

# Analyzing the Pros and Cons of Single National Curriculum

Henna Ahsan

Pakistan has a variety of educational systems which further class differences and seems to be a big hurdle in bringing unity and harmony among the nation. One of these systems is represented by high level English medium schools in private sector whose fees on average ranges from 15 to 25K or even more. Other major chunk of the children goes to low fee private and public sector schools and finally a substantial amount of children studies in religious sanctuaries known as Madrassa. All these educational institutes have different environments in terms of curriculum, way of teaching, facilities and freedom. After spending 10 years, which is the average schooling time, in these respective institutes, it is hard to imagine that these children would be able to befriend each other or have an intimate and respectable working relationship whenever future brings them close. Therefore, any effort to eradicate these differences may be seen as an effort with a good intention and in the right direction.



We have about 22.5 million out of school children in this country and all governments have been doing efforts to bring these out of school children to schools. Incentives like total fee wave off, giving monthly stipends, free books and copies are some notable measures taken in this context. Single National Curriculum (SNC) is in fact a step ahead to this basic problem which means that along with doing efforts to increase children enrollment, government is now serious and taking concrete steps to increase the quality of education being provided. Through SNC government has provided some minimum learning standards for students of all grades and except for few books like Islamiyat and Urdu, private schools are at great liberty to design and draft their own books keeping in consideration the minimum learning standards. Regarding mode of education in these books' government, at present, intends to implement its scheme of teaching from one to three class in Urdu except Math and Science subjects and later this will be implemented from grade 1 to 5.

There are people who have apprehensions about this SNC, the way it has been carved out, about syllabus, about present faculty and about possible outcomes of SNC. However, most of these apprehensions and concerns could be summarized under below main points.

1. Asking private schools to teach Islamiyat and Social Studies in Urdu will be a big challenge for the children especially for children of 3 and 4 grades who have been studying these subjects in English.
2. Along with making Islamiyat mandatory for all grades, SNC has introduced lot of religious/Islamic stuff in Urdu, English, Social Studies and even in History books as well.
3. It is not the curriculum which lacked but the teaching capabilities of the teachers and teaching environment, especially of

the public sector schools, so this should have been the focus of government.

4. Just focusing on the curriculum and not on testing/examination system will not render any fruitful results.
5. The government instead of raising the standard of public sector schools is trying to lower the private schools' standard to bring all at one level.
6. Madrassas would not implement this SNC and will keep following their own agendas.

Now when we deeply scrutinize these concerns, we see that some are mere fears of doing an extra effort, some mere negative opinions and some are really genuine grievances. Though developed countries have been able to give a complete secular outlook to their educational systems but Pakistan being formed on the basis of religion has its own dynamics and limitations. Therefore, honoring the sentiments of people regarding ideological basis of this country there is no harm in mandating Islamiyat as a compulsory subject however increased religious/Islamic content in other books should be a matter of concern for people at the helm. Government has made arrangements for teaching Ethics to the Non-Muslim students in place of Islamiyat, however, what other choice these non-Muslim students have when they are forced to read Islamic content in other above-mentioned books. So, it is good that government seriously address this concern and try to make these subject specific books more secular that are equally acceptable to all citizens of the country.

Concern regarding capabilities of the teaching staff and teaching methodologies is a very genuine concern and perhaps one which should be given the most importance. If we observe our big cities, we see that most of the public sector schools have larger infrastructure than private schools and also teaching staff here has permanent and secure jobs with perks much better than private schools' teachers. However, learning outcomes and overall personality development of the students in these public sector schools is far behind than the average private schools in these areas. Further we see the trend very dominant, at least in cities, that even the extremely poor people prefer to send their children in private schools<sup>1</sup>. A study done by (Manzoor et al., 2017) show that the "quality of education" is one of the major factors for parents for selecting a private school over a public sector school. Therefore, government needs to take it very seriously and should have more emphasis on teachers training, school environment and also efficient use of technology by the teaching staff for imparting education in easy and interesting manner for the students.

Regarding madrassas, these are approximately more than 30,000 in number that cater to the educational needs of approximately three million children. However, education being imparted in these madrassas have been a subject of great debate due to these madrassas' affiliation and allegiance with particular religious sects. Now if we could have a curriculum that along with fulfilling the religious needs of these madrassas may fulfill their secular education needs as well then it would be a great step in the history of our country. Moreover, having a single national curriculum which will have great commonality of syllabus and contents will make these madrasa students not to feel alien about other children in the country and will also open new career avenues for them. However, critics are right in saying that mere introduction of the curriculum will not suffice the purpose and a strict surveillance and monitoring mechanism needs to be put in place to ensure things are actually happening on the ground.

Finally, if we do not have a right testing and examination system in place, we will never know how well our students are doing and do our efforts are reaping the desired results. If the examination system would be the same old which tested children memory rather any cognitive or intellectual abilities then there will be no benefit of introducing a better curriculum. Unfortunately, we do not see any substantive work and efforts done in this regard against this SNC exercise. So, it is necessary that government look into this important pillar of good education and try to revamp existing examination system to match the claimed learning outcomes of SNC.

<sup>1</sup>Hamad, Rasool, S. Ahsan, Safdar, A. (2017). "Determinants of Parental Choice for Public – Private Schooling of Children: A Study of Rawalpindi-Islamabad." MPRA Working Paper.