

COMPREHENSIVE PRIMARY CURRICULUM: A NATIONAL GOAL OR A DREAM

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum provides specific kinds of exposure to learners as a continuous process and determines ones abilities overtime. As per education policy developing a Comprehensive Curriculum for primary education is one way of balancing equal exposures for all learners across socioeconomic classes however, school streams situated across stratification system within the country vary greatly in terms of curriculum they deliver. Curriculum differences setup a different start for learners which lead to an outcome difference. This research studied the nature of variations in English curriculum used in schools and the reasons for differences and its persistent existence in educational institutes. This paper also looked into reasons for disparities and uncovered the hidden curriculum themes across socially stratified schools in Pakistan with a specific focus on English language ability. Phenomenological method is used to gather data through interviews, demographics and analysis of themes in fifth class English textbooks across school systems. The results will highlight how curriculum differs across various schools which are categorized with respect to their socio-economic status.

Keywords: Curriculum; socially stratified schools; hidden themes; variation; equity; disparity.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan National education policy (2009) clearly states that ‘educational system is supposed to ensure the right of an individual to grow in income and stature’ on the basis of excellence in education (p.12). The policy document gives priority to education being a key economic growth measure which is capable of allowing social advancement directly related to upward mobility. In order to attain Pakistan vision 2030 which states that the education systems must unify in terms of goals there is a strong need to direct policy and practice towards this end. Equality in education can have a huge impact on removing social apartheid and therefore bringing curriculums visions and practice in line with this goal.

Educational success is not only directly related to ones linguistics proficiency but is also related to the life chances, income and well-being of a person ([Battie & Lewis, 2002](#)). Since education is means to enhancement, a comprehensive curriculum of English language regardless of diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds of learners must be emphasized in the current educational scenario keeping in view the importance English language skill has in the globalized world these days.

This research contributes to an understanding that Linguistics ability is the currency with which students negotiate success however, inadequate linguistic skills have been known to be a significant barrier to academic and economic success (Gray, 1996; Pecorino & Dozier, 2000; Saville-Troike, 1984). The situation becomes grave when it is elementary education which is at stake. The influences of stratification are a well-established phenomenon however, maintaining the level of English ability varied across school systems and the range of factors that increase this variation is of major concern for this research work. Similarly, the influence of implicit curriculum practices which lead to linguistic disparity and the underlying factors responsible for making comprehensive national primary curriculum a dream are discussed in this work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the course of history a number of researchers have noticed the influence of stratification on education. In this regard, the work of Bernstein (1962), Morgan (2009), Mills (2005), (Rigney, 2010), Kincheloe & Steinberg (2007), Marzano (2003), Qadeer (2006), and Rehman (2002) is noteworthy. These researchers in one way or the other point out how education can be means to advancement and what impact stratification and socioeconomic status can have on individual achievements. For instance, Marzano (2003) says that Schools can be highly effective in enhancing achievement conversely they can be highly influential in reducing achievement and increasing risk factors. Put in another way, the relationship of one's socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievements is important as educational institutions are not neutral in their treatments of students from different backgrounds so, they impact and set the trend of ones learning and final outcomes greatly. The main reason for this is a political interest and a social interest of the ruling who divide the society unequally into those who can be given advantage and those who may not be provided with advantage.

Since progress in education depends a lot on elementary education hence, factors which underlie and influence outcomes are of significant nature; one of which is curriculum. Language is distributed differently across the different socioeconomic classes of Pakistan since it is a language of power. Different socioeconomic classes invest different efforts to attain English keeping in mind the advantages they can have through the linguistic skills. Curriculums across different schools too differ in their approach towards how they cater to teach English language skills.

Vygotsky (1998) theory of child development and learning is of significance to understanding this transition. Childhood is a sensitive age in which the children see the world through the eyes of other associations at home or in schools. They internalize the social understandings that are presented to them through these mediums. While parents provide the best they can to their children in terms of economic resources, culture and social environment they are

particular about the choices they make for their children, most of these choices are associated with their rational understanding their own experiences. They by doing this, start at a very early age a process that sets pathways for accumulation of what they perceive as advantageous. This difference can be noted by the choice of school parents make for their children. If all schools provided equal opportunities, good exposure, up to date curriculum and best instruction, there would be no need for making such decisions yet, parents spend a lot of time observing and researching before they select a school they can send their children to. According to Vygotsky, this 'formal logical' thinking makes the analyze themselves and position themselves in the world. His theory of development has cognitive, social, emotional and motivational aspects at heart (Kozulin, 2003). This explains for the 'intellectual growth' of children as they grow and expand into 'societal production'. This in itself points out the presence of stratified school systems existing in society and the socioeconomic and cultural exposure the children will receive when they move they move to school. Class advantages are linked to the fact that schools sort children; these institutions prioritize and reward particular cultural traits and resources. Schools play a wonderful, sometime overwhelming role in shaping students life chances. Schools vary tremendously in the quality of their curricula, pace of instruction extent of teacher preparation, degree of safety.' (Lareau, 2011, p. 264)

Schools are an important institutions that window social, political, economic, and cultural tools in their practices all at the same time; Where they differ from each other in their constitutive philosophies and approaches to problem solving they differ in the exposures they provide to students. This is mediated through institutional characteristic broadly, and through curriculum and pedagogy at ground level. Likewise, schools help inculcate and internalize what is called the hidden curriculum alongside formal curriculum in students with respect to how prestigious conscious they are. Different institutions hold different perceptions of curriculum and invest accordingly in students learning so, the possibility becomes very true that an institute or educational system may have obvious differences in the amount of exposure they provide to their students through their working and hidden curriculum.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research used phenomenological approach and gathered data through 45 interviews and textbook analysis as a primary source of information. Demographics were collected to divide 30 schools into categories with respect to socioeconomic class. The sample of schools was reorganized based on the fee differences they had. The schools were categorized as high paid, middle paid and low paid based on demographics of the students and fee structure. The schools that took fee between 20 to 500 Rupees was categorized as low paid, between 500 onwards to 2500 as middle paid and above that as high paid schools.

Analysis of interviews under phenomenological approach as discussed by Kate (2010) was based on a systematic procedure which includes reading for meaning, dividing the text into meaningful units, expressing the meaning in a more transferrable method and formulating a structure that highlights the experience in the narratives and illustrating the themes in details. Textbook content was analyzed and compared in terms of themes, activities, teaching methods and language skills.

FINDINGS

The visions for the sample schools was categorized into high paid, middle paid and low paid schools and studied with respect to the curriculum goals and visions. Common curriculum features and language skills emphasized were extracted to point out prominent features of visions and curriculum across different stratified schools. It was found that the curriculum is not same across school systems and is separated in terms of aims and purposes that guide the whole process of teaching and learning in schools. The curriculums documents and visions refer to the difference of curriculum experiences that the sample studied receives. Each category of school has devised a different curriculum and focus on different language skills. Moreover, the themes and contents in textbooks that set ideological grounds at primary school level too vary.

The curriculum in low paid schools is oriented towards purposeful and quality education with a focus on community and national values. The specific language skills emphasized in low paid schools are reading and writing. In low paid schools the visions were not clearly stated however, included words such as ‘Purposeful, quality, healthy educational environment national values, community, culture of innovation, learning’. The language skills emphasized across low paid schools included reading, writing primarily as most textbook content included exercises that involve read and answer exercises, fill in the blanks, sentence making, grammar practice (verbs, adjectives, nouns, articles, tense, negatives, interrogatives, punctuation) true false, matching lists, spellings and story writing. The themes emphasized in syllabus included patriotism, Religious holidays, family, school, seasons.

The curriculum in middle paid schools is oriented towards the same values as the low paid schools and also includes ethics, religious aspects and a focus on compatibility with the wider world. The visions included terms such as ‘Education suited to our cultural, historical/ religious framework, empower and equip,, the country and the wider world, affordable, accessible and quality education, basic knowledge of skills explorative mind, moral and ethical values, National objectives. The specific language skills emphasized in middle paid schools are reading, writing and speaking. However, it was observed that speaking though was mentioned in curriculum as a skill to be emphasized was not taught or practiced in language classes. In textbook, language practice was carried out through Translation, Read and answer, fill in the blanks, sentence making, vocabulary, grammar practice (verbs, adjectives, nouns, articles, tense, negatives, interrogatives, punctuation), true false, matching lists, spellings, translation, essay and story writing. The themes found in the textbook content were related to Patriotism, Religious holidays, family, school, basic activities, seasons.

The curriculum in high paid schools is oriented towards specifically developing English language skill with improved teaching, management and monitoring. Moreover, these schools have textbook text with a focus on developing individuals, who are competent with the international world therefore themes related to the foreign culture were abundant. The terms

found in visions document included terms such as Cambridge, Reggio Emilia approach, Scottish Curriculum, UK National Curriculum, international standard, develop a first language competency of English, excellence through quality management, quality teacher teaching, diverse community, global, entrepreneurial centered achievement, development of attitude, skills, knowledge, high academic standard, inclusivity, acceptance, respect, and responsibility, a deep understanding of the traditions and values of our community, distinguish themselves academically and become conscientious citizens of a greater community, confident, personally fulfilled.

The interviewees threw light on the current educational scenario and the influence of curriculum on the experiences of the learners. The data not only highlighted how and why curriculum differs across low cost, middle cost and high cost schools but will also provide useful insights and reasons for such practices. Through interview data it is clear that the specific language skills emphasized in high paid schools are speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The skills were practiced through literature, critical thinking and problem solving ability with special focus on at least one of the four language skills. Textbook analysis showed that language was practiced through Activity books, comprehension, proverbs, idioms, vocabulary, Language rules, grammar (parts of speech and their categories), Functions of language to create a dialogue, communicative competence, conversation, responding critically, recalling incidents through speaking, identifying /differentiating sounds, pronunciation w.r.t stress/intonation, example based inductive exercises with a focus on discovery, Recalling, brainstorming, planning, sentence structures, subject/verb agreement, creative/imaginative writing, and Completing incomplete paragraphs. The themes found in textbook content included Biography, opinions, facts, reading for entrainment/ expression/ information/ discussion/ explanation and ethics/priorities. It is interesting to note that some schools which are categorized as high paid and studied for this research also include specific terms as ‘our community’ and ‘our culture’ which refers to the specific efforts by these school system to

maintain themselves as a distinct class that is unique in terms of the kinds of material and cultural exposures and privileges they provide to their learners.

Other aspects that the interviews talked about included stratification in society and views on the overall educational system. Naveed Iqbal, the grandson of Alama Muhammad Iqbal said this is 'an international problem and not unique to us and there is a tripod for which we need a lot of effort to close the gaps in the society which many people want to retain'. The President of Pakistan People Party, Rawalpindi Zamurd Khan, who is a Political personal, Ex-Member of National Assembly and also involved in educating orphans, said, 'the influence of stratified system on education is quite influential specifically as education has taken up the shape of industry and form of a developed business'. Miss Aneela, director NEAS stated, 'education is not our nation's priority', and although she said 'many programs are being run yet the monitoring is poor due to which the country's educational system remains ineffective'. Interviewees pointed out that other reasons for disparity include lack of resources and negligence on the part of the decision makers.

Interviewees believed that diversity in education system was due to fee, curriculum and teaching differences across schools which led to performance differences. Teachers across different stratified schools pointed out 'that the curriculum in her school was based on international standards and had defined goals whereas the teachers were specifically instructed to follow them'. Teachers from medium paid schools pointed out that curriculum in their schools was designed by the school board and the textbooks were revised however, they said that in classrooms 'teachers did not follow the curriculum yet focused on teaching students only the exam syllabus to pass the students'. Faisal Mushtaq, chairman Roots system said that, 'education cannot be equalized yet it can be universal in values and curriculum'. He emphasized 'the uniformity of curriculum' that he said may lead to equalizing social classes. The role of teacher in understanding learning and making reflective decisions for their peculiar situations was emphasized by most interviewees. The role of politics was highlighted in

interview responses by the interviewees as a significant cause in stratified schooling and difference in curriculums. In this regard one interviewee said that 'there is so much politics in education that the top management does not want to change and a lot of social pressure is involved, at times I do not foresee any change'.

The interviewees gave different responses regarding the solution to the issues and challenges of stratification to education and linguistic development. The difference in responses stemmed from the diversity of experience each interviewee had. According to the interviewees 'public private partnership must be emphasized' and 'monitoring' of the current system is required to enhance the status of education. The interviews point out that 'a single person cannot regulate the system as the rich schools have turned into business institutes hence, a collective effort is needed'. The interviewees remained positive regardless of all the problems the nation is facing in education, and add that education 'is becoming our priority with a lot of knowledge coming in from our students who are returning from foreign' yet 'we need to overcome the lack of trust between government and private educationists who seem to be competing rather than working together and pose danger to each other'. They add that 'curriculum documents and textbook decisions should be taken at national level and the visions schools follow must be decided collaboratively'.

The interview data points out that the diversified education is based implicitly on socio economic criteria of stratification across school systems. Moreover, specific efforts were made to maintain and provide a unique material and cultural exposure and privileges at institutional level to students in high paid schools that already belonged to a high class. This material and cultural exposure was missing in low and middle paid schools although, it was these two classes that needed it the most. Different school systems infuse different experiences that children face as soon as they enter school which develop as patterns of experiences that accumulate overtime. No institution and group is neutral and according to the conflict perspective, an instrument of class domination (Hughes, M., p. 120), hence specific efforts are made to maintain differences in curriculum experiences. Since English is considered to be the

criteria of school success and a privilege which is an advantage some enjoy whereas as other do not or cannot (Elvin, 1965) hence, the linguistics competence of students' also varies. It is due to this elevated position and utilitarian role English plays in raising ones status with enhanced chances of better employment that the skill handed over to different social classes not only varies in the ability yet, this ability is maintained through implicit practices of curriculum.

Overall the interviewees said that there exists a great difference in students, who come from different schooling as they are taught different levels of skills that lead to a divide and the impact lingers on as the student enter education in later years. Moreover, the participants pointed out the potential of government role and private partnerships in overcoming the gaps while emphasizing the inculcation of appropriate language skills at school level through uniform curriculum. Similarly, the role of teacher catering for the linguistics needs of student with the textbook, teaching methodology and curriculum was considered important to enhanced linguistics outcomes and overall improvement of skills.

CONCLUSION

This study highlighted the particular differences of characteristics in curriculum that students came across in different schools. The differences were in line with the overall curriculum visions and the emphasis each curriculum laid on the inculcation of English language. In schools, the patterns of social stratification are reintroduced in new ways through curriculum differences. Different school systems infuse different experiences that children face as soon as they enter school which develop as patterns of experiences hence specific efforts are made to maintain differences in curriculum. Since English is considered to be the criteria of school success and a privilege which is an advantage some enjoy whereas, as other do not, or cannot, (Elvin, 1965)hence, the linguistics competence of students' also varies.It is due to this elevated position and utilitarian role English plays in raising ones status with enhanced chances of better employment that the skill handed over to different social classes not only varies in the ability

yet, this ability is maintained through implicit practices of curriculum. Instead of being dependent on circumstances of chance rather, they depend on circumstances of construct; intentional and systematic in terms of how socioeconomic classes retain their individuality of marked preferences and in terms of how schools as institutions hand over different exposure of curriculum to students.

Finally, it is concluded that the educational scenario in Pakistan is far from providing equal education to all and requires extensive reformations. English curriculum has been widely diversified in nature and scope and has become a major reason for the divide in the experience learners receive at schools. It is through curriculum difference that transfer in experience and build on overtime the divide is maintained deliberately. If the national dream is to unify all education and exposure then curriculum differences have to be removed at all levels.

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