zones need to have specific approaches.

The socioeconomic data demonstrate the universal trends and the regional details. The amount of agreement between the principal and the teacher on the effects of poverty ($r=0.94$) is higher than in other similar studies in Philippines (Alberto et al., 2022) or Kenya (Oketch, 2021) which indicates that Balochistan economic crises have had a particular effect of cohesion in the views of teachers related to poverty. Nevertheless, the results of gender disparity ($M=3.19$) are not as harsh as they are in Afghanistan (Samar et al., 2023) yet more than in Iranian Balochistan (Mohammadi, 2022), making cultural dynamics intricate. The systemic approach of managers ($M=4.25$) fits with the capability approach that was recently updated by Sen (2021), but it is contrary to successful interventions at the micro-level of Bangladesh (Asadullah, 2022). This paper is also a contribution to literature on conflict-zone education as the existing studies on whether Iranians (Shah, 2023) and Yemenis (Al-Ammar, 2021) perceive themselves and the country differently quantify perception gaps that they reported only qualitatively. Post-conflict experiences of Sri Lanka (Little, 2022) might be used to create intervention models, and the tactic of conditional cash transfer programs could be recreated as it was in Brazil with the Bolsa Family (Barrera, 2021) and applied to Balochistan pastoralist society.

Conclusion

This research paper offers crucial revelations about the very intricate issue of education problems in Balochistan by means of the unique views of managers, principals and teachers. The research highlights internal conflicts between policy systemic interest and the activities at the ground level especially in matters concerning inequality of funds, inapplicability of the school syllabus and issues of socioeconomic disadvantage. Although all the stakeholders confirm extremely harsh infrastructure shortages and poverty related barriers, they portray different priorities, which underscores an imperative gap in implementation. Managers deal with structural reforms, principals have to operate within operational constraints and teachers have day-to-day classroom struggles and this necessitates more coordinated solutions. The findings of the research reveal that stakeholder misalignments in conflict-affected areas such as Balochistan are even stronger than they are in secure environments, and that the

interventions should be adjusted accordingly and include equity-oriented funding, culture-responsive design of curriculum, and enhanced cooperation among the stakeholders.

The comparative nature of analysis of international cases like the localized curriculum, implemented in Ethiopia and the conditional cash transfer policy, in Brazil is highly instructive to Balochistan, and although international cases should not mimic the localized situations, adaptations should be made. Ahead, policymakers should emphasize multi-level transformations that would resolve the differences of perceptions between the representatives of the administration and educators so that the policies should be focused on both structural inequalities and classroom needs. It is possible to make the education system in Balochistan more equitable and effective by introducing cross-stakeholder dialogue and evidence-based measures. This stakeholder analysis should be applied to other marginalized areas in future and the long term effects of such interventions studied to give greater contribution towards providing quality education in conflict regions. Finally, this paper may emphasize that educational transformation needs not only the change of policy, but also the greater reconciliation of the perspectives of various stakeholders.

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