

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:

UNDERSTANDING POLICY ENACTMENT
IN DIVERSE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SINGLE
NATIONAL CURRICULUM POLICY IN
PAKISTAN

Fatimah Ali, Doctor of Philosophy, 2023

Dissertation directed by:

Steven J. Klees, Ph.D.
Department of Counseling, Higher Education,
and Special Education

Education reform is a contested and complicated terrain where multiple stakeholders with competing visions seek to influence the direction of reform in alignment with their own interests. As a result of these competing visions, education policy is not value free or neutral and favors those who hold the political and economic power to maintain the inertia of the status quo. Despite this unequal balance, education reform remains a dialectic process which is affected by several factors including contexts, resources, accountability processes and the agency of those tasked with policy implementation. Since policy is rarely implemented without some refraction from its original formulation, it is important to examine the implementation process to understand its complexities that can aid in better policymaking by decisionmakers.

This multi-case qualitative study examines the implementation of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) Policy introduced during the 2021-2022 academic year in Punjab, Pakistan in

primary schools (grade 1-5). Using an institutional lens, this study investigates how public and private schools interpreted the Single National Curriculum Policy and implemented it in classrooms. To highlight the complexity of policy implementation and provide a variegated and nuanced view of policy implementation within different institutional and social contexts, the study was conducted in a public school, a low-cost private school, and a high-cost private school in the cities of Lahore and Kamalia in May and June of 2022. In total, 22 teachers and administrators across the three schools were interviewed for this research.

This study found that the alignment of belief systems, the institutional arrangements of schools and perceived costs of deviation all influenced how closely the SNC curriculum was implemented in each school. Schools interpreted the policy in light of mediating factors which included institutional factors such as the learning environment, capacity and agency of the teachers and administrators as well as their hierarchies and support systems. Adherence to policy was also dependent on the perceived risk of being inspected by government officials and monitoring frameworks established to assess policy implementation. Lastly, in all three schools, administrators and teachers adhered to a spectrum of beliefs that were in alignment with or opposed to the SNC policy. These governed how closely the SNC was implemented in classrooms and or if corrective pressure was applied to maintain their desired student outcomes. As a result of this variation, gaps in student learning remained intact as the new policy did not address the roots of quality differences across schools. However, the government was able to successfully coerce all schools into incorporating more religious instruction and nationalistic citizenship education leading to more tight coupling between the schools on this front.

UNDERSTANDING POLICY ENACTMENT IN DIVERSE INSTITUTIONAL
CONTEXTS: AN EXPLORATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
SINGLE NATIONAL CURRICULUM POLICY IN PAKISTAN

by
Fatimah Ali

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2023

Advisory Committee:
Professor Steven Klees, Chair
Professor Jing Lin
Professor Zeena Zakharia
Professor Mark Ginsburg
Professor Francine Hultgren

© Copyright by
Fatimah Ali
2023

Dedication

In the loving memory of my father, Ali Raza, who would be surprised by the adventures I have undertaken.

Acknowledgements

My dissertation has been a labor of love, and it could not have been achieved without the support of my family and community that helped me work through my stumbling blocks and gave me the confidence to cross the finish line.

This journey would not have been possible without my mother, Nazneen, who gave me the courage to dream my dreams and to live life on my own terms. I would also like to thank my sisters, Fizza and Bushra, who have been stalwart companions in all the ups and downs of life with their unwavering love and support. I am also grateful for the support of my brother Zuhair, and my uncle Amjad. My heartfelt thanks to the family that I made along the way on this journey; to Maggie and Maryam, who were witnesses of the whole journey, and without whose friendship, these four years would have been lonely and joyless. Lastly, I would like to say a heartfelt thanks to my partner Abbas, who sees the world in a way that no one else can. In his company, I learned to be a better human and a better researcher. I am also grateful for the constant encouragement I received from my parents in law, Huzaima and Ikram.

My sincere gratitude to my mentor Dr. Klees, for giving me the space to explore my interests and for his counsel from the beginning to the end of this journey. I would like to thank my committee, Dr. Lin, Dr. Ginsburg, Dr. Zakharia and Dr. Hultgren for helping me see avenues of research I had not thought of and for discussing my research with interest; your guidance has been invaluable. I would also like to acknowledge the professional community at UMD that made these four years possible, and I extend my earnest thanks to my peers and colleagues at the University of Maryland who help make it a wonderful learning environment and a home away from home.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	1
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	ix
List of Abbreviations	x
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose of Research	7
Significance	9
Conclusion	10
Chapter 2: A Brief History of Education Reform in Pakistan and Punjab	12
The Pakistani Context	12
Domestic Education Policy Making: Intentions, Processes, and Outcomes	16
1947-1970: Education for Nation Building	17
The 1970's: The Era of Nationalization	18
The 1980's: The Islamization of the Education Sector	19
1990-2010: Conforming to International Education Agendas and Increasing Privatization	21
2010-2020: Decentralization and Education Reforms	24
2020-2023: A Return to Political and Economic Instability	25
Focus on Punjab	27
The Cities of Kamalia and Lahore	30
The Single National Curriculum Policy	32
Objectives of the SNC policy	32
Major Criticisms of the SNC policy	34
Conclusion	37
Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks	39
Understanding Education Policy and its Implementation	39
The Multiple Contexts of Policymaking	44
Institutional Analysis of Schools as Sites of Policy Implementation	48
The Complexity of Policy Implementation - Theoretical Frameworks	52
Bell and Johnson's (2006) Policy as a Process Model	53
Viennet and Pont (2017) Framework for Policy Implementation	57
Use of Frameworks in this Study	61
Conclusion	61

Chapter 4: Methodology	63
Restatement of the Purpose of Study	63
Research Questions	64
Research Paradigm	65
Researcher Positionality	67
Research Design	72
Case Selection.....	74
Case 1: Public School	75
Case 2: Low-cost Elite Private School	76
Case 3: High-cost Elite Private School	77
Data Sources and Collection.....	78
Document Review	78
Semi-structured Interviews & Focus Groups.....	79
Observations	81
Data Translation	81
Data Analysis	84
Ethical Considerations	86
Ensuring Research Quality	87
Conclusion	89
Chapter 5: The Public School	90
School Profile and Environment	90
Staff Profiles	93
Institutional Hierarchy and Arrangements	95
Learning Environment of the School	107
Experiences with the SNC Policy Roll Out	108
Implementation Strategy of the School.....	110
Challenges to Policy Implementation	113
Language Issues-English	114
Nazra	117
Merits of the Single National Curriculum	121
The Role of Values and Beliefs in SNC Policy Implementation	122
Religion.....	123
Gender	126
Conclusion	131
Chapter 6: The Low-Cost Private School	132
School Context.....	132
Staff Profiles	133
Institutional Hierarchy and Arrangements	136

Learning Environment of the School	139
Experiences with the SNC Policy Roll Out	143
Implementation Strategy of the School	147
Challenges to SNC Policy Implementation	150
Nazra	150
Language Issues and the Overloading of the Syllabus	153
Merits of the SNC.....	157
The Role of Values and Beliefs in Policy Implementation	159
Religion.....	159
Gender	162
Conclusion	165
<i>Chapter 7: The High-Cost Private School.....</i>	<i>167</i>
School Profile and Environment	167
Staff Profiles	169
Institutional Hierarchy and Arrangements	170
School Learning Environment	173
Experiences with SNC Policy Implementation	179
Implementation Strategy of the School.....	184
Challenges to Operationalizing the SNC Policy	188
Making Space for the New Subjects.....	189
Nazra and Islamiyat	191
Language Issues-Urdu	193
Merits of the SNC.....	197
The Role of Values and Beliefs in SNC Implementation	199
Religion.....	200
Gender	202
Conclusion	205
<i>Chapter 8: Cross-Case Analysis and Findings</i>	<i>208</i>
Theme 1: Institutional Arrangements.....	210
Learning Environment	210
Capacity and Agency	213
Hierarchy and Support Systems	218
Theme 2: Perceived Cost of Deviation from Policy	223
Monitoring Frameworks.....	223
Perceived Risk of Inspection.....	225
Theme 3: Alignment of Implementer Beliefs with Policy Edicts	228
Alignments of Beliefs on Gender and Religion.....	229
Perspectives on Curriculum Quality	235
Conclusion	235
<i>Chapter 9: Discussion and Conclusion.....</i>	<i>241</i>

Introduction	241
The Complexity of Implementing Policy in Diverse Education Systems	242
Limitations.....	247
Future Research.....	248
Conclusion	250
Appendix A	251
Appendix B	255
<i>References</i>	259

List of Tables

Table 1: Staff Profile of Public School	93
Table 2: Staff Profile of Low Cost Private School	134
Table 3: Staff Profile of High Cost Private School.....	169

List of Figures

Figure 1: Proportion of Out of School Children in Punjab	29
Figure 2: Bell and Johnson’s 2006 model of Policy Enactment	55
Figure 3: Education Policy Framework	60
Figure 4: Hierarchy of Public School	96
Figure 5: Hierarchy of low-cost private school	137
Figure 6: Hierarchy of High-Cost Private School.....	171
Figure 7: Theme Map of Findings	209
Figure 8: An Example of Data Available from PMIU.....	219

List of Abbreviations

AEO	Assistant Education Officer
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
DEA	District Education Authorities
EFA	Education For All
ESR	Education Sector Reform
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MEA	Monitoring and Evaluation Assistants
PCTB	Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board
PEPRIS	Private Education Provider Registration and Information System
PMIU	Punjab Monitoring and Implementation Unit
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SED	School Education Department
SLO	Student Learning Objectives
SNC	Single National Curriculum
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Chapter 1: Introduction

As governments try to keep pace with changing social, political, and cultural norms, education policies are adopted and discarded frequently. In an increasingly globalized world, there is a normative pressure on national education systems towards increasing standardization of schooling and education in line with purported market-based values of competition and efficiency. Partially, this pressure stems from the international dominance of the neo-conservative and neoliberal ideologies which sees education as a major avenue that fosters economic growth (Zajda & Geo-Jaja , 2010). Simultaneously, nation-states use education as a way of molding the citizenry of the future, equipped with skills needed by society and with the ability to live in the community as disciplined and rule-abiding individuals (Welch, 1985). Thus, education reform is influenced by these various competing interests that seek to influence education policy and practice in favor of their own educational and social visions (Apple, 2004).

There is a multitude of research on education policy and practice that delves into the processes of policy formulation and implementation. Bell and Stevenson (2006), consider education policy to be a continuous and contested process which is partisan and designed to safeguard the interests of the dominant class. In socially heterogeneous societies with stark political divides, the control of education policies such as curriculum change, resource allocations and compliance or non-compliance with international benchmarks allows governments to determine the socio-political values of the nation and reproduce the power structures already entrenched in societies (Apple, 2004). Thus, due to the inherently political nature of education policy, it invites intense scrutiny which is reflective of the context in which the policy change is to be implemented. Dissenting voices are generally drowned out by using

terminology that is couched in the ethos of social justice and offers legitimization to proposed policies. Despite this domineering strong hold which the status quo has on education and schooling, policymaking and implementation in this domain is a dialectic process which is shaped by all the different stakeholders involved at various levels (Bell & Johnson, 2006). The extent to which the policy is implemented as designed is limited by several factors including contexts, resources, agency of the implementers and the oversight of the implementation process (Altaf, 2021).

Research on policy analysis typically falls within two categories. The first conceptualizes policy as an *outcome* which describes systematic goals or actions that should happen independent of context indicating a top-down prescriptive approach (Blakemore, 2007). The second category understands policy as both an *outcome* and a *process* that accounts for the context in which it is implemented and considers policy to be a bargaining process and a political activity where the perceptions and interests of actors are influential at all stages (Taylor et al., 1997; Hill, 1997). This means that for any policy to be successful, the role of schools as institutions and its personnel as the agents of implementation is significant; the success of any policy reform is thus also contingent on the institutional context in which it is enacted. Additionally, McLaughlin (1987) states that “policy effects are complex, sometimes hidden, or invisible, often unanticipated or nominalistic. And even when they are apparent, they may be transitory.” Therefore, learning from policy implementation needs to be more focused on social learning that can support the ongoing decision-making of actors as opposed to positivistic models of evaluation that adjudge policy success or failure.

This multi-case qualitative study focuses on the implementation of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) policy introduced by the Federal Government of Pakistan in academic year

2021-2022. Since the implementation of revised curricula plays out at the school level, teachers and administrators are the agents who are the interpreters of the policy and determine how it is applied. Through its focus on the implementation of the SNC policy, this research aims to investigate how public and private institutions understand the curriculum change process and consequently implement it. It looks at the perceptions and real-life experiences of teachers and administrators that dealt with a mandated curriculum change whilst trying to stay true to their institution's values and purpose of education.

This chapter provides an overview of the phenomena of curriculum policy change that is the focus of my study. It also details the purpose of the study and the research questions that I investigated. It touches on the contextual and methodological frameworks that define both the scope and the lens through which I conducted my research. These will be explained in detail in subsequent chapters. I will also take this opportunity to give an abbreviated snapshot of the reasoning underpinning my choice of research site selection.

Problem Statement

Curriculum reform which is one type of education policy, focuses on what the knowledge or education that is given to children in schools looks like (Parveen, 2018). As with other subsets of education policy, curriculum change is political in nature; revising curriculum in any society is a contentious process as it tends to serve the ideological interests of the dominant class. In Pakistan, the issue of who controls education has been contentious between provincial and federal governments. In 2010, during a rare period of democratic stability, the Parliament of Pakistan made the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, which stipulates that K-12 education falls under the purview of the provinces, which are responsible for all educational decision-making including curriculum design, teacher training and regulation of the different

education streams (private and public) within their geographical territories (Rana, 2020). This amendment decentralized education and limited the role of the federal apparatus in decision making related to education policies.

Therefore, a move towards a single national curriculum (SNC) was widely seen as a power grab by the Federal Government that aimed to shape the idea of national identity by manipulating the narratives of religion and patriotism through educational curricula, a tactic that has been periodically applied in Pakistan before without much success. Complicating the landscape in which this curriculum change was implemented is the structure of Pakistan's education sector which consists of three major streams; public, private and the *madrassa* (religious seminaries) system that cater to different student demographics. Differentiation in these student demographics is rooted firmly in the economic and social class of the students. This fragmentation of the education sector is also representative of an acknowledged education 'apartheid' that is a remnant of Pakistan's colonial legacy (Khattak, 2014). Further detail on this will be provided in Chapter 2.

The government denied using education reform or the SNC for political gains or for appeasing conservative sections of its voter base. The vision for the SNC which was proposed by the Federal government stated "*One system of Education for all, in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction and a common platform of assessment so that all children have a fair and equal opportunity to receive high quality education. Single National Curriculum is a step in that direction.*" (Ministry of Federal Education & Training, n.d.). Thus, according to the government, the underlying tenets of the SNC are an effort to correct inequalities in the access and quality of education in Pakistan by ensuring that all schools have the same minimum standards. However, it has been noted by various educationists and other civil society activists

that the difference in the quality of education does not stem from the diversity in curricula; They are a result of a multitude of factors that include income inequalities, poor public education, lack of infrastructure and resources in public schools and a low financial commitment to education which makes up a paltry 2% of Pakistan's budget in 2022 (World Bank, 2023).

Many critics have pointed out that the then government of Pakistan, led by the political party of *Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI)*, which promised a uniform curriculum in its manifesto in 2018 was politically motivated to show SNC as an achievement before Pakistan headed to the polls in 2023 (Javed, 2020). Robust debate in Pakistan by educationists, academics, and civil society activists pointed towards the hasty nature of the SNC curriculum reform and the weakness of the underlying rationale proposed by the PTI government for the policy change.

According to Hoodbhoy (2020), the SNC policy “prioritizes ideology over education quality and acquisition of basic skills.” Further, it is built on three flawed assumptions. Firstly, that the inequality in the three streams of education in Pakistan is due to the differences in curricula and prescribing a single curriculum will eradicate these. Secondly, he also negates that increasing the level of religious content within the curriculum will have an equalizing effect between rich and poor schools which differ vastly in both resources and education quality. Thirdly, Hoodbhoy (2020) argues that modern schooling with its emphasis on critical thinking and relevant world knowledge cannot be equated with *madrassa* education where the desired outcome is a religiously observant student body which necessitates a discouragement of critical thinking. The SNC policy also has a confusing stance on the medium of instruction which switches between English and Urdu in different subjects between grades 1-5. This has also been flagged as a major quality concern by education sector professionals as it is one of the reasons for school dropout in Pakistan in later years (Altaf, 2021).

Regardless of the intentions of the proposed SNC policy, its implementation is not completely within the control of the government, and it is dependent on the *institutions* and the *agency* of those who oversee the implementation of this policy change. According to Hodgson (2006, p.2), *institutions* can be defined as “as systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions.” Therefore, each of the three streams of education in Pakistan can be termed as institutions within their own right which have their own organizational arrangements, formal rules, unspoken norms and intended outcomes of education. As the implementation of any policy is also dependent on the institutions that are tasked to enact them, all policy situations are subject to existing institutional arrangements which are deliberately crafted (or circumvented) by individuals and groups (Polski & Ostrom, 1999).

As the implementation of revised curriculum plays out on the school and classroom level, the administration and the teachers are interpreters of the policy and will determine the ways in which it is implemented or circumvented. Equally important in the policy implementation are the student demographics and the expectations of those who enroll their children within these institutions. Bell and Johnson (2006) contend that education policy development is a process that occurs simultaneously at various levels which include the organization of educational institutions, leadership, and management of schools as well as teachers within classrooms. Thus, policy is rarely implemented as it is written or even as it is intended. However, policy does have a profound impact on the daily work of both teachers and administrators who work in schools (Rigby et al., 2016). Most importantly, given that improving student learning is the target of the intended policy, even in a truncated form it can be consequential for their future.

The implementation of the SNC policy in Pakistan presented an opportunity for me as a researcher to scrutinize and explore the policy implementation process at different institutions

(public and private) to understand how the culture and structures within these institutions coupled with the agency of teachers and administrators, determined the approach through which policy became practice.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research study is to investigate how public and private schools interpret the curriculum change policy and implement it in classrooms in Pakistan. Specifically, it focuses on the perspectives of teachers and administrators as the agents of change and interpreters of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) policy. I used an institutional analysis lens to examine how the SNC policy is turned into practice at the school and classroom level to shed light on the complexities of educational policy implementation as a dynamic space in Pakistan. This institutional analysis is rooted in a critical constructive paradigm as Pakistan's long history of colonial occupation under the British has impacted the historical development of institutions which includes its fragmented education sector. In addition to Pakistan's history, the heterogeneity of its society has also been a salient factor in the conservative leanings of its social and cultural attitudes. More contextual and background information on the Pakistani context, education sector and the Single National Curriculum will be provided in Chapter 2.

Since this is an exploratory study on policy implementation, I used themes from policy analysis literature and frameworks coupled with an institutional analysis lens to guide my study. The Chapter 3 will cover these theoretical perspectives in greater detail. This study has one main, overarching research question and three sub-questions.

1. How do schools (as institutions) understand, interpret, and implement the Single National Curriculum Policy in Pakistan?

- a. What are the perspectives of teachers and administrators as agents of change, on the Single National Curriculum (SNC) policy especially on the issues of gender, religion, and the quality of the course curriculum?
- b. Do the views of teachers and administrators differ according to the type of educational institutions (public or private) and the institutional arrangements within which they work?
- c. What role does institutional culture (public or private) play in the adaptation to or the circumvention of the SNC policy?

These research questions address how those tasked with the implementation of education policy understand, interpret and seek to enact it. They also focus on the role of institutional culture in public and private institutions in Pakistan and explore how policy is absorbed and reshaped to existing institutional arrangements. The research questions also seek to leverage the voice and agency of teachers and administrators who are responsible for implementing national policies and creating school level policies in accordance with their personal and institutional values. It does so to highlight how policy impacts diverse communities and stakeholders differently.

To conduct this research, I carried out a comparative case study in Punjab, Pakistan in one primary level public school, one primary level high-cost private school and one primary level low-cost private school. Differentiating private schools based on cost is important as low-cost private schools are a relatively recent phenomenon in Pakistan with almost 1 in every 3 enrolled children studying in private schools (Andrabi et al., 2007). According to Stake (2006), qualitative understanding of a case is predicated on the situation and the context(s) in which the activity under observation takes place. These are important because this impacts the experience

and the interpretation of the activity or phenomena we want to research (Stake, 2006). A qualitative multi-case study design is methodologically the most appropriate as I provide an in-depth description of the policy implementation process at the school level. Additionally, research at multiple sites makes this study more robust in terms of quality. Choosing schools as the stage of investigation aligns with the study's institutional focus.

Significance

This multiple case study used the implementation of the SNC policy in Pakistan as an opportunity to thoroughly explore policy implementation within specific institutional contexts. By understanding policy as both a *product* and a *process* (Taylor et al., 1997; Bell & Johnson, 2006; Ball, 1994), it investigated how the same policy of a single national curriculum change was interpreted in public and private schools within the limitations imposed by both the school culture and the agency of the teachers and administrators who work there. Understanding how the SNC policy is interpreted and operationalized at the school level can highlight potential areas which policymakers need to account for when laying out sweeping standalone policy prescriptions.

Due to its focus on the interpretation of policy by teachers and administrators, it offers a unique lens on how they make meaning of government issued education policies and the extent to which they incorporate them into their daily activities. Pakistan has a top-down policy structure and by centering the voice of the implementers, this study presents their ignored perspectives. It will also highlight the tension between organizational level policies and government mandated policies which can illuminate the complex power dynamics that are at play in Pakistan's education sector. Additionally, the SNC policy is a highly contentious issue within Pakistan. It is a policy prescription that has long term implications for not only schooling

and education but also Pakistani society. As one of the earliest academic studies on the topic, this dissertation provides an in-depth understanding of what the SNC policy is and what it aims to do, what rationales were put forward to justify it, what major criticisms have been levied against it, who does it seem to benefit, its practical feasibility and the extent to which it can achieve its stated objectives.

This study also adds to the extant literature on education policy analysis in comparative contexts and provides an example for the analysis of policy implementation from a critical constructivist perspective that can serve as a reference for similar studies in other contexts. The use of institutional analysis framework will also highlight the school as a unit of analysis with the agency of teachers and administrators affecting the policy process. As it is a multi-site case study that delves into the differences in private and public-school cultures in Pakistan, this study can also offer a useful window into the inequity that exists within and between different school streams in Pakistan.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a vital bird's eye view of this research study which examines the process of policy implementation at the school level at different types of institutions (public and private) in Pakistan. It also highlights how the study contributes to extant literature on policy analysis. In Chapter 2, I provide a thorough summation of the Pakistani context including a brief history of its colonial past, the development of its education sector, major educational reforms, and major stakeholders in the policymaking arena (international and national). In chapter 3, I discuss the literature on policy analysis from an institutional theory perspective and provide a detailed explanation of all relevant concepts utilized as the conceptual bedrock of this study. Chapter 4 covers the methodology and research design. Chapters 5-7 are within-case analyses of

each school in the study, Chapter 8 presents a cross-case analysis and Chapter 9 presents a discussion, conclusion and future directions for research.

Chapter 2: A Brief History of Education Reform in Pakistan and Punjab

This chapter seeks to situate this research both geographically and in historical context of Pakistan. It presents a timeline of the educational reform that Pakistan has undertaken and endeavors to emphasize the relationship between the politics of the state and the function education serves for it. It also explains the status Punjab holds within the Pakistani federation and the educational challenges that are Punjab faces. Lastly, this chapter provides an in-depth look at the SNC policy, government rationales for the policy and the major criticisms of the policy.

The Pakistani Context

The conception of Pakistan was rooted in an ideology of religious difference or the 'two nation theory'. This contended that Muslims and Hindus had different cultural and religious beliefs which necessitated the need for separate homelands to prevent the minority Muslims in the subcontinent from being oppressed by the Hindu majority (Krishan, 1998). The idea was to carve a separate homeland for the Muslims by bringing together the Muslim majority provinces in the East and West of British India and this was supported by Muslims from Hindu majority provinces as well as the Muslim clergy or the *ulema* of India (Krishan, 1998; Sayeed, 1963). At the same time, the religious card that was used to sell this magical solution to the public masked the influential members of the Indian elite that wanted separate homelands to guard their personal interests. Put simply, the politics that led to the partition of the subcontinent was a culmination of the decades long 'high' politics where politicians of the two main political parties the All-India Congress and the All-India Muslim League negotiated the borders of the two states

(India and Pakistan) that were to be created when the British presence withdrew from the subcontinent, without much influence from the masses that resided here (Gilmartin, 1998).

Pakistan came into existence on 14th August 1947 after a violent and traumatic partition from India. At its inception, it consisted of two parts; East Pakistan (what is now modern-day Bangladesh) which was separated from West Pakistan (comprising four contiguous provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and NWFP (North West Frontier Province now known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or KPK)) by almost a thousand-mile stretch of Indian territory (Sayeed, 1963). Partition also triggered a vicious and brutal mass migration of Hindus and Muslims across the borders of the newly created Indian and Pakistani states, with both sides committing atrocious acts against each other. Fear of violence led to a mass exodus of the white-collar communities of Hindus who worked as bureaucrats, bankers, engineers etc. from Pakistan leaving her bereft of an educated class that was sorely needed to guide the new state. At the same time, it brought especially to West Pakistan, an influx of Muslims (known as *Muhajirs*) which the new state had to accommodate into its diverse social fabric (Peshkin, 1963).

This top-down stitching together of different ethnicities and communities whose entire common heritage rested upon the perception of a shared religion brought with it unprecedented challenges. To counter the strength of regional and ethnic identity in the new state, attempts were made to create a shared identity and a past that rested on Islam as a cementing force. One of the first major challenges to this new national identity was the issue of language. At the time of partition, only 3.5% of Pakistani's spoke Urdu however, the speakers made up a core segment of Pakistan's leadership. At the same time, 57% of Pakistanis that resided in East Bengal spoke Bangla. Initially, the agenda of one nation and one language was explored with Urdu as the national language. However, due to push back from the Bangla speaking East Pakistanis, this

idea was reversed. It was decided that Bangla and Urdu would be co-national languages of East and West Pakistan respectively with English used for official purposes (Simpson, 2007). For West Pakistanis, the new national language was not native to them; rather it was an effort by the new Pakistani leadership to bolster national identity for the new state of Pakistan (Rahman, 1997).

Attempts at creating a monolithic Pakistani identity however faced tall odds and are largely considered to have failed. In 1971, after a prolonged civil war, East Pakistan seceded from West Pakistan due to a multitude of factors. These included economic rifts, unequal interprovincial transfer of resources benefitting West Pakistan and a denigration of Bengali identity and language. The deprivation of East Pakistan's rightful political power led to an independent Bangladesh and proved that Islam was not a firm enough glue to create a nation from such distinct ethnic identities (Ahmad, 1971).

Even beyond 1971, the regional identities of Pakistan remain strong. Punjab now retains the lion's share of political and economic power with the ethnic populations including Sindhis, Balochis and Pashtuns vying against the hegemony of the Punjabi and *Muhajir* elite. Regional and linguistic identities persist in Pakistan; In a 2003 survey conducted in Pakistan, it was found that this nation of 210 million people spoke 69 distinct languages and dialects which pointed towards a negation of the monolithic myth of Islam as a transcendent form of identity (Behuria, 2005). With this language diversity comes an access to nationalistic and regional ideals that do not tie in with the State's version of Pakistani history which often originates from the arrival of Muslim invaders to the subcontinent in the 8th century and especially glorifies personalities in the rule of Muslim invaders (Giunchi, 2007).

According to the 2017 Census of Pakistan, Muslims make up 96.2% of the population, Hindus comprise 1.6%, Christians 1.59 %, Ahmadis 0.22 %, scheduled castes 0.25% and other minorities 0.07% (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). It should also be mentioned that whilst Shia Muslims are not considered a minority in terms of statistics, they face similar challenges as the other minorities including decades of otherization, sectarian violence and discrimination. Estimates of the Shia population stand between 15-25 % of the Pakistani population (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2020). In the face of this complex heterogeneity, education has served as a master tool in the hands of the Pakistani governments through which political and nationalist agendas are pursued, with real and often detrimental consequences for Pakistani society.

Furthermore, *praetorianism*, which is defined by Haleem (2003) as “direct or indirect military intervention” has been a common feature of the Pakistani political landscape. This has arisen out of a combination of phenomena which include inept and weak civilian governments, the existence of a military-industrial complex, the argument that Pakistan is a garrison state, and the external enemy (India in this case) strengthens the need for a strong army (Shah, 2008). Additionally, Haleem (2003) contends that the utility of these frequent military interventions and coups is maintained by fluid civil-military alliances that foment sectarian violence and inter-ethnic clashes (Haleem, 2003).

On the educational front, Pakistan’s education system consists of three different sectors: private, public and *madrassa*. The quality of education offered across and within these different sectors varies greatly. In addition to the issues of access, there is also the issue of the disparity in education quality that is available. Private schools that make up approximately one-third of all schools in Pakistan offer instruction in English for which they charge t fees. The more elite the private school, the more expensive it is in Pakistan’s context. Therefore, the quality of education

reinforces and regurgitates the socio-economic class variations that already exist. Leading local academics have termed the current system as an “educational and linguistic apartheid”(Mahboob, 2020). Due to the history of how formal education has evolved in the subcontinent, Ali and Farah (2008) contend that “education became a tool of creating and maintaining distinctions rather than removing them.” As the historical overview which follows highlights, the current state of the education sector in Pakistan has evolved over time with successive iterations of policymaking that has served to maintain the economic and political hegemony of the elite class.

Domestic Education Policy Making: Intentions, Processes, and Outcomes

This historical overview is a timeline organized by major periods in Pakistan’s history. Each section presents a succinct summary of the era, its major political stakeholders, the direction in education reform, major educational policies, and any notable developments in the education sector. The purpose of this review is to situate this research within its broader sociopolitical context and provide an understanding of the relationship between the state and education sector policymaking in Pakistan. This relationship is crucial to understanding why the SNC policy is so polarizing in Pakistan and what repercussions it may have for education.

It should also be noted that Pakistan has undertaken numerous attempts at education sector reform; from 1948-1995 Pakistan introduced seven national education policies, eight five-year plans and several other educational programs at the national level (Bengali, 1999). Pakistan was also a signatory to the Education For All agenda (EFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) thus, some of its policy directions especially since the 2000s has been dictated by these international policy directions.

1947-1970: Education for Nation Building

In 1947, Pakistan had a total of 30 million people, with only 6 million living in urban areas. 65% of its labor force worked in its primarily agrarian economy, and 99.2% of its exports consisted of agricultural products. From an educational standpoint, only 10% of the population was literate (Anjum & Sgro, 2017). From the outset, education was seen as one of the chief priorities of the new country. In a 1948 address to the All-Pakistan Educational Conference, Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah admonished that Pakistan had an urgent need to give scientific and technical education to its people whilst at the same time creating a moral citizenry that would selflessly serve the nation through education (Jinnah, 1948 as cited in Peshkin, 1963). At this time, the bulk of the education system was public and private schools were mostly missionary run, English-medium institutions that catered to the very small elite class that comprised the bureaucracy, landowners, and elite military personnel (Andrabi et al., 2007).

With both manpower planning and civic education burden placed on the education sector (specifically the public education sector), the Central Advisory Board, a relic of colonized India, was reconvened to assess the state of education in Pakistan. The Central Advisory Board faced an uphill task as it was supposed to decide on numerous matters which included deciding on a medium of instruction, adding Islamic tenets or values to the education sector in line with political pressures, making focused attempts to increase the literacy rate and have more gender inclusion in schooling. Above all the task of "national reconstruction" was also laid at the feet of the education sector (Peshkin, 1963). In 1956, the first 5-year plan for the education sector was proposed by the Advisory Board. The main recommendations made in this report were to expand access to schooling particularly at the primary education, establish a system of adult education, set up a system of teacher training and review and revise the curriculum to meet the needs of the

nation. In this era immediately post partition, significant gains were made in the education sector however, the government kept falling short of its own goals.

On the political front, the civilian government of Pakistan was taken over by a bloodless coup that brought General Ayub Khan to power in 1958. He set up several committees including one for education which recommended the second five-year plan that covered the period from 1961-1965. A 1960 review done by the government of Pakistan found the results of the previous 5-year plan to have fallen short of intended targets (Parveen, 2008; Bengali, 1999). The Report of the Commission of National Education (1960) emphasized that education had four specific purposes: the development of the individual, the development of the citizen, the development of the worker and the development of the patriot (Peshkin, 1963). Thus, the purpose of education as understood by the state remained focused on both human capital and social cohesion.

The 1970's: The Era of Nationalization

The next major turn of events in Pakistan's education reform happened in the seventies. On the political front, East Pakistan became Bangladesh in 1971 and on the other hand, the populist government of Z.A Bhutto came to power in Pakistan. Bhutto's slogan of "*Roti, Kapra aur Makaan*" (food, clothes, and housing for all) brought him immense popularity with the masses especially the rural masses of Sindh. At the same time, since he threatened the status quo of control by elites, to which he himself belonged, he was unpopular with the ruling elites. His economic policies of social redistribution whilst popular with the public failed spectacularly. Two crop failures during his political tenure and the exodus of the industrial elite that feared having their wealth 'nationalized' led to an economic devaluation of the Pakistani economy (Ali, 1987; Zahoor, 2011).

Bhutto's socialist policies did not remain confined to economic industries. In 1972, he nationalized private educational institutions including the elite private schools as well as colleges and universities. In total, the government nationalized 3,334 educational institutions which included almost two thousand primary and secondary schools, 155 colleges and 5 technical and vocational schools (Sulehria, 2020). This nationalization added 25,000 teachers to the national exchequer which was not strong enough for this financial burden (Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, 1976). Additionally, the nationalization policy also failed to impact the elite institutions; exemptions were granted to certain schools especially at the K-12 level. Other elite schools, which had been established during British colonial rule, had public status because a public official sat on the school board, but they functioned as elite private institutions (Jimenez & Tan, 1987). In 1977, riding on the wave of economic discontent amongst the elite and the masses, the Pakistan Army overthrew the government of Bhutto who was imprisoned. (Ali, 1987).

The 1980's: The Islamization of the Education Sector

General Zia-ul-Haq declared martial law and became the new President in 1977. From 1977-1988, Pakistan faced the most intense period of Islamization since its inception. The sixth five-year plan, introduced in 1979, focused on the *madrassa* schools from the outset. These schools were not reliant on government money and were run by religious *ulema* through donations whilst providing room and board to students. Zia wanted to modernize the *madrassas* to a certain extent and pushed for the inclusion of modern subjects, such as history and general science, in addition to religious texts with *madrassas* devoting one-third of their time to the modern subjects; however, the backlash against this was extremely strong with conservative elements (specifically the *Deobandi* and *Baraelvi Schools*) of society protesting the

secularization of the government and education. The demand for a more modern curriculum was dropped but *madrassas* were allowed to give certificates to their graduates that held the same equivalence as college degrees if they could produce a sixteen-year curriculum. This included some other subjects such as Urdu and Persian which did not compete with the salience or emphasis on Islamic Law. Math and General Science were not considered at all (Siddiqa & Amin, 2010). Further, the state assumed responsibility for disbursing zakat funds to the *madrassas*. These two policies had a two-fold impact. Firstly, there was a mushroom growth of religious schools which swelled especially in the rural areas in almost all provinces. Secondly, with an increase in funding and the equivalence to formal schooling, the number of graduates from these seminaries also increased manifold. From 1978-1985, the *madrassas* produced 8,198 graduates which made 69% of all madrasa graduates since 1960 (Malik, 1989).

Another major development in the 1980s was the Islamization of the curriculum taught in public schools. According to Saigol (2005), the 1979 Education Policy gave the highest priority to the revision of curricula to be organized around Islamic thought so that “the younger generation had the necessary conviction and ability to refashion society according to Islamic tenets”. The subject of *Diniyat* (knowledge of religions) was replaced by the subject of *Islamiyat* (knowledge of Islam) and in doing so a radicalized orthodox version of Islam was mainstreamed via education. At the same time, this pushed minorities out of the education sphere (Awan, 2012). National citizenship education in the form of the social studies curriculum also aimed to increase the Islamization of society and it continued into the 2000s through the textbooks that reproduced this ideology. According to Ahmad (2004), the curriculum for civic education makes no distinction between religious education and citizenship education and thus aims to produce practicing Muslims over and above a democratic citizenry. These curricular objectives directly

contradicted the needs of non-Muslim students as well as students from the minority Muslim sects (Ahmad, 2004).

The Islamization of curriculum to bolster a sense of national unity and a Pakistani identity rooted in Islam led to the radicalization of Pakistani society. Part of this Islamization of the education sector rested on the foreign policy aims of reinventing the ideas of 'jihad' to create a fighting militia to oppose the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This was not done from any altruistic or religious motives per se. The military government stood to obtain millions of dollars in foreign aid from the United States to fight a proxy war against the Soviets. Consequently, this shift towards Islamization resulted in a permanent conservative shift within Pakistani society (Petrov-yoo, 2019). Once the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan was over, the presence of an armed and militant group that ascribed to the radical Islamic ideology pushed by the State contributed to extreme unrest in Pakistan in terms of sectarian violence and an increased marginalization of minorities (Fielden, 1998).

1990-2010: Conforming to International Education Agendas and Increasing Privatization

The 1990s marked a very unstable socio-political scene in Pakistan. Following Zia's assassination in 1988 this decade saw a return to civilian governance in the country. Till 1999, three separate governments were elected but not one was able to complete its term due to parliamentary actions. At the same time, focus on the sectors of health and education increased especially with international interest in Pakistan's low performance on social indicators such as education and health for a country with relatively high gross domestic product (GDP) (Pasha et al., 1995). The Social Action Program (SAP) was funded entirely by donor organizations including the World Bank and Asian Development Bank and it cost almost \$4 Billion. The major emphasis in the education sector of the SAP program was increasing enrollment and service

delivery of primary education especially by constructing more schools (Candland, 2001). Apart from the SAP, the influence of global education policy was also seen in national level policymaking and the target setting. As a signatory to the Education For All (EFA) agenda signed at Jomtien in 1990 as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) signed in 2000, Pakistan had made international commitments to achieve specific education targets. The three education plans, and the Education Sector Reform (ESR) documents introduced in these two decades reflect these goals. Ali (2012) noted that all policy documents released during this period had a visible difference in language which mirrored global education policy. Gender sensitive provisions, meeting EFA targets of universal primary enrollment, involving civil society and NGOs as well as privatization were some salient themes.

With the return of a military government under General Pervez Musharraf in 1999, education policy in Pakistan returned to the drawing board. Under the Musharraf government and in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terror attacks on New York and Washington DC, greater scrutiny landed on the *madrassa* schools and renewed attempts to integrate them into the mainstream and regulate them were started (Khokhar, 2007). Additionally, the Musharraf government launched the Education Sector Reform programs that provided an action plan for the achievement of the 1998-2010 education policy. This included accommodation of all education programs run by the education ministries under the ESR, a greater decentralization of decision-making centered at the district level as opposed to provincial and federal centers and a review and revision of the national curriculum (Ali, 2012). At the same time, the outcomes that the education reforms and policies focused on were those set out by the EFA agenda and the MDG agenda.

Despite these measures taken to meet greater enrollment and quality targets, the GDP spending on education remained low which made the achievement of universal primary education and other goals unlikely. Easterly (2001) analyzed Pakistan as a case study and called it a case of ‘growth without development’. He contended that the reason for low levels of social development in Pakistan were a result of two issues. Firstly, the elite of Pakistan whether they were the large feudal landowners, industrialists, or bureaucrats, found it expedient to withhold quality education from the public as that made them easier to control whilst their own children attended quality private schools. Secondly, the ethnic and sectarian divisions within the country meant that consensus on how much to spend on public goods was always a contentious decision (Easterly, 2001).

The last major development of this 20-year period was the mushrooming of the low-fee private school industry (Benz, 2012; Andrabi et al. 2002). In one estimate by Andrabi et al. (2007), the number of low fee private schools increased from 32 000 in 2000 to 47 000 in 2005. By 2015, the number of private schools had risen to 70,000 (Das, 2023). This was partially in response to the emphasis on public private partnerships (PPP) which were encouraged by international donors and policy drivers as a way to mitigate state spending on education (Farah & Rizvi, 2007). Whilst this was an improvement in access, especially in rural and peri-urban areas of developing countries, these schools tended to employ untrained teachers thus providing lower quality education (Fennell, 2013). In 2017–2018, almost 38% of all educational institutes were private and catered to 44% of total enrollment in Pakistan. (Pakistan Institute of Education, 2021).

2010-2020: Decentralization and Education Reforms

The end of Musharraf's military government saw the return of civilian government and Pakistan went to the ballot box in 2008 (Shah, 2008). To strengthen democracy and weaken the control of the center on provinces, the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan was passed in April of 2010. The key features of the amendment were the devolution of power to the provinces, so they had greater autonomy over certain service sectors such as education and health. For education, provincial autonomy was accompanied by Article 25-A which made State provision of education from the ages of 5-16 a compulsory right of the children (Shah, 2012). Provincial autonomy in the education sphere encompassed syllabi, curricula, planning and policy initiatives and the maintenance of standards of education. According to Siddiqui (2010), dissent to this fragmentation of control on state education followed swiftly especially from the Federal Ministry of Education. The chief arguments presented focused on the nation building responsibility of education which required central control, the inability of provincial capacity to undertake education as a portfolio and the need for standardization of curricula and assessments across provinces (Siddiqui, 2010). Despite objections, the control of education was shifted to the provinces leading to a diversification of education planning and implementation.

Provincial autonomy over education did not mean that the provinces were free of influence from different policy stakeholders or national commitments for education. Additionally, expanding access to education was to be done through additional financing of foreign aid which came with strings attached including an increased emphasis on public-private partnerships (Ali, 2012). As a signatory to the MDGs, Pakistan was expected to meet Goal 2 of universal primary education at the primary level however, none of the provinces were able to achieve this target with enrollment ratio in 2013 estimated to be at 71.9%. With the shift of focus

from national to provincial level, regional disparities also came into stark display. Punjab as the most infrastructurally developed province was far ahead of other provinces in the efforts to meet MDG targets of universal primary education (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015).

Despite its inability to meet the MDG targets, Pakistan became a signatory of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2016. According to Salik (2016), the MDGs were mostly focused on developing countries and gave focal targets to their governments around which policy was to be constructed on social measures. At the same time, progress on these goals were a signal to donor nations on how effective their aid was. The SDGs are broader in scope with 17 interconnected goals that require collective action and the participation of all nations, not just developing countries. According to the UN, the core framework of the SDGs is trifold with a focus on economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection (Morton et al, 2017). Unlike the ad hoc manner in which the various goals of the MDGs were pursued, the SDGs have a more formal incorporation in Pakistan's national development agenda . These goals are woven into the Vision 2025 National Policy document as well as provincial policy documents. Pakistan's progress on the SDGs, however, will depend on the concerted political commitment and stability as well as meaningful democratic opportunities especially for marginalized communities such as women (Cho et al., 2018).

2020-2023: A Return to Political and Economic Instability

The 2020-2023 years for Pakistan have been marked by economic and political instability. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns, the agricultural value chains, a cornerstone of Pakistan's economy, were disrupted. This was accompanied by the compounding of longstanding challenges in the industrial and manufacturing sectors of Pakistan's economy which suffered greatly and contracted by 0.47% in 2019-2020. This

followed on weak growth of 1.9% in the previous year (Government of Pakistan Finance Division, 2021). In the face of economic hardship, the ruling political party, PTI, started to face increasing pressure from its political opposition and it also lost the confidence of the military establishment which had provided it with vital support in the 2018 polls. After facing a no confidence vote in the Parliament, Prime Minister Imran Khan was removed from office in April 2022 and a coalition government of the major opposition parties took over (Abenante, 2023).

In the immediate aftermath of the no confidence vote, PTI started a protest campaign against the new government and what it termed as the unfair ouster of Prime Minister Khan. PTI's members of the national assembly resigned from the government instead of sitting in the opposition. Imran Khan also decided to dissolve the provincial governments in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where his party held a majority to force the government to hold early elections (Farooq, 2022). Additionally, in an unprecedented about face, Imran Khan openly called out the military for intervening in the democratic affairs of the state. In retaliation, the new government (under military patronage) accused Imran Khan and his family of corruption and opened several investigations of the PTI chairman who was forced to constantly appear in the courts to defend himself and avoid arrest.

On May 9th, 2023, Imran Khan was arrested for corruption from the Islamabad High Court. His party called for a mass protest which led to clashes between the military and the protestors. Several military installations were attacked in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Khan denied any knowledge of these protests and distanced his party and himself from the chaos. The State's response was to term May 9th a black day in the country's history. PTI and Khan were accused of dividing the nation and instigating it against the Army. Mass arrests of those involved in the May 9th protests were carried out. The military also announced that under the

‘Pakistan Army Act and the Official Secrets Act’ civilians thought to be masterminds of the May 9th unrest would be tried in military courts (Wolf, 2023).

As of November 2023, Pakistan was still under immense economic pressure and political instability is not helping its economic outlook with the country approaching the IMF for a record 23rd time to bailout the economy and prevent default (International Monetary Fund, 2023). On the political front, the current parliament was dissolved on August 10th, 2023, and a caretaker set up of technocrats took over the government. The elections, which are constitutionally mandated to be held within 90 days of the end of the previous government, have been delayed indefinitely. All of this points to a reemergence of the Army in the forefront of Pakistan’s political sphere (Baloch, 2023). Given the bleak economic and political outlook, for the moment, education policy is on the backburner. The Single National Curriculum has been renamed the National Curriculum of Pakistan without any major changes proposed to it, as the central goal of national unity remains at the forefront of political agendas (Dawn News, 2023).

Focus on Punjab

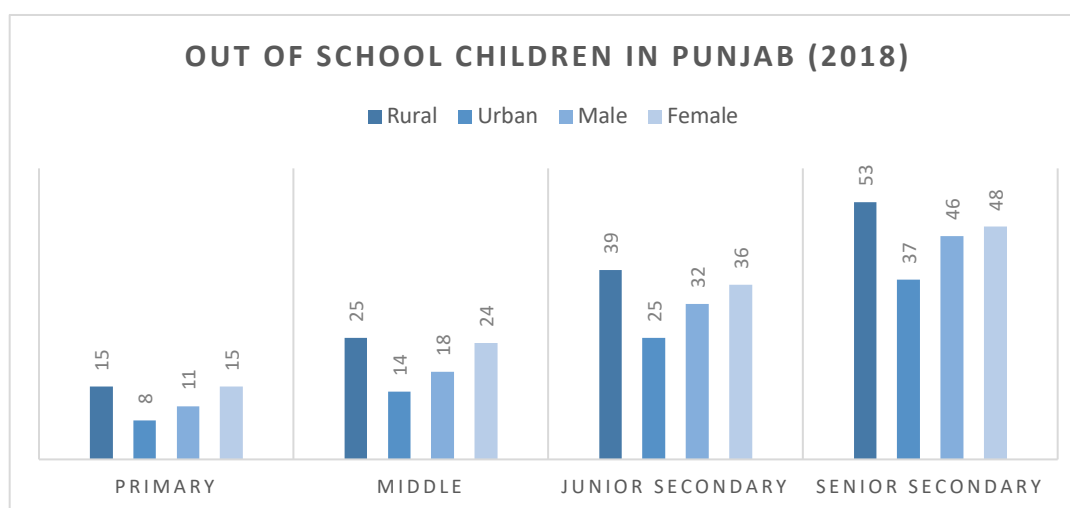
As the research sites are in Punjab, an in-depth look at the province is warranted to provide more detailed context for the study. Punjab is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of population with a 53% share. According to the 2017 census, Punjab had 110 million people (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). As the focus of an authoritative state that has consistently prized national identity building and a strong center to the detriment of regional identities of the other provinces, Punjab is consistently advantaged with a larger share of national resources (Siddiqi, 2011). Therefore, the other provinces and ethnic groups are always competing against Punjab for their share of resources and opportunities (Ayeris, 2008).

Additionally, Punjabis make up the bulk of the Pakistan's military and bureaucracy, both of which gatekeep the other provinces from making significant progress in all fields. Compared to the other provinces, Punjabis are the most literate with literacy rates of 72% for men and 57 percent for women and an 89% enrollment rate in primary school (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). According to the Pakistan Living Standards Measurement Survey 2019-2020, (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2020), the use of facilities including basic health units, schools, police, family planning and agricultural support was above the national average in Punjab. This pattern of greater access to services and governmental resources has persisted since gaining independence from the British in 1947. As Ayeres (2008, p.921) put it, "All the indicators tell us, in short, that there are more Punjabis than anyone else in Pakistan, and they are better off than everyone else, with more productive land, cleaner water, better technology and better educated families."

Even though Punjab is comparatively better off than other provinces, it still faces formidable odds in terms of development, especially within education. The number of out of school children in Punjab stands at 10.5 million according to the latest 5-year Punjab Education Sector Plan 2019-2024 (Government of Punjab, 2018). Although this is lower than other provinces, it falls well short of fulfilling the constitutional promise of compulsory free education for children between 5-16 years of age. With each successive level, the proportion of out of school children increases; At the primary level, 13 % of students are out of school and this increases to 21%, 34% and 47% at the middle, junior and senior secondary school respectively. Figure 1 shows proportion of out of school children by rural-urban divide and gender reported by UNICEF (2022). There are more children out of school in rural areas as compared to urban areas at each level. More girls are out of school than boys at all levels of schooling.

Figure 1

Proportion of Out of School Children in Punjab by Location and Gender (in Percentage)



Note: Adapted from MICS data as presented in Pakistan Education Factsheets (2022) by UNICEF.

According to the School Information System dashboard, there are a total of 48,504 public schools in Punjab, serving 12.06 million students and employing approximately 337,753 teachers (School Education Department, n.d.). For the students in school, the quality of education remains below par. From a learning levels perspective, the Annual Status of Education Survey (ASER) conducted in 35 rural districts of Punjab, across 1018 villages, in 2021, showed that only 68% of students in grade 5 could read a story in Urdu, 73% could read sentences in English and 69% could do 2-digit division (ASER, 2021).

From an administrative perspective, Punjab's education sector is populated by numerous entities that are a part of the provincial policymaking and educational oversight apparatus, which is a testament to centralized control that the provincial government has on education. The School Education Department (SED) is the main body responsible for implementing national and provincial legislation related to education. It is responsible for maintaining the standards of education from K-12, organizing the monitoring and evaluation system, distributing textbooks

and the implementing development schemes. It also works on staff development through training and professional development and sets the regulatory policies for private schools (School Education Department, 2023). The School Education Department is also affiliated with several autonomous bodies that are expected to aid it in its various functions. These include the Punjab Textbook Board (PCTB) responsible for creating low price textbooks with government approved material, the Punjab Education Commission (PEC) that conducts annual examinations in grades 5 and 8 across public schools in Punjab and the Punjab Education Foundation which fosters public-private partnerships to improve schooling access in underprivileged areas of the province. The breadth of the functions that the SED holds show how schools, especially public schools have very little autonomy in education related matters (School Education Department, n.d.).

In addition to the centralized education apparatus described above, the provincial assembly has passed several laws that impact education. Notably, *The Muttehida Ulema Board Punjab Act (2022)* was passed which gives oversight powers on educational content to a board consisting of Muslim clerics . Similarly, in 2018, *The Punjab Compulsory Teaching of the Holy Quran Act (2018)* was passed which makes it compulsory for all schools to teach the recitation of the Quran with translation all through grades 1-12. Passage of such laws, especially those that further entrench the religious elements within the education sector, reflect how education is viewed as a means to create a religious and moral citizen that does not have the desire or the capacity to cause disruptions in the status quo created by the political elite.

The Cities of Kamalia and Lahore

It is pertinent to give some basic context on the cities where this research was conducted. Kamalia is a city in southern Punjab, approximately 200 kilometers away from the provincial capital of Lahore. It is a sub-district of Toba Tek Singh which is its administrative center. The

city is surrounded by several villages which are fertile, and cash crops are grown in this region including sugar cane and cotton. Kamalia is famous for producing *Khaddar* which is a woven fabric made of natural fibers such as cotton (Miraj, 2013). The city has a population of 135,641 people whereas the surrounding rural villages have a population of 236, 210 according to the 2017 census (Punjab Bureau of Statistics, 2017). From an educational standpoint, there are 222 public schools in Kamalia sub-district with a total enrollment of 56 000 students. Of the 222 schools, there are 134 primary schools, 55 middle schools, 34 high schools and 4 higher secondary schools. In addition, according to the registration records in the private school registration portal (PEPRIS), Kamalia also has 103 private schools across all levels (Government of Punjab, n.d.).

When I traveled to Kamalia from Lahore for the research, it was a 3-hour journey via an intercity motorway. Access to the city passes through agricultural fields, poultry farms as well as ginning and sugar mills. The National Highway cuts through the city and is its busiest road with restaurants and shops on both sides of the roads. All along the main road, there are several private schools and colleges that are being run inside regular houses. Each private school has billboards, announcing results of past pupils, offers for evening tuitions for board exams and admission information. As Kamalia is a city on the rural periphery, it is much more conservative than Lahore. As a result, women are mostly absent from public; whilst the shops and the roads were crowded, there were few women to be seen. Those who were seen had their heads covered with *chaddars* (cloths that cover the full body). I was also asked by my hostess to wear a *chaddar* when visiting schools as it was not appropriate to have my head uncovered in public.

In contrast, Lahore is one of the major urban centers of Pakistan and it is the provincial capital of Punjab. It has a great cultural and historical footprint in the Indian subcontinent and

has been the seat of government for many rulers including the Mughals, the Sikhs and the British. Lahore's history is writ large in its architecture from the Mughal Emperor Akbar's grand Lahore Fort to the British Empire's Railway Station and Post Office buildings. Lahore is a sprawling city that is dotted with both historical and modern landmarks. Wealthier people have created their own suburbs with state-of-the-art private schools and colleges, restaurants, and cafes whilst the working class live in poorer, overcrowded neighborhoods with lower-cost private schools or public schools. According to the 2017 Census, the city had a population of 11 million (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). To serve this population, there are 1,122 public schools with a total enrollment of 650,000 students (School Education Department, n.d.). In addition to these schools, PEPRIS shows that over 3200 private schools have been issued e-licenses to operate in Lahore with more than 2200 waiting for approval (Government of Punjab, n.d.).

The Single National Curriculum Policy

Understanding Punjab's place within the Pakistani State and the broad contours of its education sector highlight the context in which the Single National Curriculum policy was implemented in 2021. This section delves in depth into the Single National curriculum policy, highlighting its objectives, government rationales for choosing curriculum for resource allocation and the criticisms generated in the public space against the imposition of the SNC.

Objectives of the SNC policy

The SNC is a policy prescription that was presented as an attempt to create a unified education system in Pakistan in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction and a common assessment framework. The salient objectives of the SNC are to provide fair and equal access to

high quality education for all children, to create social cohesion and national integration, to remove disparities in curriculum content between the three streams (public, private and *madrassa*) and to foster holistic development of children keeping in view international trends (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2020).

The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training presented a lengthy list of considerations that were kept in mind when the SNC was developed. These can be grouped into three categories. The most salient in this list were considerations of religion and nation building; these include the “teachings of the Quran & Sunnah” followed by the “vision” of Pakistan’s founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Pakistan’s Constitution as well as a focus towards building respect and appreciation for different cultures and religions in local and global contexts. The second major category was the influence of international policy trends and assessments. This includes the SDG Goal 4 and its targets, focus on 21st century analytical and thinking skills, alignment with Trends in International Mathematics and Science study (TIMSS) and a move away from rote learning. The last category focuses on assessment criteria that include an outcome-based approach and benchmarking against national and international standards (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2020). Key features of the SNC policy included an earlier start to religious education for both Muslims and Non-Muslim students with Islamiyat or religious education as a separate subject from grade 1 instead of grade 3. The student learning outcomes (SLOs) in Math and Science were aligned with the TIMSS framework and the requirements of SDG 4. Technology had been incorporated into the SNC curriculum for the first time and the expectation was that this curriculum will be enforced in all three streams of education without differentiation (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, n.d.).

According to the Director of the National Curriculum Council, Dr. Mariam Chugtai, 400 people, representing different stakeholders, contributed to the creation of the curriculum. These included teachers, government officials, education experts, civil society activists and minority representatives who according to the government were star performers in their fields. However, the process of the selection of these 400 representatives was never made public. She further asserted that the curriculum was a first step towards holistic educational change that had 4 tiers: uniform minimum standards, good quality books, teacher development and an updated assessment structure which included concept-based assessment (Ghias, 2021). Further, the compulsory teaching of the Quran within schools was prescribed by *The Punjab Compulsory Teaching of the Holy Quran Act 2018* and the SNC just provided clear student learning objectives to make the process more streamlined in schools (Shaikh, 2020). It is important to note that when the policy was introduced in 2020, the government insisted that the SNC meant the same curriculum of education across all schools, without any exceptions. Later, in the face of pushback and the realization that such an endeavor was an impossible task to monitor, the SNC was rebranded as minimum standards (Ghias, 2023).

Major Criticisms of the SNC policy

This policy faced an extensive amount of pushback from various sectors of the Pakistani population. To put it simply, the SNC policy attributed differences in educational access to differences in curriculum as opposed to differences in resources, institutional objectives, increasing inequality between social classes and parental expectations.

Educationists were particularly alarmed by the level of religious education this policy deemed necessary for Pakistani children and several called it out for being an indoctrination tool for the federal government. According to Torwali (2020), the SNC aims to homogenize and

assimilate the diverse cultures of Pakistan under one unified culture imposed from the top. This is evident in the SNC policy language which holds Urdu as the most important language at the expense of regional and cultural languages. Additionally, it seeks to mainstream *madrassa* education and appease the powerful conservative security and religious lobby at the expense of religious minorities who are also subject to pervasiveness of Islam in the SNC curriculum outside of the religious education subject (Torwali, 2020).

An analysis of the religious curriculum suggested by the SNC found that it had more religious instruction than the current curriculum of *madrassas* themselves. Whilst students from the religious minorities are not expected to study *Islamiyat* as a subject, other subjects such as English and Urdu also contain religious content. This includes chapters on Islamic religious figures and the weaving of Muslim lifestyle throughout the educational content in the form of tenets and anecdotes (Razzaque, 2021). In doing so, the SNC policy violates the constitutional right of minorities to religious freedom under Article 22 of the Pakistani Constitution which prohibits educational institutions from imposing religious teachings on any student who is not a follower of that religion (Akhter, 2021). Thus, the erasure of minorities continues unabated in the curriculum. Further, Pakistan is a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, under which, parents have the right to choose the religious education of their children. By imposing a religious national curriculum, the government is violating the rights of the parents (Naqvi, 2021).

Another prominent criticism of the Single National Curriculum is that it seeks to distract from the actual problems that beset public education in Pakistan and fails to address the root causes of any of them. At present, Pakistan has 22.6 million children out of school despite education being a responsibility of the state as per Article 25A of the Constitution. The SNC

policy has no way of addressing this issue and children who are not in school cannot avail the purported benefits of the SNC. Looking deeper, gender inequality in education is tied to the school dropout issue. Without re-enrolling these children in school, gender parity will not be addressed (Naqvi, 2021).

Given the plethora of problems, education in Pakistan faced critics on many fronts including lifelong educationists, civil society leaders and parents who oppose framing education policies and debates around a national curriculum. According to Babar (2020), the focus needs to be on the quality minimum standards in education, improving the quality of teachers, and the infrastructure of public schools. Similarly, Durrani (2021), points out that the SNC wants a unified education system by demonizing the education imparted in elite private schools as too liberal and western minded. However, prescribing a set of limitations or unification standards on private schools in the form of the SNC does not mean that public schools will become better resourced and have better quality teachers, both of which are essential for the learning that happens in the classroom. By focusing on creating a uniform education system that inhibits critical thinking and promotes the erasure of Pakistan's diversity of cultures and languages, the SNC policy diverts resources from targeted policies that can be fruitful such as in-service teacher training. Additionally, meaningful reforms require massive investment of resources. In Pakistan however, the education budget is about 2.5% of GDP most of which is utilized in paying teachers (World Bank, 2021). Without resources, palliative education measures do not address the education apartheid. Instead, they end up absolving the government of its responsibilities of improving access to quality education (Durrani, 2021).

The government insisted that the new standards were built upon those introduced in 2006. The "modernist backlash" of the critics was orchestrated by liberals who were unhappy with the

enrichment of Islamic education within the school systems in line with the values of the Pakistani society. However, in response to the criticisms leveled against the policy, the government held out an olive branch to its critics and changed the proposed policy from uniform to minimum standards. If all schools met the minimum requirements ascertained by the government, they were allowed to teach additional topics. Certain aspects of the policy could not be avoided. It was compulsory to teach the Quran in Arabic to grades 1-5 with the expectation that students would complete the whole book before entering middle school, at which point, they would re-read it along with translations. A new subject, called *Waqfiat-e-Aama* (General Knowledge), replaced Science and Social Studies in grades 1-3 and was to be taught in Urdu. In Grade 4, Science and Social Studies were to be reintroduced, with science being taught in English and Social Studies in Urdu. From grades 1-5, the language of instruction for Math was English. This was in line with agenda of teaching English as a second language as opposed to a subject and highlighting the use of Urdu as the national language (Nazeer & Khan, 2021).

Conclusion

The historical overview given in this chapter showcases the complex space education occupies within Pakistan's sociopolitical fabric as it is viewed as an instrument of 'nation building' with an emphasis on a mythical 'Islamized' past (Gilmartin, 1998). Additionally, it is also held responsible for producing a certain type of citizen that can help maintain the current status quo which benefits the establishment (Ahmad, 2004). Devolution of education to the provinces threatens this mythic nationhood by giving more control especially to the marginalized provinces (Siddiqui, 2010). The SNC is a step to reverse control to the original script of central regulation despite this being against the Constitution of Pakistan. The Federal Government of

Pakistan led by the political party *Tehreek-i Insaf (PTI)* held control of three provincial legislatures in three of the four provinces when the SNC was adopted, however, only Punjab began piloting the SNC policy in grades 1-5. Sindh, which has a different party (Pakistan People's Party) in power, is the only province that has not agreed to implement the SNC in public or private schools.

Following the dismissal of Imran Khan as Prime Minister, the SNC has now been renamed the National Curriculum of Pakistan. It has now been adopted by the other provinces and implemented in all grades from ECE-12. At the behest of the coalition Prime Minister, Shahbaz Sharif, two additional subjects were added to the curriculum. One is called the 'Constitution of Pakistan' which ensures that students have knowledge of the Constitution, and the other is 'Coding' which is to help develop 21st century skills in students (Ministry of Federal Education and Training, n.d.). For this dissertation, I will refer to the policy as the SNC as it was the term used in the interviews and field visits.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Issues and Related Research

This chapter presents a literature review that has guided this research and situates it in the policy analysis realm. It provides an overview of theories and frameworks that examine the policy process and problematize its implementation through identifying the multitude of factors that impact the extent to which it is effectuated. Specifically, it discusses the literature on the nature of education policy. It also looks at the role of institutions in the policy process and provides the necessary nuance to policy evaluation frameworks. It examines the importance of contexts in which policy operates and discusses the mechanisms through which it transforms from written edicts to actions. As schools are the site where this investigation takes place, it also examines relevant literature from organizational theory to provide the unique institutional lens that is employed in this study. Using this foundation, it discusses the conceptual frameworks that underpinned my research framework for examining the SNC policy.

Understanding Education Policy and its Implementation

Examining the implementation of any policy necessitates an attempt to provide nuance to the understanding of both ‘policy’ and the ‘policy process’ especially as it applies to the field of education. Any definition of policy is limited or oversimplified if it cannot account for the multiple ways in which policy is understood by those who formulate and implement it. In the literature, the most prominent understanding of policy is that of an *outcome*. Policy can be understood as rational programs or purposive actions that address a specific need or gap as well as statements of how that gap can be addressed (Dye, 2017; Blakemore & Warwick-Booth, 2013). Along similar lines, others have conceptualized policy as a specific field of activity, a

general purpose, decisions of government, formal authorization and the actions and positions taken by the state from a position of collectivity and authority (Wedel et al., 2005; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Nudzor, 2009). Public policy, of which education policy is a subset, is thus a normative prescriptive program through which governments try to steer the behavior of people as well as meet their needs (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Blakemore & Warwick-Booth, 2013; Dye, 2017). This understanding of policy assumes that policy is systematic and goal oriented and relatively straightforward. However, this disconnects policy from the process of its implementation which is rife with competing interests and the politics of sociocultural power dynamics that are already at play in society which determine resource allocation (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2017). Here, those with power in society define the problem, settle on the solution, and define the pathways through which that solution can be reached (Bell & Johnson, 2006).

Once the role of power is acknowledged within the education policy arena, it can be seen that the shortcoming of understanding policy as an *outcome* is that it assumes policy to be value free and neutral. This is a simplistic understanding of a complex process. As pointed out by Boyd (1999), educational problems are value-laden and have direct implications for the access to opportunities, social justice and the future direction and structure of society especially given resource constraints, competition for public funding and the role of the state in policymaking. This notion of policy as a tool for partisan resource allocation is further explored by Easton (1985). For him, policies are a point of equilibrium that results from the pressures created by competing interest groups on decisionmakers. This equilibrium is an “authoritative allocation of values for a society” (Easton, 1985).

According to Kogan (1975/2018), education policymaking is a political manifestation of the authoritative allocation of values. The political nature of policymaking in education stems

from the fundamental questions that center on the purpose of education. Who is education for and what is its purpose? The answers to these questions are reflective of the context in which policy or programs are created and can range from human capital rationales of workforce productivity to citizenship building exercises at the behest of the state. Kogan (1975/2018) proposes that there are four key values that are foundational to policy making: educational, social, economic, and institutional. The first three values are basic or instrumental and are considered fundamental in nature which require no justification for those who believe it. Institutional values are secondary and deal with consequences, institutions and the methods through which objectives or goals are achieved by political bureaucracies (Kogan, 1975/2018).

Luke and Hogan (2006) understand this allocation of “values” within education policy making as the prescriptive flow of human resources including capital and the steering of general discourse across educational systems to achieve normative socioeconomic and cultural goals. In real world terms, this encapsulates the variety of ways in which resources are allocated, funding disbursed, and priorities set out. It also encompasses the context of the problem which the proposed policy intends to solve (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). This allocation of values is particularly glaring in arenas of language and curriculum policies where those groups that lack power lose out to the more dominant factions that control the political and economic structures within diverse societies.

However, this is a top-down view of the policy process. Honig (2006), posits that policy implementation processes have evolved in complexity to keep up with policy designs that have moved from being targeted and specific to addressing more systemic issues such as equity. As the goals of the policy widen, so do the myriad of interactions between the people and the places with which policy interacts. Whilst they may be dwarfed in the face of powerful entities such as

governments and their political apparatus, actors who are responsible for operationalizing the policy into practice are a compelling force that determine the extent to which policy is implemented as designed. According to Malen (2006), actors come into the policy implementation process laden with their own complex values, subjectivities, orientations, and preferences which they use to interpret the policy problem and solution they are expected to execute. This may be aligned to the proposed policy or in conflict with it. In states like Pakistan, where the State and select institutions within it have a monopoly on both economic resources and political power, the values of society are fostered according to the will of the military and political elite. As discussed in Chapter 2, persistent efforts to create a homogenous “Pakistani identity” through the creed of “one language” and “one religion” has led to a conservative shift in society that seems difficult to reverse. At the same time, the failure of policy schemes that aim to foster a synthetic national identity is a testament to the power that the multitude of non-state actors possess.

On the other hand, a lot of education policy evaluation literature considers policy to be both *process* and *outcome*. Ball (1993) conceptualizes policy as a cycle which includes political agenda setting, production of the policy texts as well as implementation processes. He understood policy to represent both the text which is produced as well as the intended and unintended actions that result during policy implementation Ball (1993). This observation alludes to the fact that there is always a potential gap between the intended outcome of a policy and an actual outcome of a policy. This gap results from a multiplicity of organizational and practical arrangements at the site of policy implementation such as schools, the existing systems of inequalities within which they function, as well as the interpretive ability and the agency of individuals that are charged with the implementation process. He states that “policy is not

exterior to inequalities, although it may change them, it is also affected, inflected and deflected by them” (Ball, 1993, p. 11-12) . Inequality is a fundamental aspect of Pakistan’s education sector, and the SNC promises to change the gap between different types of schools. However, the constraints that are placed at the site of implementation determine to what extent that is a feasible objective.

Taylor et al., (1997), posit a similar viewpoint of policy as both outcome and process. In their conceptualization, policy goes beyond text or document to encompass the production process of the policy text, the text itself, and any ongoing modifications as well as the implementation processes. The inclusion of the idea of modifications to both policy text and implementation processes implies that policy is dynamic in nature and will be altered even as it is being implemented.

Another key idea that is often ignored in oversimplified understandings of education policy is the importance of context. Policy as outcome assumes a linear trajectory from the formulation of policy to its implementation to its outcome. For example, Jennings (1997), conceptualized the policy process as a step-by-step linear prescription where each subsequent step follows at the conclusion of the previous stage of the process. This indicates that there is no overlap between any of the stages. In the first step of initiation, there is evidence that identifies a problem that needs to be addressed. Following the identification of the problem, opinions regarding the problem are reformulated and policy options are presented to leaders formally. These options are debated on by both politicians and the public and once appropriate consent building has occurred, a key policy from the options is selected and administrative procedures for its implementation are operationalized (Jennings, 1977).

Ball (1994), on the other hand thinks of policy as a cycle that is non-linear, messy, and contested at multiple levels by multiple stakeholders. These different levels include the context of influence, text production as well as policy practice and implementation. The interactions between these various contexts have a direct impact on how closely the intended outcomes of any policy are achieved. Building on Ball's (1994) conception of policy as both product and process, Bell and Johnson (2006), also conceptualize policy as a duality that includes both process and outcome. The product aspect of policy includes statements of strategic, operational, and organizational values. The process aspect of policy encompasses the capacity of the policy makers or the system to operationalize these values. For Bell and Johnson (2006), values that underpin any policy within education are politically motivated and by operationalizing them, there is an implicit recognition that values are not neutral. They are constantly being contested, shaped, and reshaped through negotiation, conflict, and compromise. Thus, policy implementation happens as a process that crosscuts across multiple contexts.

The Multiple Contexts of Policymaking

As discussed in the above section, context is a key element of any discussion of policy. In a way, it limits and defines the extent to which the policy will be able to achieve the objectives that are set out in the text. Policy creation and implementation occurs simultaneously in several contexts which can be conflicting, reinforcing, or neutral to each other. These now extend from the supranational to the local. (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Therefore, it is important to discuss some of the different contexts within which policy development happens.

On the supranational scale, globalization is a major factor that impacts national policy development. This is a result of increasing social and political linkages between nation

states. Policy discourse and agenda setting that takes place in the supranational context is driven by international organizations such as UNESCO, The World Bank, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) etc. These organizations and the policy directions they choose have a direct impact on the policymaking that happens at the national and local levels especially for nations that belong to the global south (Vavrus, 2005).

This influence is not only codified as policy documents within programs and projects funded by these organizations but also manifests in international treaties and development agendas such as Education For All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) etc. When nations sign up to be signatories to such agendas, they are necessarily choosing to follow the policy prescriptions, goals and outcomes ascribed in these documents. From here, the discourse language filters down into national level policy discourses and is again codified within policy documents that are then assigned to be implemented in schools and classrooms. Thus, the global context has implications for national and local policies especially in countries that are economically dependent on external funding for meeting basic social development needs.

A prime example of this is the structural adjustment policies that arose out of the international debt crisis in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Vavrus, 2005). At the behest of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, countries in Asia, Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa were tasked with a restructuring of their economies to gain access to more loans and avoid defaults on payments (Vavrus, 2005). A key demand of the structural adjustment policies was reduced spending on social sectors such as education and health. Whilst nations were free to choose whether to adopt these policies or not, they were unlikely to stay afloat economically without doing so (Peet, 2003). In an article on the impact of structural adjustment policy led

austerity in the public sectors on local opportunities for education, economic opportunities, and health in Tanzania, Vavrus (2005) found that these policies resulted in greater access for the privileged due to the cost sharing and user fees but fewer opportunities for those who were classified as poor or near poor. Thus, even as supranational policies aim to influence national policymaking, they filter down to the local level where they overlap with the local context. Any interpretation of these policies is subject to the constraints imposed by these overlapping contexts.

At the same time, the national level socio-historical context cannot be ignored at all. The localized history of the nation state, its past priorities and other policies that set the precedent for the current ones have a significant influence on the education sector. The extent to which nations can counter the forces of globalization in education policy vary drastically and are dependent on the economic position of the country and the extent to which education policy is tasked with citizenship and identity building. Therefore, whilst in some nations cosmopolitan global identities and foreign languages etc. are promoted, in others education policy is insular and focuses on the revitalization of nationalism and citizenship loyalty through subjective curriculum texts. In either scenario, national policies cannot escape the influence of global trends and are often couched in terms of global competitiveness and development etc. which grant legitimacy to the proposed policy prescriptions (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009).

An example of national contexts and their impact on policy directions in the education sector are the responses to publication of PISA results. In a study of national responses to PISA results, Martens and Niemann (2010), found that in countries such as the USA, Canada, Great Britain and New Zealand, the media paid little or no attention to the country's performance on PISA. As a result, there was no public debate on PISA results or an associated change in national

education policy due to poor performance on the PISA assessments. At the same time, in other countries such as Germany, Spain and Mexico, PISA results generated public debate on education quality and policy efforts to alleviate highlighted deficits (Martens & Niemann, 2010). Differential responses to the same assessment standards highlight that national contexts retain some autonomy in determining the direction of education. This is because education is fundamental to civic life and the nation state is tasked with maintaining a fine balance between ensuring that it produces a citizenry that meets the desired requirements of the state and meets the benchmarks set by global economic and socio-political forces.

Contexts are not global and national only, for that implies that policy is only top down and unidirectional. If we understand policy as both product and process, there is also a bottom-up pressure which shapes policy as well (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). This is the existence of the local context which provides a framework in light of which teachers, parents, students, and administrators interpret what any specific policy means. For Ball (1997), policies specify problems that rely on localized contexts for solutions and provide the actors in the local arena an opportunity to construct solutions in the circumstances that are generated by the policy (Ball, 1997). Here, the *agency* of the individuals in charge of implementation such as teachers and administrators and the socio-historical institutional arrangements of organizations such as schools, district boards etc. determine to what extent the policy is implemented (Ball, 1994).

In both cases, individuals and organizations refer to their own individual and collective value systems to interpret policy. In an analysis of the enactment of curriculum change policy in Queensland, Australia, Parveen (2018) found that during the transitional period *agents* (i.e. teachers and schools) were caught in a dialectic process where they mediated change in accordance with their own contextual requirements. The *agent* tended to favor previous practices

whilst navigating the demand for change that was imposed by the policy within the field. Thus, the implementation of any policy is also dependent on the institutions that are tasked to enact them, and all policy situations are subject to existing institutional arrangements which are deliberately crafted (or circumvented) by individuals and groups (Polski & Ostrom, 1999).

Policy as product and process is therefore bound by the often-overlapping contexts within which it plays out. It is imperative that research specify the lens and the context in which it examines policy implementation. As my research focuses on an institutional analysis of the SNC policy in Pakistan, the next section endeavors to create a deeper understanding of both the institutional arrangements that are manifestations of the broader sociohistorical contexts as well as the individual agency of actors that are responsible for the implementation process as found in organizational theory literature.

Institutional Analysis of Schools as Sites of Policy Implementation

This research uses the school as the main site of investigation in the policy process. According to Apple (2004), schools “‘process’ both knowledge and people.” Essentially, formal and informal knowledge in schools is used to reproduce the class inequalities and different values and dispositions are taught to different school populations. Due to this differential in what is taught and how it is taught, schools have their own culture which is the result of the values and other myriad factors to which schools ascribe. Chief amongst these is the nature and organization of the school (whether public or private) and if education is free or for-profit. To understand schools from an organizational point of view, formal schooling as an institution needs to be examined by delving into institutional theory and its applications to the field of education.

The concept of institutions is diffuse and encompasses a wide variety of understandings in sociology. According to Polski and Ostrom (1999), institutions are highly abstract and sometimes invisible aspects of the policy environment. Crawford and Ostrom (1995) define institutions as extensively understood rules, customs, or strategies that incentivize specific behavior in repetitive situations. Institutions can take many forms including laws, policies, or informal general norms, standard practices or habits that are recurring within society. These forms can be standalones or interrelated with each other and they regulate behavior between individuals and groups of individuals (Hurwicz, 1994). Hodgson (2015) also describes institutions as “the integrated systems of rules which structure social interactions.” Rules in this definition also include legal rules, norms of behavior as well as social conventions (Hodgson, 2015).

For Durkheim (1912/1995), institutions arise out of human collective action and are made of a set of symbols that are cognitive (knowledge and belief) and moral. These then fix actions into repeated patterns that then extend beyond individual behavior. Institutions are thus emergent around human interaction in society. Once they are established, they are important external sources that regulate human behavior and stabilize social structures. For Sumner (1907/2019), in addition to being emergent, institutions can also be enacted through the needs of powerful groups within society. At the same time Sumner (1907/2019) acknowledges that institutions need legitimacy from wider society to survive. This means that the interests of the powerful must be, or at least perceived to be, in alignment with society’s core values and norms.

A related term in institutional theory is the concept of organizations. Organizations are thought of as institutional arrangements and agents who act in light of a common purpose and goals and must interact on multiple levels and for different activities (Polski & Ostrom, 1999).

Hodgson (2015) contends that since organizations themselves are integrated systems of rules which govern how people behave, they themselves classify as institutions. Organizations include legislatures, multilateral organizations like the Bretton Woods institutions, NGOs, universities and colleges, religious groups, social networks etc. These come into existence to remove uncertainty in human interaction. A key feature of organizations is that they are regulated by higher forms of organizations and institutions (Polski & Ostrom, 1999). For example, schools, colleges, and universities are organizations within their own rights, and they are also regulated or influenced by boards, government ministries and international organizations.

In the light of these definitions and aspects of institutions and organizations, formal schooling is a fundamental institution within society which governs schools as organizations and institutions within their own rights. Meyer (1977) contends that in addition to providing knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in their student body, schooling has an allocative function in that schools legitimately can classify and allocate people to positions in society based on credentials of graduate degrees, licensure etc. This imbues schools with the power of being an institutional system rather than a set of organizations that process individuals.

In the traditional conception of institutional theory, institutions are dependent on their external environments and exhibit two distinct aspects of institutionalization which can also be observed in the education sector. The first is isomorphism. Isomorphism implies that when serving the same population and environmental constraints, organizations will start to conform to the societal expectations of their environment as well as each other over time (Dacin, 1997). According to Di Maggio and Powell (1983), isomorphism is of three types. *Coercive* isomorphism comes from formal and informal pressures from other institutions on which these organizations depend including political institutions, legislature and the collective social

opinions and government mandates. For schools, this manifests in the form of policies that govern curriculum, accountability, and other aspects of schooling. The second source of institutional change towards isomorphism is *mimetic*. Here, in the face of uncertain outcomes, organizations tend to model themselves on other organizations that they consider to be legitimate and successful (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983). In the education sector, this results in similar standardization and accountability practices, textbook materials etc. The last source of pressure that results in isomorphism is *normative* pressures. This is the professionalization that happens in institutions that result from the individuals coming together to define their work and their occupational autonomy (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983).

The second aspect that is fundamental to the understanding of institutional theory is that of coupling. There are two types of coupling between organizations that operate within the same fields. The first is called loose coupling and most of the research that looks at education considers this to be the predominant type of coupling in education sectors. In loose coupling, organizations are grouped on the basis of shared belief systems, norms, and institutionalized expectations. In education this includes decentralization, shared governance, and choice in schooling (Meyer, 2002; Boyd & Crowson, 2002). In tight coupling, educational systems formalize reliance on rules and procedures which then govern the behavior of teachers and pupils (Hautala et al., 2018). Regardless of the type of coupling, external pressures from the socio-political environment in which the school operates results in change within the schools as well as the systems of education to which they belong. Fusarelli (2002) contends that at any given time, both types of coupling can be present with some aspects such as scheduling, teacher hiring processes, curriculum being tightly coupled whilst others such as purposes for education, uses of resources and technologies may differ.

Meyer and Rowan (2006) contend that broadly speaking, there have been three major changes which have impacted the institutional reality of education across the globe. Firstly, there is greater provider pluralism. This means that there is a shift from the state as the exclusive provider of education to rapid privatization and the involvement of the civil society as providers and stakeholders in the field. Secondly, there is more tight coupling in educational institutions now with an emphasis on accountability, standardization and interdependence and centralized authority between educational organizations. Thirdly, educational institutions have become more central to society as it becomes more knowledge dependent so that colleges and universities have a major role to play in the social fabric. Due to this, the governance structures of education institutions are now pluralistic with voluntary organizations, entrepreneurs and corporations taking a strong interest in educational outcomes of students (Meyer & Rowan, 2006).

Given that schools as organizations have a consequential role to play in the policy implementation process, understanding the role of the institutional and organizational culture of schools is of paramount importance. This research combines the institutional lens with policy frameworks that focus on schools as the sites of policy implementation to explore how their institutional nature impacts the execution of top-down policy edicts.

The Complexity of Policy Implementation - Theoretical Frameworks

For the purpose of this research, I used two policy analysis frameworks that allow for a closer look at policy implementation in schools. The first framework is proposed by Bell & Johnson (2006) and is particularly suited to understanding the intricacies of education policy as a

process. The second framework by Viennet and Pont (2017) explores policy implementation at a deeper level and delves into the various determinants that are key to its success or failure.

Bell and Johnson's (2006) Policy as a Process Model

Bell and Johnson (2006) understand policy as a continuous, emergent process which is affected by external actors and institutional norms as it passes through multiple stages. For them, the policy process is dialectic where all those affected by the policy are explicitly or implicitly involved in shaping its development. This policy analysis model is built on Taylor et al.'s (1997) model which had three main components. Firstly, Taylor et al., (1997), look at the *context* in which any new policy is introduced. This includes an analysis of the social, economic, political, and other factors which led to the emergence of specific policies on the governmental agendas. In the current policy environments, this will include supranational directives from international organizations, local socio-historical antecedents in policy and demands that are created by pressure groups to determine policy direction. The *context* as envisioned by Taylor et al. (1997), is specific according to the level at which policy analysis and implementation takes place. For example, school contexts will differ significantly from the contexts of government agencies that design or evaluate policies.

The second component for Taylor et al. (1997) is the *text* of the policy itself. This specifically deals with the content of the policy and how it is framed or codified. What does the policy set out to do and why? What are values that are explicitly stated in the text, or which can be inferred from the way in which policy aims are stated. It is important to note that policy texts are open to interpretation by the various agents that are tasked with policy implementation. Textual analysis of policy can be done from multiple lenses, and it is equally

important to identify the groups who are silent or disadvantaged by the policy as it is to identify groups of people the policy benefits.

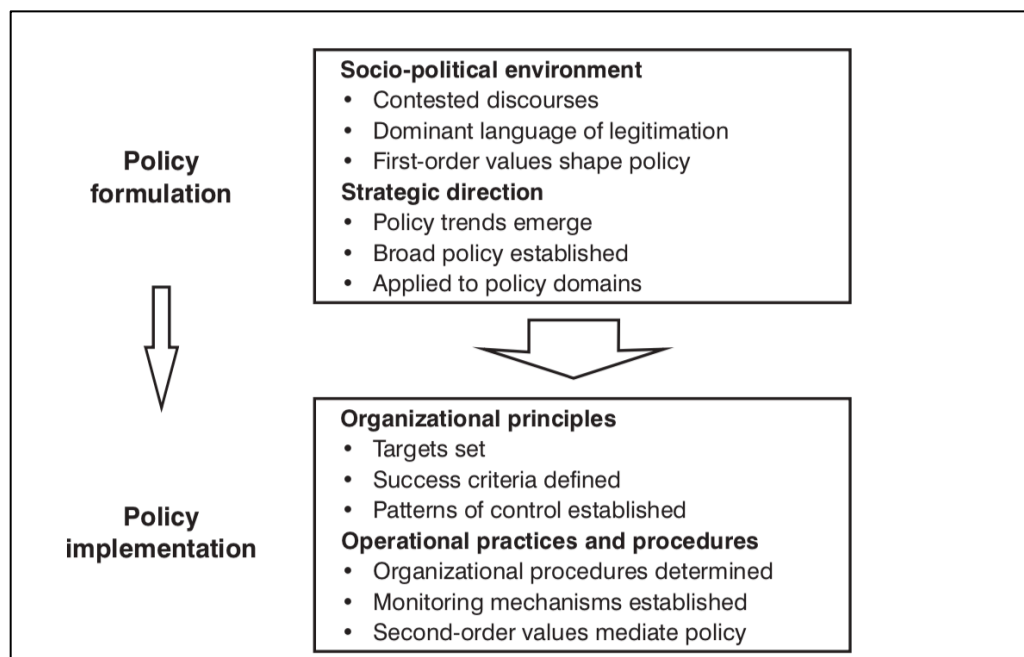
The last major aspect of Taylor et al.'s (1997) framework are the *consequences* of policy. Policy texts are open to interpretation therefore, the consequences of policy are never black and white. Implementation is differentiated in accordance with unique conditions prevailing at institutional and societal level. They are also dependent on resistance to the policy in question from different quarters. This is referred to as “policy refraction” (Bell & Johnson, 2006).

Using this framework as a foundation, Bell and Johnson (2006) introduce additional components to the policy enactment framework that are more appropriate for the myriad of levels, contexts and stakeholders that comprise today's education sectors. Figure 2 shows an outline of Bell and Johnson's (2006) model and the additional components added to Taylor et al.'s framework. Bell and Johnson's (2006) framework treats policy as development that happens continuously at both the policy formulation and the policy implementation stage and allows for a more focused analysis at the various levels and contexts. In their framework, the four components are the *socio-political environment*, *strategic direction*, *organizational principles* and *operational practices and procedures*. These four levels are hierarchical and nested and can be divided broadly into *policy formulation* and *policy implementation*. This does not mean that they are sequential, and each stage is derived from the previous stage of the policy development with neat boundaries between each stage. Rather, it showcases that as power resides with those in control of policy development, it is more likely to have policy edicts developed top-down; i.e values that underpin policy formulation dictate the organizational principles and the operational practices that seek to determine how policy is implemented. However, Bell and Johnson (2006)

claim that policy analysts and researchers should view these boundaries between the different categories as permeable and porous with adjustments being made in each category in response to influences from other categories.

Figure 2

Bell and Johnson's 2006 model of Policy Enactment



Note. From “Education policy: Process, themes and impact.” (p.13) by L. Bell, and H. Stevenson, 2006. Routledge.

In the first level of policy formulation, the *sociopolitical environment* is the external discourse from which policy is derived and within which the broad values that underpin policy are determined. From this discourse, the problem that is to be addressed is identified and possible policy solutions to it are generated. This is the stage at which legitimation for the policy in question is sought and it is characterized by contested debates on the policy (Bell & Johnson, 2006). Here, Kogan’s (1975/2018) first order fundamental values (social, economic, and educational) are employed to justify and gain support for the proposed policy. In the case of

Pakistan and the SNC, this translates to the vigorous debates between the SNC creators and its critics in print media, televised debates, and other public and private forums. This legitimizing language focused on equity and religious rationales for the SNC policy, modernizing aspects of the policy to bring Pakistani education standards at par with international benchmarks and presenting the economic, social, and educational justifications for the SNC that have been described in Chapter 2.

In the second level, stemming from the sociopolitical discourse, the *strategic direction* of the policy is determined and the social spheres to which policy applies are decided. At this stage, the success criteria for policies are determined. The *strategic direction* mediates the policy that is derived from the wider socio-political discourse considering the national, regional, and international contexts (Bell & Johnson, 2006). At this stage, policy endeavors to meet the various goals that the state has committed to in the international and national contexts. In this stage for Pakistan, the success criteria and the policy text were determined. To summarize, the policy text has three main themes: religious teachings and nation building, meeting international commitments of the state with a focus on Goal 4 of the SDGs and adhering to an outcome-based approach with benchmarking against international standards (Ministry of Federal Education and Training, 2020). These are discussed in Chapter 2.

Following policy formulation, the policy development process moves to the organizational level. From strategic direction *organizational principles* are set where the parameters of the policy are decided. At this stage, targets for implementation are determined, success criteria are defined concretely, and evaluation methods and procedures are established as patterns of control. Once these have been determined, *operational procedures and practices* within schools are determined which translate the policy into concrete actions within classrooms.

These organizational procedures encompass curriculum content, pedagogical practices and assessment methods and criteria (Bell & Johnson, 2006). In the case of Pakistan and the SNC, the government created textbooks which were to be taught in classrooms across all institutions whether public or private and learning outcomes and syllabi were determined with the expectation that all schools would adhere to these (Ghani, 2022).

The flexibility of using this framework for the analysis of education policy lies in the fact that it allows for in-depth research at any of the four stages of the policy process. The strategic direction and organizational principles shed light on policy content with a focus on aims and purpose whilst studying the operational procedures and practices allows for an institutional lens to policy analysis. This means that the consequences, policy refraction and the variability in interpretation within the confines of institutional norms can be studied more closely.

For this research study, the focus is on SNC implementation from an institutional standpoint. Therefore, I will look at the organizational principles and operational practices and procedures outlined in the framework. Specifically, by doing a qualitative analysis of the perspectives of teachers and administrators, I use this framework to understand the overlaps between international, national, and local contexts as well as the limiting and translating role of institutional culture and local actor agency on SNC implementation.

Viennet and Pont (2017) Framework for Policy Implementation

Since this research primarily focuses on the implementation part of the policy process, I also used the Viennet and Pont's (2017) Framework of Education Policy Implementation. They designed this framework after conducting an analytical literature review of policy analysis frameworks seeking to answer the following questions:

1. What did education policy implementation entail in theory and practice?

2. What are the determinants that are involved in the policy implementation process?

In their meta-analysis of relevant literature on policy, they identified 18 frameworks that can apply to policy implementation in education. By analyzing these studies, they filtered out key determinants which were recurrent across the frameworks and used them to propose a new, more integrated, and non-linear framework that highlighted the people, context and places that affected policy implementation.

For Viennet and Pont (2017), policy implementation as a process has three main characteristics. Firstly, it is *purposeful* with the intent to change education in some capacity according to given policy objectives. Secondly, it is *multidirectional* as it can be influenced by different actors and stakeholders at different points of the process. Thirdly, it is highly based on *context* and is very responsive to societal attributes such as culture, demography, and economics etc. (Viennet & Pont, 2017). Using their analysis, they proposed a set of key determinants that have the capacity to hinder or enable effective policy implementation.

Viennet and Pont's (2017) framework has four key elements. The first element is *policy design*. For them, policy design is understood in a narrow sense as the "object" that is being implemented. The debates surrounding the policy, the issues raised and the issues that were ignored have the potential to carry over to the implementation process. In this element of the framework, the justification for the policy needs to address the need for the policy, the reason why this policy was prioritized over others, the feasibility of operationalizing it on scale and the outcome that is expected from the policy. For their framework, they term this aspect *smart policy design*.

The second major element of this framework is inclusive *stakeholder engagement*. Education policies are implemented by people who bring their own interpretation and values to

bear on the process. These stakeholders engage with the policy at different levels of the implementation process within the education network. For example, for public education, policy stakeholders reside inside schools such as principals, teachers, students, and their parents who are affected by the policy in their daily lives. Outside of the schools, regulatory institutions such as boards and teacher training institutes or other actors such as textbook publishers that are a part of the implementation process. The third element in this framework refers to the institutional, societal and policy contexts and how they overlap. This includes the institutional settings of laws, conventions, and norms within which an education system is situated and the governance model, centralized or decentralized, which is followed. These set the parameters within which implementation happens and they term it as the presence of a *conducive, institutional, policy and societal context* (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

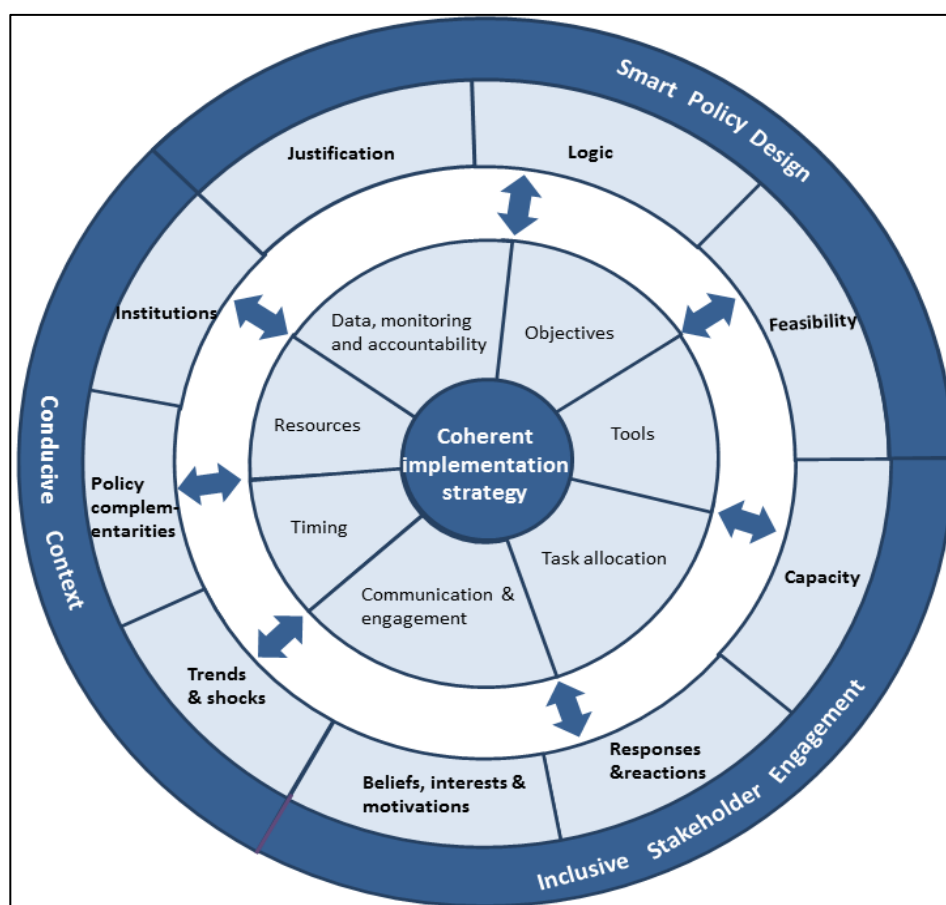
The last fundamental element of this framework is the existence of a *coherent implementation strategy*. This is the viable operational plan of action through which policy becomes practice. It includes the accountability and monitoring mechanisms overseeing the policy, the establishment of clear actionable goals, consistent engagement with stakeholders implementing the policy, the timing of when the policy goes into effect and the provision of all resources, including technologies and personnel, that are necessary for the policy to become part of practice (Viennet & Pont, 2017). As in the Bell & Johnson (2006) Framework, this framework also acknowledges that completely separating the policy implementation process from the policy formulation process is not viable. Although interlinked, policy design has to be created to a certain extent before the implementation process is activated.

Figure 3 shows a coherent implementation strategy is central to the implementation process. However, it alone is not enough, there are key multidirectional determinants that can

impact the implementation of policy. For example, actors can be tasked to implement a policy a certain way, but they can influence implementation in light of their own capacity and belief systems which may run counter to what policymakers intend. Figure 3 also shows centrality of context to education policy meaning that there is no one size fits all policy for education reform. These aspects of this framework make it highly suitable for studying the implementation process of the SNC policy and analyzing the determinants that impact the process in public and private contexts.

Figure 3

Education Policy Framework



Note. From Education Policy Analysis: A literature Review and Proposed Framework by R. Viennet and B. Pont, 2017 (p. 7) This is a visual diagram of Education Policy. The outermost rings represent the policy formulation process whilst the central ring is the implementation strategy through which policy becomes practice. The arrows show the multidirectional nature of the relationship between policy formulation and policy enactment.

Use of Frameworks in this Study

This study is exploratory in nature and the use of these frameworks reflects that. As this study is not an evaluation of the SNC policy, it focuses instead on the process, mechanisms, and agents (teachers and administrators) through which policy is to be implemented in schools. Therefore, the use of these frameworks is limited to understanding how teachers and administrators interpreted the SNC policy and created the mechanisms to implement it in different school contexts. The four components of Viennet and Pont (2017) framework in conjunction with the Policy as Process model presented in Figure 1, are used to structure the analysis in this study. The SNC policy design and formulation is discussed in detail in Chapter 2 which describes the SNC policy in detail and also delves into debates that justified or opposed the policy before it went into effect. The within-case analyses and the cross-case analyses will cater to the other elements of stakeholder engagement, contexts, implementation strategies and monitoring mechanisms that are fundamental to the policy implementation process.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted the relevant literature that pertains to this study. This chapter starts with an important discussion on how policy is defined and understood as outcome and process. It outlines the multiple contexts of education policymaking and gives examples of overlap in contexts that limit policy implementation. It also looks at how policy is not linear or static but dynamic and multidirectional. Since this research focuses on schools as the sites of policy implementation, it examines how despite top-down generation of policy, bottom-up pressures by institutions and individuals who interpret policy differentially results in policy refraction. It highlights the agentic capacity of individuals and organizations in the policy

implementation process, and it explains in detail the two theoretical frameworks used for analysis for this study to answer the research questions posed.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter provides the roadmap of my dissertation research. I conducted a multi-case qualitative research across three schools in the cities of Lahore and Kamalia. For the research, I interviewed 22 teachers and administrators in May and June of 2022. For data analysis, I chose to use Braun and Clark's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis which accommodates the critical constructive paradigm used in this research. It also offers an insight into my own positionality as a researcher. Following an account of my positionality, this chapter will discuss the details of the multi-case study research design. This will include a discussion of the selection process of each case (school) and its unique situational context in the Pakistani education landscape. It also outlines the research process including sources of data, data collection techniques, proposed data analysis, and steps I took to ensure quality of this research.

Restatement of the Purpose of Study

The objective of the research is to explore the process of policy interpretation and implementation from an institutional standpoint. Specifically, my research looks to investigate how different types of schools (public or private) understand, interpret, and implement the curriculum change process in the classroom. To do so, this study leverages the perspectives of teachers and administrators as agents of change in the implementation of the SNC Policy in Pakistan. The institutional lens employed in this study allows for a glimpse of school level constraints that affect the process of policy implementation. This analysis is rooted in a critical constructivist paradigm that highlights policy refraction that occurs in different types of schools. It examines the space between policy rhetoric and policy practice, the variance in policy

implementation process and the meaning-making of policy that teachers and administrators do in light of personal and institutional values. The institutional analysis used in this study focuses on understanding how the socio-historical forces that encompass explicit laws and implicit cultural norms affect and are in turn affected by the people that work within institutions (Orlikowski & Barley, 2001; Pohlmann et al., 2014). This research centers on policy implementation as a process and relies on a modified use of Bell & Johnson's (2006) two stage policy analysis framework and Viennet & Pont's (2017) Policy Implementation Framework. These frameworks have been discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Research Questions

This study has one main, overarching research question and three sub questions.

1. How do different types of schools (as institutions) understand, interpret, and implement the Single National Curriculum Policy in Pakistan?
 - a. What are the perspectives of teachers and administrators as agents of change, on the Single National Curriculum (SNC) policy especially on the issues of gender, religion, and the quality of the course curriculum?
 - b. Do the views of teachers and administrators differ according to the type of educational institutions (public or private) and the institutional arrangements within which they work?
 - c. What role does institutional culture (public or private) play in the adaptation to or the circumvention of the SNC policy?

These research questions focus on the role of schools as institutions with their own institutional cultures that are dictated by the key actors within them and how they perceive

education, their organizational hierarchy, the demographics of their student population and whether the school is public or private. These questions explore how institutional norms and arrangements in different types of schools absorb and reshape policy in the process of its implementation. By focusing on the agency of teachers and administrators, these questions explore how the people responsible for implementing national and school policies interpret and adapt them in accordance with their own personal and institutional values. By doing so, this line of inquiry will highlight how policy has a differential impact on different communities, stakeholders and groups of students within the same school.

Research Paradigm

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), any inquiry is situated in a paradigm that delimits what falls within and outside the boundaries of legitimate inquiry for researchers. A paradigm is a set of beliefs that represent a worldview for the holder (in this case the researcher) about the nature of the world, an individual's place in it and the myriad relationships they can have with it. For researchers legitimate inquiry rests on three interconnected fundamental questions that are *ontological*, *epistemological*, and *methodological*. The *ontological* question focuses on the researcher's belief about the nature and form of reality and what can be known about it. The *epistemological* question defines the relationship between the researcher as the would-be knower and what can be known. Based on the answers to these questions, the *methodological* question centers on how the researcher can find the knowledge they believe is out there (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Any paradigm of inquiry is essentially a human construction and represents the most sophisticated and informed view that researchers can utilize to uncover knowledge as they understand it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Keeping in mind these three questions

or first principles of inquiry, it is important to clarify for the reader the paradigm to which I ascribe to as the singular researcher in this study.

I approached this research from a critical constructivist perspective. For Kincheloe (2005), the central agenda of critical constructivist research is to ‘gain awareness of ourselves as social, cultural and historical beings’ (p.81). This means that from my research perspective on what can be known, reality is subjective and created by the lived experiences of people within the myriad value systems that we interact with daily. Since my research lens is critical constructivist, my ontological orientation follows Guba and Lincoln’s (1994) typology for the critical and constructivist paradigm to a great extent. I believe that reality as we experience it is shaped by our interactions in the social, cultural, political, historical, gender, economic and other value systems that encompass our lives in any specific geographical region over time.

In the case of Pakistan where my research is based, reality is shaped by religion, experiences with the legacy of colonialism such as the prestige attached to the English as a language, conservative value systems on gender, differences in social classes, political disempowerment, and other related cultural elements. These elements have played a pivotal role in not only forming the institutions that govern life and human interaction but also the formal governance structures within which actors create policy for development including education. The interaction of people with these value systems creates their own lived experiences or realities. Guba and Lincoln (1994) contend that for any research that comes under the umbrella paradigm of critical theory, the ontological and the epistemological are intertwined and the findings of the study are essentially *value-mediated* as the investigator’s values serve as the interpretive lens through which the phenomenon under investigation can be viewed. The next section discusses my own positionality and values to clearly delineate my subjectivity and lens.

Researcher Positionality

From an epistemological standpoint, the findings of the study are *value-mediated* and judged through my own lens as a researcher who possesses both an *emic* and *etic* perspective to the context under investigation and thus resides in the tension between these two perspectives. An *emic* perspective according to Merriam (2009) is an insider's knowledge of a culture and an *etic* perspective is the outsider's viewpoint as a researcher. In educational research, *emic* perspectives, according to Yin (2015), capture the intrinsic meanings of real-world events from the perspectives of the individuals whose culture is being studied. Yin (2015) contends that *etic* perspectives are external views on meaning-making and real-world events. This includes the primarily western academic perspectives researchers learn in academia as frameworks for studying culture. According to Olive (2014) who chose to study his own LGBT community, most researchers reside in the tension between the *emic* and the *etic*. He contends that each researcher carries with him/her an inescapable subjectivity consisting of past experiences, ideas, and beliefs. These make achieving a completely *emic* perspective difficult. At the same time, taking a purely *etic* stance runs the risk of missing the nuances in interviews and observations that are important to understanding the subject under investigation. As someone who has significant *emic* insights, I have chosen to highlight the aspects of SNC policy that correspond to my lived experiences and which I believe needed to be researched. These include representation of gender, religion, and language colonialism as they are three most salient value systems that impact the lived realities of Pakistanis.

Research by various international institutions shows that in countries where gender inequality is large and the norm, women's indicators for health, poverty and economic wellbeing are less favorable than men's (World Bank, 2012). Pakistan consistently ranks towards the

bottom of the Global Gender Gap Report published annually by the World Economic Forum.

This report measures gender gaps in educational attainment, economic participation, health, and political empowerment. In 2023, Pakistan ranked 142nd out of 146 countries and was only ahead of Afghanistan, Iran, Algeria, and Chad (World Economic Forum, 2023). This ranking gives a clear indication of how gender impacts everyday life in Pakistan. However, it does not reflect that beyond lack of gender parity in opportunities, women in Pakistan suffer from extreme levels of gender-based violence despite constitutional guarantees.

Whilst their absence from public spaces is ensured through lack of political and economic opportunities using the pretexts of religion and culture, women are not safe within their homes either. According to the Pakistan Health and Demographic Survey (2018), 28 % of women between the ages of 15-49 have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, 34% of ever-married women experience spousal violence, 26% of ever-married women reported being injured due to spousal violence and 56% of the victims reported that they did not seek any help from family or authorities (National Institute of Population Studies & ICF , 2018). As a woman who belongs to this country, I am aware of many women who have suffered violence because of their gender and have chosen to say nothing. This silence reflects the pressures of cultural, familial, and religious expectations placed on women in Pakistan and discussing gender as a salient value system through which people define their social and personal roles in life is important. It also means that I recognize that I have a significant amount of privilege within the Pakistani society even when I lived there. I am educated, have control over my mobility and occupational choices and I have financial independence. These are all elements of life which my mother did not have and her struggle to ensure that I have access to these freedoms have instilled in me a desire to pass it forward to others.

Religion has also played a pivotal role in my understanding of the world, and it is a powerful force in the Pakistani social fabric. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Pakistan is home to people from different faiths. Even within its Muslim population there is a wide range of groups and sects. These groupings have various levels of conservatism and almost all have a political manifestation of some form. Some of these groups have militant arms such as the Pakistani Taliban who believe in a very narrow vision of who is a “Muslim”. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and with patronage from the Pakistani state, such groups have brought extreme levels of violence and bloodshed to the country. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (2023), since 2000 there have been almost 16,000 incidents of terrorism in Pakistan in which 66,000 lives have been lost including those of civilians, security personnel and terrorists. Aside from these terror outfits, the State’s continued pursuit of a national Islamic identity has culminated in the misuse of blasphemy laws which are wielded against minorities often resulting in fatalities. Between 1987 and 2017, 1,549 people were accused of blasphemy with 75 official deaths (Ashraf, 2021). Outside of the state apparatus, countless instances of mob violence against minorities are recorded every year where people are lynched on the pretext of blasphemy, or their homes and places of worship are destroyed. These intolerant attitudes are prevalent and have far reaching impacts on the lives of ordinary people.

I belong to the Shia sect which is a minority in Pakistan, and I have lost family members who were victims of religious sectarian violence. These losses have shaped my personal values to a great extent. I believe that the teaching of the State’s version of religion, in schools has created intolerance in our society where anyone who does not follow the beliefs of the majority is seen as the “other”. The inclusion of more religion in mainstream schools through the SNC

policy is an alarming situation and understanding the perspectives of schoolteachers and administrators on this topic is essential.

I am also a product of Pakistan's education sector where I was a pupil in private schools from K-12 and during my undergraduate studies. At the same time, I have close first cousins who were enrolled in the public education system on account of residing in rural areas where there were fewer private schools in the 1990s. In the summers of my childhood, I spent time poring over the black and white, verbose public-school books that were a sharp contrast to my shiny and colorful readers and workbooks in private school. I was fascinated with my cousins learning English in Grade 6 when I started that process in kindergarten. For much of my teenage years and my early twenties, I prized my relative proficiency of the English language which is considered the holy grail within Pakistan and reaped the benefits of it; this language not only opens doors to better employment, but it also brings with it opportunities for greater access to higher education and social prestige. Pakistan's obsession with English is a legacy of its colonial past and its citizens are unable to break out of it. According to Rahman (2011), English is a paradox in Pakistan. All the major institutions in Pakistan including the Army, the judiciary, the universities, and the non-governmental organizations use English. On the other hand, most people, even in the urban areas, do not know many words of English and cannot converse in it. This is in spite of the fact that English is the main second language that students learn in Pakistan and the education system is set up so that English gatekeeps access to higher education and the job market (Rahman, 2011). The issue of language of instruction in schools is salient because it directly impacts what students learn. I will also share that in my initial questionnaire, I was not focused on the language of instruction issue, perhaps because, I have been a beneficiary of being fluent in English. However, language was perhaps a larger theme than gender in my

interviews. As the SNC aims to teach English as a language and not a subject, I chose to pursue conversation on this topic with the participants due to its far-reaching consequences on students.

My experience with the education space is not limited to being a student within it. I was a former teacher in Pakistan's K-12 private education sector for four years teaching grades 6-8 and I have considerable knowledge of how the schools and classrooms work and what values can be espoused by teachers. I am also aware of the power structures that are in place and dictate what is taught to students and how it is taught. I have also worked with a government institution that focused on gender gaps in public education, so I am familiar with the convoluted processes of policy generation in Pakistan as it simultaneously seeks to navigate international, national, and provincial policy contexts. As a Pakistani, I am also a native speaker of Urdu and Punjabi which are the languages spoken in the region where this research took place. I also held an *etic* perspective going into this research as I have been trained in various ways of conducting an inquiry into social phenomena outside of the culture and the space I investigated.

Based on my perspectives on the ontological and the epistemological questions, my methodological viewpoint for this research was dialogic and dialectical. Methodological principles according to Guba and Lincoln (1994) are separate from methods by which research is conducted. Here, as I conducted a critical constructivist inquiry, my research was a dialectical dialogue between me and the subjects of the inquiry to shed light on the process of policy implementation in schools in Pakistan.

In line with my choice of research paradigm, a qualitative study was the most appropriate methodology for this inquiry. Cresswell (2014) contends that qualitative research explores and understands the meaning individuals or groups make of social or human problems. The emphasis of this research methodology is to rely as much as possible on the participants' viewpoints about

the situation and the context within which specific phenomena are being studied (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, as proposed by Creswell (2014), the research questions I investigated were broad and I held the role of an active listener to discern how participants make meaning of their particular situations. The next section discusses the research design I employed to undertake this research.

Research Design

This research is a multi-case qualitative case study that was carried out in the cities of Lahore and Kamalia in Punjab, Pakistan in May/June 2022. Using the multi-site case study approach was methodologically the most appropriate as my research questions examined the roles of schools as institutions in the policy implementation of education reform therefore each school in this study was a case. Conducting the study in two cities which were different in social, economic, and demographic characteristics further served to provide varying contexts that allowed for more nuance in addressing the research questions. Choosing schools as the stage of investigation aligned with the study's institutional focus and the use of policy implementation frameworks described in Chapter 3.

Before describing this multi-case study, it is useful to think about case study as a research design. Merriam (2009, p. 49) defined a case study as an “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system”. Stake (2006, p. 1) defines a case as “a noun, a thing, an entity; it is seldom a verb, participle or functioning.” He further clarifies that even if we are to study a functioning such as a policy or training, we will use case as the unit of analysis. Yin (2008) describes a case study as empirical research that looks at a phenomenon in a real-world situation with a focus on its context. Similarly, Stake (2006) posits that a qualitative understanding of a case is predicated

on the situation and the context(s) in which the activity under observation takes place. These are important because this impacts the experience and the interpretation of the activity or phenomena we want to research (Stake, 2006). Therefore, the consensus of these definitions is that case studies are bounded systems that are studied in their real-world contexts. As mentioned earlier the bounded systems for this study were the three schools where research was conducted. The first school was a primary and elementary public school in the city of Kamalia which is in Southern Punjab, the second school was a K-10 low-cost private school also located in Kamalia and the third was an elite high-cost early-childhood and primary private school in Lahore.

Multi-case studies are a special category of the case study design. Merriam (2009) defines them as research designs that collect and analyze data from several cases that are distinguishable from a single case study with subunits. Stake (2006) contends that the collection of cases in a multi-case study are grouped together due to some common defining characteristic such as membership in a group or as an example of a phenomenon. He terms this collection of cases as a *quintain*. *Quintains* can be functionings of which we seek examples to study. (Stake, 2006). The quintain is central to multi-case research and whilst we study its manifestations as different individual cases, it is the quintain we want to learn more about. The planning of research focuses on what helps to understand the case and what helps us to understand the *quintain* (Stake, 2006).

In the case of my research, the *quintain* is the implementation process of the Single National Curriculum in different types of Pakistani schools. The foreshadowed problem that I sought to address was that schools as institutions have varying understanding and interpretation of education policy. This understanding and interpretation of policy is correlated to the value attached to education by teachers and administrators, the purpose for which the schools educate

and the organizational and institutional culture of the school in question. The schools chosen for this study were illustrative organizations for particular types of schools that operate in Pakistan and each case sheds light on how policy is understood and implemented in different contexts. Each case also provides greater insight into the issues that each institution and the individuals that work there are faced with as they endeavor to implement government mandated policy. Whilst these cases are examples of different institutional contexts in the Pakistani education sector, they are not representative of their type of school. For example, an elite private school may share many characteristics with another elite private school, but they may differ on several others.

Case Selection

For this research, I studied the implementation processes of the SNC in three different types of schools based on school type. All of these schools have implemented the SNC policy in primary classes from grades 1-5 in the academic year 2021-2022. These schools have different values, institutional legacies, and different reasons to educate students. Additionally, the two school sites of Lahore and Kamalia are very different in their social and local contexts which further highlights how geographical location also added to the contextual constraints on policy implementation. Snapshots of these cities is given in Chapter 2.

School selection was made through purposive sampling. Etikan et al., (2016), describe purposive selection as a deliberate choice on the part of the researcher due to the qualities exhibited by the participant. It is at the discretion of the researcher to decide what needs to be explored and to find participants who are willing to provide that information or knowledge by virtue of their lived experience. I reached out to several primary schools from the private and

public sector via email, official channels, and personal contacts to discuss the possibility of conducting research with teachers and administrators on the implementation of the SNC policy. Whilst I used my personal contacts to reach out to schools, none of these schools are places where I have either worked or studied.

Pakistan's geographical diversity is reflected in education with urban areas providing better schooling opportunities in both public and private education. I felt that this research was an excellent opportunity to also engage with schools in smaller cities especially for public and low-cost private schools. At the same time, elite private schools only exist in major cities like Lahore. Even at this stage the variation in schools was visible as they all had varying range for classes, number of teachers and organizational set ups and I had to use my knowledge of the sector to choose the final three schools. The key criterion I used for choosing these schools is that together they showed the extent of the variation in school resources, hierarchies and purposes that allowed the study to capture the differences in SNC implementation in differing institutional contexts.

From the responses I received, I chose the following three schools as cases. Given that this research touches on topics, such as gender and religion, that can excite backlash against the participants and schools, I have chosen to not disclose the names of the schools and I use pseudonyms to deidentify the teachers and administrators who participated in the research. An initial snapshot of each school and the participants interviewed is given below. Chapters 5, 6 and 7, which offer an in-depth look at each school, will provide greater detail about the schools.

Case 1: Public School

This public school is located in the city of Kamalia and has grades 1-8. There were approximately 900 students enrolled in this school for the academic year 2021-2022. At the end

of grade 8, students from this school appear for grade 8 board exams (local state exams) before they can enter high school. Till grade 5, this school has both male and female students in the same classes. After grade 5, male students move onto a separate school for boys only. This school has only one administrator who is the principal and there are 12 teachers teach in grades 1-5. I interviewed 6 teachers from this school, those who are responsible for teaching grade 1-grade 5. The school has a cohort-based teaching system and teachers move with their classes from grades 1-5. Each class has only one teacher and no subject teachers due to a staff shortage. The school charged a nominal monthly fee of Rs. 20 (7 cents) in the 2021-2022 school year. Money collected from the fees is used to pay the electricity bill and keep the janitor on the payroll. The salaries of teachers and administrators are paid by the provincial government.

Case 2: Low-cost Private School

This school is in the city of Kamalia in Punjab with classes from Pre-k to grade 9. It is a for-profit institution. The official medium of instruction in this school is English and it subscribes to the textbooks of a private publisher (*Afaq Publishers*) as opposed to government textbooks. Students however are expected to appear for local public board exams like public school students. Teachers who work here are not on the government payroll and the school enrollment for all the grades is approximately 500 students. The school was run out of a large house leased from a local family but there were plans to build a purpose-built campus in the near future. At the time of the interviews, the school charged a fee of Rs. 3500 per month which is roughly equivalent to \$12. From this school, I interviewed 2 administrators and 5 teachers who were teaching grades 1-3. The school had 27 teachers of which 18 had a master's or bachelor's degree in a science field.

Case 3: High-cost Elite Private School

This school is a co-education school located in one of the most elite neighborhoods in Lahore. The main demographic of students who attend here belong to wealthy upper-middle and upper-class families. This school is for-profit and was founded by an elite family. It is part of an integrated system of sister schools that run under a common name and additional branch names to identify school location. This school, prior to the 2020-2021 academic year housed grades pre-K to 5. Post pandemic, grades 2-5 were shifted to a new campus and this school expanded its offering to pre-K to grade 1 to build the foundational base of students especially in learning English as a language which is the language of instruction in the school. Reputation-wise, this is considered one of the best schools in Lahore with a long history of secular teaching and successful alumni and even though it only went up to grade 1, it presented a rare opportunity to research in a school from this tier.

The school teaches from international standard textbooks by private publishers and charges a monthly fee of approximately Rs. 40,000 which amounts is roughly equivalent to \$200. Most of the teachers from this school are fluent in English. Students from this primary school are expected to progress to affiliated middle and high schools after grade 1. For students, the culmination of school life is appearance in external international board examinations from either the Cambridge O-levels, the International Baccalaureate examinations, or the Oxford Board examinations. Given this end goal, the students here follow an integrated curriculum that gives them the skills to appear and succeed in these exams. At this school, I interviewed 2 administrators and 6 grade 1 teachers.

Data Sources and Data Collection

Document Review

As this research focused on the implementation of a government policy, I reviewed a plethora of documents that were related to education and curriculum policy within Pakistan to get a better sense of national and provincial policy directions. These included the Punjab Education Sector Analysis 2020, the 5-year Punjab Education Sector plans from 2013-2017 and 2019-2024. Additionally, I reviewed available standard learning objectives (SLOs) and syllabi for the SNC from grades 1-5 produced by the National Curriculum Council, and copies of the model textbooks produced by the PCTB which are available online.

Outside of government documents, I reviewed newspaper articles on the SNC policy, editorials, and opinion pieces in the major newspapers between January 2021 to September 2022 as print media was where the bulk of the policy discourse on the SNC was carried out. Additionally, due to its international commitments such as the SDGs and the high degree of donor involvement in the education sector, a lot of information about schools was available online. I thoroughly reviewed the websites of the Ministry of Professional Education and Training, which led the creation of the SNC policy, the Punjab Textbook Board which is the department responsible for creating the model textbooks and approving the textbooks of the private publishers, the School Education Department which maintains district wise information on enrollment numbers, school numbers, facilities available in public schools and is also responsible for tracking teacher and student attendance. I also reviewed the books available from the private publishers used by the private schools and additionally, documents that were provided by the schools such as timetables, parent handbooks, newsletters etc. The Elite Private School had its own website which I explored extensively.

The policy documents provided more information about the SNC policy and its goals and the curriculum that went into effect at the beginning of the academic year in August 2021. The public discourse in the print media highlighted salient issues with the curriculum and the websites offered more information about government departments or schools, their mandates, and spheres of influence within the SNC implementation process. Lastly, this document review also highlighted the absence of the K-12 teachers and administrators from the entire discourse on the SNC which highlights the top-down nature of the SNC education reform.

Semi-structured Interviews & Focus Groups

For this research, I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators at all three case schools. In total, I interviewed 17 teachers and 5 administrators across the 3 schools. The interview protocols used for teachers (see Appendix A) and administrators (see Appendix B) are given in the Appendices. As mentioned earlier, a critical inquiry requires the methodology to be both dialectical and dialogic (Guba & Lincoln, 1999 Orlikowski & Barley, 2014). At this juncture, I think it is helpful to delineate what such a dialogue entailed for me. According to Arnett (1997), a dialogue between people requires the following attitudes: a willingness to have conversation about ideas with flexible positions that can be altered given new perspectives and information, a willingness to keep relationships affirming even in disagreements and a willingness to ask value questions. Further, dialogues require listening to a multiplicity of perspectives and being willing to go in uncharted directions during conversations.

This research centers the teachers and the administrators and these guidelines for a constructive dialogue were vital in helping the participants be open about their experience with the SNC implementation process. Through this process of dialogue, most of the conversations were free flowing and informative, and the participants were forthright with their opinions. The

interview protocols used were a useful guide to ensure that the issues of interest to me were discussed but at the same time, I pursued any line of conversation which I felt the participants were interested in talking about. This allowed for rich data that shed light on teacher agency, their views about education and curriculum, the institutional structure in their schools and their belief systems.

21 interviews were conducted in-person in Lahore and Kamalia, Pakistan between May 23, 2022, and June 11, 2022. This .The principal of the public school was unable to be available in person on the day of the interview due to a personal emergency and she was interviewed via telephone later. I also took extensive notes on during the interviews which I later converted to typed memos. The interviews were one-on-one, varied in length and lasted between 25-60 minutes. With the permission of the participants, I recorded all the interviews. However, due to a technical issue with the recorder during recording, the interview of the vice principal of the low-cost private school was deleted and I had to rely on my notes for that interview.

In addition, I conducted focus groups, using the same protocols as the interviews as a starting point, with the teachers at each of the 3 schools before I interviewed teachers individually. This was extremely beneficial as it gave me a chance to gain more insight into the collective mindset of each school staff towards the policy implementation process. Focus group were helpful for me in discovering lines of inquiry in addition to what I had originally included in my interview protocols. The focus groups were also a great insight into group dynamics which added more nuance to the contextual aspect of each school. They also served as another source of information that corroborated or contradicted the information received in individual interviews. In fact, some teachers chose to refer to conversations in the focus groups to explain

their individual viewpoints during the individual interviews. No administrators were present during the focus groups.

Observations

According to Labaree (2002), *insiderness* or an emic perspective can lead to a deeper understanding of the knowledge and experiences of the participants or communities being researched. I made a conscious choice to conduct this research in person so that I could experience the settings where the participants interacted and shaped the policy implementation process. As mentioned earlier, I possess both an *emic* and *etic* perspective on this study. Having been a student, a teacher, an administrator, and a policy analyst working with schools in the public sector, I carried with me insights about how schools worked and were organized, and this gave me a valuable platform to notice and observe different aspects of the research setting.

At each of the schools, I had the opportunity to document through pictures and notes the resources available, the social interactions amongst teachers and between teachers and the administration and the intangible aspects of organizational structure that could not be accounted for in online interviews such as which teachers also held somewhat of a leadership role within the school despite having no formal title. I visited each of the schools over 3-4 days and took a tour of the school accompanied by a teacher. I visited classrooms and the staffroom as well as noted the facilities which were available. I also took pictures of posters, boards, and other elements of the research setting that would help in creating a thick description for each case.

Data Translation

According to Birbili (2000), there is a need for social researchers who translate data from one language to another to be transparent about the choices and decisions they make in this

process. In Pakistan, where most people are at least bilingual, there is a clear hierarchy in languages spoken. English is considered the most modern language followed by Urdu and then regional languages as a distant third. Understanding the existing power dynamic underpinning language in Pakistan, I spent days trying to decide which language I would conduct data analysis in. Other factors that weighed on me during this time period were my own ease in Urdu and English, which language was more functional and compatible with the software I intended to use and the time it would take to create the texts from the audio interviews for data analysis.

Research by other bilingual researchers who collected data in a non-English language showed different pathways. Some chose to translate data directly into English from audio recordings like Lee (2017) who conducted her research in mandarin and English and chose to transcribe and translate data simultaneously in English. Srivastava (2006) put forward the concepts of the “language of data” and the “language of thinking” for her research conducted in India. She identified English as her “language of thinking” and Hindi as the “language of data” and explained that as her research progressed, she found herself ‘slipping between languages’ for example when she sometimes automatically translated important quotes during interviews into English and morphed the language of data into the language of thinking.

For me, the conundrum was similar, I consider English to be the language of function from a personal perspective. It has been the medium of instruction in all of my student life from pre-K to my PhD and I have more command over this language than over Urdu especially in the written format. Additionally, my data was rife with code switching. Although, I asked questions in Urdu, teachers were given the opportunity to answer in English or Urdu, whichever language they were more comfortable with, none of the teachers exclusively used one language during the interview in one language. Code switching between English and Urdu is common in Pakistan

and colloquial Urdu uses English words extensively. In educational settings such as schools, code switching proliferates even more due to the use of special vocabularies of subjects such as science and math (Halai, 2007).

Further, as all the participants had experience of studying in the higher education institutions of Pakistan, they spoke some English given that the language of instruction in Pakistani higher education is English. All public-school teachers extensively used words such as “exactly”, “pressure”, “teachers”, “issues”, “respect”, “accountability”, “ground realities” etc. in Urdu sentences with a few full sentences of English. On the other hand, the private-school teachers, in response to a question were likely to speak in English for the most part, interspersed with a sentence or two of Urdu. Further, as Urdu is written in a different script written from right to left, it was impractical timewise to transcribe the interviews in Urdu before translating them into English as the data analysis was to be conducted in English. Additionally, the NVivo software I intended to use for data analysis did not support language scripts written from right to left. The last consideration for choosing to translate in English was that this dissertation is aimed for an audience that is external to the context investigated and for the widest possibility of sharing this research, translations in English were a necessity. In the end, expedience and limited resources were the key deciders and I decided to translate my data to English before analysis could begin.

For the translation process for each interview, I listened to the audio recordings multiple times. Once I had fully translated an interview, I listened to the interview again to review the scripts and make changes if I had missed or mistranslated something. Before starting the data analysis of the translated data for each within-case analysis, I reviewed the audio recordings and made a final tally with the translated transcripts. I also want to acknowledge here that the

translations of the audio recordings focused more on preserving the meaning of the participants' responses than on verbatim translation. This meant that I as the researcher-translator was the decision maker on what that conceptual equivalence looked like. I chose to use Halai's (2007) concept of "transmuted texts" which implies that the final texts on which data analysis was conducted were reflections of the original data as recreated by the researcher and some meaning may have been lost in translation.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, I examined each individual case separately as a portrait of the policy implementation process and then did a cross-case analysis to highlight themes which were similar and divergent in each case. To do this in line with my research paradigm, I decided to employ Braun and Clark's (2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) for data organization and analysis. This choice of thematic analysis was the most appropriate for qualitative research in which my subjectivities and positionality were the final prism through which the collected data were analyzed. This process began from the point where I started data translation and created the "transmuted texts" (Halai, 2007) mentioned in the previous section. According to Braun and Clark (2023) for RTA, it is important to resituate the research in its underlying theoretical assumptions along four dimensions at the beginning of data analysis; essentialist vs. constructivist epistemologies, deductive vs. inductive analysis, semantic vs. latent coding and experiential vs. critical orientation of data (Braun & Clark, 2023). For my research, my epistemology was constructivist and data orientation were critical which meant that meaningfulness of data was co-produced by my interactions with the participants, in light of the value systems through which our mutual reality was structured. For my analyses, I used both

deductive and inductive techniques as some themes were generated using the theories and concepts mentioned in Chapter 3 whilst others were brought into light by participant responses in the open coding phase. Lastly, since I wanted to center the perspectives of the participants, whilst highlighting the value structures that underpinned these views, I did both semantic and latent coding. At the end of each stage, I wrote researcher reflections on the process to acknowledge my own subjectivity and my role in the analytic process.

In phase 1, I familiarized myself with my data. I organized my data in NVivo by school type. For each school, I had the translated data from the interviews and focus groups, pictures I had taken on the visits to each school and memos I had written at the time. Additionally, I organized a list of documents and websites that I had used for providing national and provincial educational contexts and podcasts and other audio-visual media that was part of my document review. I read through my transcripts and listened to the interview data again after which I did a round of memos for each of the three schools.

In the second phase, I used NVivo to do an initial coding of data for each school, using guidelines by Bryne (2022), which indicated that coding needed to be contextual and clear. After initial coding, I wrote another memo for my initial impressions of what story the data told for the school. Examples of codes in this initial round were “girls are more policed than boys”, “schools have responsibility to teach some religion”, “purpose of education is character building”, “staff is a community”, “education is important for a good future”, “poor student accountability”, “teaching conditions in public sector are poor” etc. In the second round of coding, I cleaned the codes by going over the data again to ensure that the codes reflected the underlying data by going through each coded item’s references individually in NVivo. In phase 3 and 4, I used a combination of deductive and inductive methodologies to generate themes and

sub/themes for patterns in the data. I did this stage in Excel after I exported my codebook and used color coding to make connections within the dataset as I found it visually easier. Stage 3 and 4 of the process was recursive and continuous as I tried to make sense of how the codes addressed my research question from the data I had gathered. In stage 5, I went over the interviews again to select and collate data that I wanted to include in my presentation of case analyses to exemplify what each theme portrayed and the way they all combined to answer how different schools implemented the SNC policy in Pakistan. The last stage of RTA was writing the within-case and cross-case analyses presented in Chapters 5-9.

Ethical Considerations

This research topic was politically charged when the SNC policy was rolled out and at the time that the interviews were conducted. Additionally, my research asked about gender and religion both of which are sensitive topics in Pakistan and can generate significant backlash from society. To protect both the schools and individuals who participated in this research, I de-identified the data and assigned pseudonyms to the individuals. Data collected from the research is stored in a password protected UMD Box for backup and on a personal password protected computer. I am the only person to have access to both these repositories.

I realized that even though I belonged to the community of educators within Pakistan, and I shared several of my identities with the participants, there were some relations of power between me as a researcher and the participants. I noted these in our initial meetings before the interviews and sought to ensure that all participants were able to express their perspectives freely. Language was one of the main underlying power constructs in my interactions with participants. I assured participants that they were free to express themselves in whichever

language they preferred, and my interest was in hearing the substance of their opinion and not in the language they chose to articulate it in. I also shared instances from my teaching experience to build a rapport with them and allow them to open up about their own teaching experiences.

Ensuring Research Quality

For this research, I had multiple sources of data which I used to triangulate my findings. I used information from the documents reviewed to corroborate instances of interest in the interview data to get a more nuanced understanding of the contexts and the perceptions of the participants. The objective of this triangulation was not to remove researcher bias but to create more context around the data points of interest in the research and to ensure that I was fairly representing the voices of the research participants. Once created, I double checked all themes with the original data and collated all excerpts I used to provide evidence for the analytical claims I made.

Another key element of good quality qualitative research is providing *thick descriptions* and adequate information about the contexts of each school to allow the reader to make his/her own informed judgements of the researchers' interpretations and conclusions that are presented. I endeavored to provide national and provincial contexts to set up the research. For each case school, I presented physical descriptions from my observations as well as notes and memos from the sites to make them as three-dimensional as possible.

One of the key reasons for using the Reflexive Thematic Analysis method for data analysis was to ensure that my positionality was positively accounted for in the research process. For Braun and Clark (2023) one of the ten core assumptions of reflexive thematic analysis was researcher subjectivity. For them, "Researcher subjectivity is the primary tool for reflexive TA,

as knowledge generation is inherently subjective and situated.” (Braun & Clark, 2023, p. 93).

For them, objective knowledge generation is not the aim of research that is grounded in a constructivist epistemology. Instead, the focus of ensuring quality needs to be on the strong and convincing analysis of data which is nuanced and variegated. The key to achieve this is researcher reflexivity through which the researcher can understand their own subjective lens.

This has a direct impact on the quality of the research produced. I kept a reflexivity journal where I noted down my own personal subjectivities, how they related to my research, why I had chosen this topic and how I perceived myself as a researcher residing in the tension between the emic and the etic. I interrogated my own value systems and at the end of this exercise I was able to clearly articulate my positionality, described earlier in this chapter, in relation to the research. However, my critical reflexivity was not just limited to trying to understand my personal biases coming into the research, it was instrumental in helping me make methodological decisions such as choosing which language to use for data analysis. I would also like to note here that the study does not aim for generalizability which is a precept of the positivist paradigm according to Braun and Clark (2022). Another key criterion for assessing research quality is the transferability.

According to Kuper et.al (2008), readers must decide if the study is transferable to the contexts they are researching or studying by looking for resonance which is the extent to which the study has meaning for the reader. The use of different school contexts to study the policy implementation processes presented here and the theoretical discussion of its results enhance the potential of transferability of the study’s findings and its applicability to other research contexts.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explain the methodology of this research into the policy implementation process in different types of Pakistani schools. I presented an in-depth description of the research paradigm I ascribe to and my positionality as a researcher who has been educated and worked in the environment in which this study took place. This chapter also provides a snapshot of the cases that are included in the multi-case study. I have also provided a detailed look at the procedures of data collection and data analysis, the methodological questions I wrestled with and the ethical considerations and limitations of this study.

Chapter 5: The Public School

School Profile and Environment

This public elementary school was located in a busy bazaar, only a stone's throw away from the busiest main street in the small city of Kamalia. On the day that I first visited the school in the last week of May 2022, the temperature had crossed a 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and the air was blistering and still. It had not rained in the city for several weeks so that roads leading to the school were dusty and hot. The school was easily visible with a bright sign announcing its name and with painted outer walls covered in quotes about learning. The school's gate was painted in the colors of the Pakistani flag and a banner in English over the gate boldly stated, "Enter to Learn, Leave to Serve."

The school caters to almost 900 students from pre-K (nursery) to Grade 8. The area of the school was not very large, and it consisted of three main building blocks with grades 5-8 having their own separate building. From nursery to grade 5, the school was co-educational and only girls stayed on from grades 5-8. The boys are moved to an all-boys middle school branch.

My first impression of the school was that it was beautiful and bright with colorful walls, a neat courtyard, planters with well-maintained plants in them and some artistically planted young trees. Even though there were no students in the school when I visited, the school was quite noisy due to its proximity to a main road of the city. Several teachers were sitting in the corridors and wrapping up the school term before the beginning of the summer holidays. Some were checking exams whilst others were doing administrative paperwork. A school custodian led me to the principal's office. The school office was not air-conditioned and had all the hallmarks of a government building. It had a Pakistani flag and pictures of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and

Allama Iqbal. Muhammad Ali Jinnah is considered to be the founder of Pakistan and Allama Muhammad Iqbal, our national poet is credited with elucidating the idea that Hindus and Muslims in British India were two different nations based on their distinct religions with such irreconcilable differences that they warranted separate countries. The office also had a security camera monitor for the gate. Ghazala, one of the teachers, met with me and we organized how the interviews would proceed over the next week. She had been asked to assist me by the principal who had been unavailable due to a family emergency. We settled on using the principal's office for the focus group and the individual interviews since it was the only room connected with a UPS battery that would keep the fan running even when the electricity went out, an occurrence which is common in the summer months in Pakistan, especially in the smaller cities.

Ghazala gave me a tour of the school and we had a very informal conversation about teaching, the city, and the school environment. Each of the classrooms I visited contained chairs or benches lined in rows facing a chalkboard and a teacher's desk showcasing the very teacher-centered education system. The rooms had multiple fans, big windows to let in light, cupboards, and a water cooler towards the back of the room. Outside each classroom was a small black board which had three lines for date, class enrollment and the number of students present.

On the walls of each class was a timetable and different charts in English or Urdu related to different subjects. Chart content ranged from detailed anatomical drawings of the eye, the heart and the nervous system and parts of flowers to quotes about the importance of education such as 'knowledge is light so concentrate on your studies' to definitions for Urdu or English grammar. Another important and visible topic in these class decorations was religious charts. In one of the classrooms, a child was shown sitting on a prayer mat with a description of the virtues

of prayer (*dua*). In another classroom, a chart in detailed calligraphy, showed the 99 names associated with the Prophet Muhammad. COVID posters expounding on cleanliness, masking and handwashing and social distancing were also present in some classes. The nursery class was the most colorful with detailed drawings of Winnie the Pooh cartoons, the Urdu alphabet, and the English alphabet.

Posters also adorned the walls of the corridors and there were painted murals on the walls of the yards. On one of the walls, was a mural of trees, a river and a mountain asking students to plant trees. Additionally, a portrait of the founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah in a library full of books was on the side of the middle school building and there were religious quotes in Arabic on the wall. One was a passage from the Quran questioning if those with knowledge and those without knowledge could be considered equal. The second quote was a saying of Prophet Muhammad that gaining knowledge was the responsibility of every Muslim man and woman. Next to these religious quotes was the national anthem of Pakistan which, interestingly, is written in Persian and not Urdu which is the national language of Pakistan. The school courtyard was small and there was a Pakistani Flag in it. In the morning, this is where the assembly of students took place before the students headed to their classes.

Apart from these civic and religious messages, the other visible signage in the school were political plaques. Each of the buildings had plaques detailing the names of city politicians who were members of the provincial or federal parliaments and had inaugurated different buildings in the school. The school had a computer room with a computer but that was locked because there was no one to teach computers as a subject. There was also a records room where records for the teachers and students were maintained. Everything in the school including

attendance of teachers, letters from the principal and government notices was maintained in registers and there was no digitization of any of these documents.

Staff Profiles

The educational profile of the 7 interviewees who participated in the research from this school is given in Table 1. Five of the teachers I interviewed had a master's degree in various subjects including Political Science, Economics and English Literature. Nusrat, who had 28 years of teaching experience under her belt, had a 2-year bachelor's degree. The teaching experience of this group ranged from Nusrat's 28 years to Ghazala's 5 years. Uzma, the principal, also had a Master's Degree in Education. She had been in-service since 1986 when she started her teaching career. In 2000, she became an administrator, and she had been the principal of this school since 2011. All the teachers had studied in the public system except Shabana who went to army schools because her father was in the Army.

Table 1

Staff profiles for public school

Name	Age	Highest Degree Achieved	Designation	Experience
Uzma	55	Masters	Principal	36 years
Zahida	35	Masters	Teacher	13 years
Shabana	34	Masters	Teacher	10 years
Ghazala	40	Masters	Teacher	5 years
Nazneen	32	Masters	Teacher	8 years
Nusrat	52	Bachelors	Teacher	28 years
Aleena	34	Masters	Teacher	10 years

As a group, they appeared to be close and supportive of each other and it showed in the way they talked about one another in individual interviews and the focus group. They shared glimpses of their lives with me, outside of the job; Nazneen's husband worked in the Middle East, she was financially stable but worked to support herself and her daughter, Zahida lived with her brother's family as she was not married, Nusrat who was unmarried did not speak or understand English well, and the other teachers asked me to be mindful of that during our one-on-one interview. Ghazala had lost her husband and she had become a teacher after his death because she needed an income to support her two daughters. The teachers who had school age children had chosen to enroll them in English-medium private schools which they deemed to have better education than the public schools. All the teachers were very proud of their teaching appointments as they were based on merit and were not due to political influence. Each of them had spent time teaching in nearby villages known as *chaks*. They commuted from the city to the villages and had often been the only teachers in the entire village schools. Zahida shared how difficult the commute had been for her,

My first posting as a public-school teacher was in a village. Even my forefathers have not lived in villages. It was so difficult to go to school on bikes. My school was in the center of the village. There was no other means of transport to get there. My brother would pick and drop me. And then there were the weather conditions and the roads as well.

Sometimes we would meet packs of stray dogs that would run after us. That was the worst.

Nusrat had similar experiences with her first appointment, "Yes. And it was very difficult.

Sometimes, I had to take my mother with me, sometimes my brothers as I could not go alone."

Zahida, who had also taught in private schools, had chosen to join the public sector for job security. She still felt that her temperament was more closely aligned with private schools' teaching philosophy as opposed to public.

I think that now I am in the public sector. People do not go back once they get in here.

With a public sector job, there is job security. In the other job we had great relationships with co-workers and the administration was like sisters in the private school. Ma'am (principal of the previous school) keeps telling me to come back but I tell her no one leaves the public sector. It has taken me a long time to settle in this job.

These comments showcase how a teaching appointment inside the city was difficult to get and despite the difficulties of teaching in the public sector, job security kept teachers from leaving.

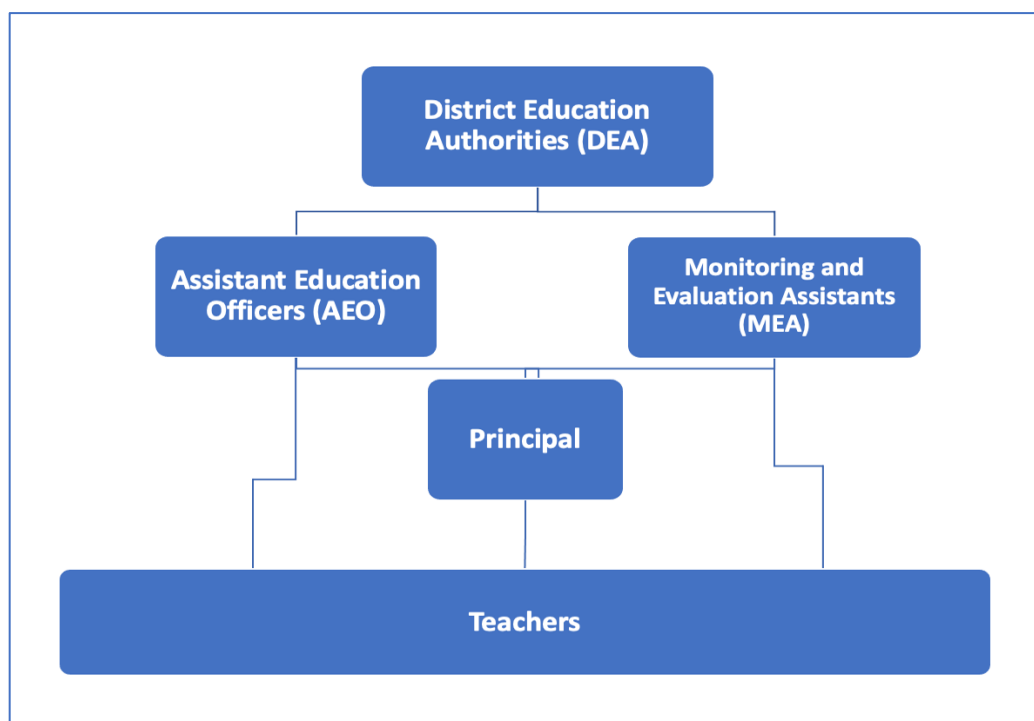
Institutional Hierarchy and Arrangements

Due to its public status, the institutional hierarchy that impacted the everyday functioning of the school is not limited to the principal and the teachers but also includes the district and sub-district educational level personnel. The organizational arrangements of the school are shown in Figure 1. Each of the schools in the sub-district (known as a *tehsil*) of Kamalia falls under the purview of an Assistant Education Officer (AEO), who reported to the District Education Authorities (DEAs) in the administrative head office in Toba Tek Singh. In addition to the AEO, there are Monitoring and Evaluation assistants from the School Education Department and the Punjab Monitoring and Implementation Unit (PMIU) that visit schools to collect data on school infrastructure and attendance. These data are publicly available on the internet as a tracking and accountability measure for the schools.

The AEO is responsible for supervising the school and helping the teachers with the development of lesson plans and curriculum content. Within the school, the principal, Uzma, was the only person in the formal administration who was responsible for managing approximately 20 teachers for the various grades.

Figure 4

Hierarchy of Public School



All the teachers were tasked with shouldering a great degree of administrative work for their classes. This was not limited to just taking attendance. It was also collecting the monthly fees of Rs. 20 (approximately 7 cents) from each of their students, maintaining their birth certificates and family forms to ensure they were enrolled in line with government guidelines and ensuring that the school's retention levels remained one hundred percent. As Zahida illustrates,

Teachers are expected to make sure that they enroll the same number of students in their class for the next year as the current year. All students have to be registered through the paperwork (national id cards) of the parents. If parents fail to provide these documents, we cannot enroll them. All of these numbers go to the government. So, if the school has 910 students this year, it should have the same number of students next year as the government tracks retention.

The teachers viewed their relationship with the principal as helpful and cooperative to a certain extent that was dictated by whether district administration was involved or not.

According to Shabana,

Her (the principal's) first priority is that she has to defend her teacher at all costs. She tries her best to contain the issue and make sure that it does not escalate and come into the notice of the educational administration of the district as the teacher will then have to go and give an explanation. She is cooperative in this regard. She also gives suggestions and tells us that it does not matter to her as she will be left out of the loop once the matter reaches the educational administration. Sometimes, she does motivate some of us.

Zahida echoed similar sentiments: "At the school level, ma'am is cooperative. If we have issues with a specific student, even if it is monetary, ma'am will help."

Uzma was also integral to ensuring that all teachers were doing their work. One of the most stringent directives that the school and the teachers have to comply with is the hundred percent pass rate of students to the next grade regardless of their performance in class and on exams. From the perspectives of the teachers this was a dual problem. On the one hand, it provided some teachers who work in the school an opportunity to just do paperwork and not put an effort in teaching their classes and on the other hand, it gave students the leeway to not learn

as they knew they would be promoted to the next grade. For Ghazala, “There are many teachers who do this and just do paperwork and not teach” but the principal was aware of these teachers and had ensured that they did their jobs. As Zahida pointed out:

Earlier, it was like we would go and teach, and then other teachers would do their own things, like sewing. In city schools this concept is now gone. In the village schools, it was up to us and our sense of duty. Some teachers would do these other things. Some did not. Here the principal keeps a close eye on what we are doing. She takes steps to improve us as teachers and classroom managers.

Uzma told me during our interview that she maintained a schedule in which she kept an eye on teachers and the work students were doing,

I keep days on which I go to classes and test the students and I also check how the teachers are teaching. It depends on how busy I am. If during the day I have free time, then I go around and check classes. I check notebooks weekly or after 10 days. I do it class wise.

She also provided vital support to the teachers when they were dealing with disruptive or inattentive students. Shabana shared that teachers spent a lot of time discussing students who were difficult with Uzma, “ We discuss this a lot and ma’am gives us good guidance, but we are the ones who have to apply this. She tells us to be kind and not overly strict so that the student listens to us and does not completely stop listening.” From Uzma’s perspective, she trusted her teachers to handle their teaching responsibilities and her time was spent more on administrative tasks to keep the school running functionally,

It is a big responsibility. You have to take care of everything all the time. There is furniture. You have to maintain that. Understand that this is a tough job and in it

everything is your responsibility. You have to look after everything. It needs the cooperation of the staff but the responsibility rests with you and you cannot share that. This focus on the appearance of the school had not gone unnoticed by the teachers. Nusrat, who had been teaching at this school since before Uzma became principal, talked about this shift in priorities:

Yes, it has changed a lot. The previous principal was very hardworking. So is this one. She focuses a lot on decoration and how the school looks. The previous principal was also interested in this, but she was more focused on the teachers and the learning. This focus on the physical appearance of the school stemmed in a large part from what the district education officials think are important metrics to observe on their visits. According to Uzma, “the requirement is that the school is well maintained, and it has a good ‘look’.

Obviously, if the school looks good then it will be attractive to the parents.”

The relationship between the teachers and the AEO was strained. The teachers do not feel like the district personnel treated them with respect. In the focus group when asked about their interaction with the AEO’s all of the teachers expressed strong negative opinions using phrases such as “not fair at all”, “they are rude”, “frankly, they need moral and civility training.”

According to Aleena,

I think they believe that the more they belittle us, the better work they will get out of us. That is their formula of using their power and authority. But that backfires, if you are insulted, you do not want to deliver good work as you know you are as skilled as they are.

In response to a question if the AEOs provided any pedagogical support as outlined in their duties, Zahida gave an example of how a typical observation with an AEO went:

Oh no. Do not talk to us about that. No one will ever ask us if we need help with what we have taught. No one will come and give a demonstration on how something can be taught. Suppose you are the person observing me. You will come to class, check attendance, and then maybe ask one of the students a spelling or a definition. If they do not know, you will blame me for not teaching well.

Shabana echoed this,

I mean that if you have 50 students in class, 90 percent of them must be present in a given day. If they are not present, you are going to be held responsible and have to give an explanation as to why students are absent.

From the accounts of the teachers, it was clear that teacher and student presence in school was a more prioritized metric than what was being taught or how it was being taught. This is congruent with the data that the School Education Department's electronic dashboard accessible on the internet also showcased. The school information system website run by the government of Punjab showcases teacher and student enrollment numbers as well as the results of monthly spot checks in schools which give numbers for teacher and student attendance in percentages and the retention rates in different grades. On the website, most schools in Kamalia had a retention of a hundred percent (Punjab Monitoring and Implementation Unit, 2023). This monitoring structure has been in place even before the introduction of the SNC. As Aleena explained,

Our accountability is extensive from the beginning. Musharraf improved it a lot. Before 2002, it was not extensive. I have heard stories from a lot of people (teachers) that in our time we did not even go to school. Now that is not the case. There is strict accountability. You cannot skip anymore; you cannot just mark your attendance but not teach your class. Your head (principal) can tell you that you are not safe from losing your job and I can

only support you till here. If they put an inquiry on you then I cannot help you. So SNC did not increase our accountability.

According to Aleena, the teachers did not have an issue with the idea of accountability which they considered to be a good thing. Their issue is with how black and white that accountability seems to be,

For institutions, accountability has been a good thing. It has improved institutions a lot. The improvements in school are a result of this accountability. The deputy (Deputy District Officer) has to complete the visits, the AEO's have to complete a specific number of visits. The CEO (Chief Education Officer) also visits random schools. We are not scared of accountability. But you can have one bad day, you have bad luck, and someone comes to observe you. Then it does not matter how many days you did good work. That is a little frustrating but otherwise it's fine.

They all fear being embroiled in an administrative inquiry due to parental reaction or due to not meeting the government benchmarks of adequate job performance where their principal could not defend them. According to Shabana,

There is a lot of pressure on all of us. Ma'am worries about the consequences for us. We get embroiled in administrative inquiries if we are suspected of violating government rules. Students can be unpredictable, and we must ensure that nothing we do is a cause for being investigated by the district.

Even though the teachers felt that the AEO's were harsh, they also acknowledged that the vertical hierarchy of the Education Department probably created pressure on them to ensure schools under their purview met all benchmarks. In Aleena's opinion,

The AEO's are also under pressure though. If your school strength is low, or something like electricity is not working or the fan is not working, they will also be asked that when you visited, why did you not check these things. To relieve that pressure, they pressurize the teacher and show authority. Like there are 15 different schools under one AEO. In each school, they visit monthly and check things like is the strength of the students complete.

The teachers had observed little change in policies due to the SNC which they consider to be a change in books for the most part and the addition of *Nazra*, which is the teaching of the reading of the Holy Quran as a subject. Nazneen said:

Well, the school has a system and it continued as before only the books changed. We already had a period system. Only the *Nazra* period was added to it. Previously, that used to be zero period. I used to give information in that.

However, even though teachers perceive that school policies have not changed due to the SNC, overtime there has been some change in them. One thing they all agree on is that the policies of the schools have changed in accordance with and at the behest of the government. The focus of the government on content heavy learning has pushed out extra-curricular activities from the school timetable and replaced it with a zero period that is now dedicated to teaching *Nazra*.

Zahida said, "We used to have drawing as a subject earlier and they removed it from the curriculum. Now we have a zero period where we can do something like exercise etc. with students." When I asked her if that was different from her own childhood experience in the public schools, she elaborated,

Now students just study. We used to have events like independence days, speeches, and other things. Now there is nothing. When we used to come home, we would continue

practicing or singing or whatever we were doing earlier. Now we do not do anything.

Even if we keep a function or event, at maximum we bring one or two classes.

From a discipline perspective, the school has a strict no corporal punishment policy as directed by the government. Whilst no clear law prohibits corporal punishment in Punjab, in the Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2014, Article 16 clause 4 states that it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that a child studying in the school is not subjected to corporal punishment or harassment (School Education Department, 2023). For the teachers this directive is welcome if slightly problematic as the school does not allow them to discipline students in any way. According to Zahida,

A little bit of strictness or scolding is required (*daant*). But we are not allowed to scold them. It is a government slogan that “*maar nahi pyaar*” (no beating, only love). I am not sure if today’s generation deserves this love though.

Shabana added in her interview that some parents requested that the teacher be strict with their children,

It is government policy that the school follows. We are not allowed to physically hit the students which used to be a big issue in schools and that is understandable. But there are parents that will come to us and tell us that they are okay with us being strict with their children if they are disruptive or not paying attention in class. These are the students that we focus on and then use to control the others. But overall, we do not physically touch our students.

Coupled with the 100% retention and promotion policy, teachers felt that there was poor student accountability. Ghazala explained that the students were aware of the retention policy, “every

year the students get promoted to the next grade. They know that even if they do not write anything in the exams they are moved to the next class.”

Further, parental involvement was unhelpful or indifferent for the teachers especially . Ghazala added that,

Even if the student is not studying, we cannot put any pressure on them. We must make sure that our strength remains complete. So yes, parents have an easy option to change the school of their child. They threaten us with that too.

Zahida agreed that since scolding or strictness was out of the question, other ways of creating some ‘pressure’ on students to learn must be used,

For students who do not study or are not attending regularly , we send them to ma’am (principal) so she can talk to them. Sending them to the office creates this little bit of pressure on the students to give more regard to us. Ma’am gives them good advice on the issue we face. Corporal punishment is against the law and not allowed. All we can do is counsel them a little bit. If the student understands, they will comply. Otherwise even if the mother tells them to do something they will not. And some students will not listen or understand what we are trying to say. In those cases, we cannot do anything.

Nusrat who taught grade 1 believed that teachers needed to find ways to motivate the students to work,

We discuss it amongst each other and gather suggestions. Some say give them leeway, someone else might think that being strict is better. We try different things and hope that something works. Sometimes I bring toffees for the students to motivate them to work.

When I asked the participants what they believed the purpose of education to be Shabana said,

Education is important. Well, I can only speak for myself. My end goal is that the student that comes to my class does learn something before he/she leaves. Even if that learning is small, that is what I strive for.

For Nusrat, education was about teaching manners, “We try to teach them the sense to differentiate between right and wrong. We teach them values such as respect your adults, do not raise your voice against them, respect your parents and teachers.” Uzma contended that education ensures success in life, “My vision is that my students become something in life, they are successful, and they bring a good name to our school. I want them to have a good future.”

In Pakistan, most schools administer exams annually and in grade 8, grade 10 and grade 12, the provincial government conducts board exams. Therefore, exams made up the focal point of this education setup and teacher and parental focus is geared towards them. According to Zahida, “parents will say to us that what you are teaching is not inside the books and we have to explain that we are covering all the things in the syllabus, and they should not worry.” For both the administration and the teachers, having the students ready to sit for end of year exams is a culmination of the whole year of teaching. For the students, doing well in exams is seen as the sign of success in school. According to Shabana, “For them it is just that we need to study this and understand this and that’s it. We will get tested on it and we need full marks from ma’am on this subject.” This way of evaluating student learning was not even stopped due to the pandemic even though all indicators showed that COVID-19 created high learning loss in students. Aleena related that,

Following COVID, we got a small syllabus from the government, and we were able to cover it. There was learning loss for students who did not keep studying at home. But we were able to make them ready for the exams.

When due to the SNC, the exams were concept-based students struggled with them which reflected the fact that students are used to rote-learning in this school. Rote-learning is something that Zahida and Shabana thought was being exacerbated by using English as a medium of instruction in certain subjects like science and math. Zahida stated,

Look, students learn English as a subject till grade 3. In Urdu, they write sentences from themselves. In English we help them read passages, do exercises. But the student does not write the answer to a question on their own. They cannot construct sentences without help. They will then revert to rote learning (*rata* system).

Shabana added that, “The students were a little worried in the exams and we had to point out that the topics were covered in class. These are young children who get worried when even one-word changes.” Zahida further stated that, “the students at our government school cannot attempt an exam in English. In a class of 55, maybe 5 can do that”.

In grade 2, Nusrat took exams orally this year because the students were not sufficiently prepared for written exams, “The students liked the books and exercises and since we were asking questions from within the books, they did well. The books are colored, and the color attracts the students.” Interestingly, when teachers referred to their own past experiences as students’ rote-learning is easily visible as a pattern. Zahida shares an incident from her childhood,

When we were children, our essays were at our fingertips. Our teacher used to call on us turn by turn and make us recite them and ask us the spelling. I still remember them. But even in Math. The first time we did Algebra, we had no idea what was happening. The next day was our funfair. But we were made to stand in front of the board and the teacher kept making us practice till we understood and could get it right.

Due to their own learning being rooted in memorizing lessons before they understood them, the teachers perpetuated similar teaching pedagogies in their own classrooms.

Learning Environment of the School

The learning environment in this public school was difficult. Class size was at capacity with each teacher in charge of 45-50 students which was more than the standard the government has for class size and the teachers could not advocate for smaller classes. Zahida said, “They have a standard of 40 students per class. We all have almost 50. And we have no rights.” Further, she added that large classes also made discipline an issue with teachers struggling to keep them organized. “I think if the strength of the class is reduced somewhat, we will have fewer discipline problems.”

Having such large class sizes put a limit on what the teacher could teach as Ghazala pointed out:

Look, in my class there are 55 students. In a 40-minute period, how can one teacher deliver the lesson, check the class work, take out mistakes. A teacher cannot do that with this much class strength. She can be a great teacher and know everything, but she cannot do it in such conditions.

It also put pressure on class resources such as chairs as Zahida explains that 4 children sat on seats made for two. Additionally, it limited the space that was available for the students during recess, “I mean look at the area of our school. During break time, it is difficult for teachers to pass through.”

Most of the teachers believed that they would be better able to implement some aspects of the SNC policy such as teaching science in English if they had smaller class sizes. Shabana stated, “There is confusion about what is happening and if it continues in the same way, it will not give good results. With this much strength it is impossible to do it. Maybe if we had 20-25

students”. For Ghazala, “ If we start with teaching in the same language (English), with a little help from parents, and a smaller class strength we can, like the private schools, teach science in English as well.”

Another key issue was the lack of resources and the varied socioeconomic background of the children who study here. Nazneen points out, “Children also come from different backgrounds. Some children have educated parents who can help. Others come from homes where there is not enough to eat.” Nusrat added that, “It is very difficult to meet the needs of all our students. Some of them come to school without eating and we give them money to eat.” The student socioeconomic background also translates into other issues such as the issue of school supplies. Zahida mentioned that,

On top of that we have the issue of supplies. Copies, pencils etc. are limited. When we would like to practice language skills and students need these supplies which cost 5 rupees or 10 rupees, they will not buy them immediately. Sometime will pass and in that they will not make notes or practice.

The learning environment in this public school was constrained by several factors, including student background, lack of resources and an overburdened teaching staff. With pressure from government officials to follow the SNC policy as closely as possible, the teachers felt that the SNC was an added burden to their full plate. The extensive monitoring system further added to the stress the teachers felt and it further limited their agency to make adaptations to classroom management that could have a positive impact on students.

Experiences with the SNC Policy Roll Out

The SNC policy was not the first time the syllabus had been changed for most of the teachers at this school. For Nusrat who had almost 28 years of experience under her belt, this was the fourth time the syllabus had changed and each time, “ They keep making it more complicated especially for the younger students.” For most of the teachers, the experience with the SNC policy roll out was as they expected. When I asked them how they were informed that the new curriculum was going to be introduced, they had similar responses. Zahida knew that the syllabus change had been outlined in the election manifesto of the PTI government. For her, it was an expected and welcome change.

When I first heard of it as it was clearly outlined in the objectives of the PTI government, I thought it was a good thing. Our students are studying in different streams of education. Some are in private schools; some are in public schools. They are learning different things. When after matric (grade 10) the competition increases for colleges, it makes an impact as there is a difference in knowledge. We should acknowledge that our students who study in public schools do not have the knowledge to compete with the students who study in private schools. So, it is a good thing that because of the SNC you will be teaching the same content across all schools whether public or private.

Uzma, as the principal, knew that the syllabus was being changed when the books for the new academic session, which were generally distributed to the students with the final exam results never arrived, but this lack of information was normal, “Whenever books are changed, when they are delivered to us and we open them, we find out that they are changed. We did not know that the books were changing for the SNC.” Ghazala also reported the same,

This year, we did not receive books when the government decided to implement the SNC. We were informed that your curriculum has been changed and it will be an SNC

curriculum and the books for that have not been published yet and the students will receive the books in the holidays. This is how we found out. The books then came out in July.

These statements indicate a lack of inclusion in the policy process. Some teachers were aware that the syllabus was up for a change because they had heard it on news talk shows but the government had made no effort to inform the teachers of such a large change in their teaching duties.

Implementation Strategy of the School

During the summer holidays, the public-school teachers were enrolled in a three-day training to update them on the syllabus change. This training was online and conducted by master trainers. For the most part, the teachers did not find it helpful. For Nazneen it was an issue of internet connectivity, “The training was online and sometimes there was a network problem and we missed some of it.” For Ghazala the problem was “we had training without seeing the books.” For Shabana the training was inconsequential, “It does not matter what happened in the training, your attendance needs to be 100%, only then you will receive the certificate of SNC teaching.” Further, the teachers related in the focus group that the School Education Department trainings followed the same pattern as explained by Zahida, “And there is a rule of training in the Education Department. If I am delivering the training, I will come in and start the topic and then immediately ask the teachers to tell me how to teach a concept.”

As a result, the teachers felt the onus of making sense of the policy fell on their shoulders.

Ghazala shared that,

We ended up doing all the work including sorting out what was new in the curriculum and what was old. We knew it better than the master trainers and the education officers.

When we saw the books, we spent time figuring out what was new and what was not. The trainers and the government staff had no clue.

In individual interviews, the teachers talked about the SNC app for mobile phones which was used as a training tool after the initial training. The app had 11 units on it and Shabana explained how the teachers were expected to use it,

We had to do the entire activities and at the end the app would tell us how much of it we did correctly. Sometimes, we would not be getting them correct because the app was not working correctly, or we did not understand the activity. Then we would ask someone like a master trainer to show us how to do it. Like there were these geometrical shapes activity where the shapes would not drag. And then at the end, we were required to have a 95% to 97% correct response rate on the app.

Ghazala added that the app had some nice learning material, but it was difficult to use it in class for a variety of reasons.

The app had 11 units and there were some activities included in those. There were some videos on it as well. Some of those videos were good. However, they were not related to the syllabus at all. They could maybe be used as models for teaching, but they were not really relevant in terms of curriculum, but they were nice videos.

Similarly, for Zahida, the app was not useful, “In the beginning, they gave us an app for content with eleven chapters and some exercises. Those are not impactful. We will read them, our students will too but if they practically show us how to do it, it would be better.”

When I asked if the AEOs provided any training or demonstrations during their visits to the school most of the teachers gave negative responses. Ghazala shared,

They were supposed to come into different schools on a monthly basis and demonstrate how to teach certain topics. But even with the AEOs it was the same thing. They would come in and ask us to open the SNC app on our phones. And then they would say this is Unit 1. I mean as teachers we can also see that it is unit 1. They would then ask different teachers to read different parts of the question or the training. The app is in Urdu, so no one had any language issues. But they did not practically demonstrate anything from the app that was helpful to us.

Lack of pedagogical support during the implementation process coupled with teaching resources that could not be used in large classes made the teachers feel that they were mostly on their own. This was coupled with pressure from the government that was not related to how students were learning with the new curriculum. Zahida explained that the introduction of the SNC came with added tasks which the teachers were expected to perform even as they juggled the syllabus change.

Since the introduction of the SNC, there are a thousand additional burdens, there are apps they made us download and instructions on these are all the additional things you must do. But no one is asking how much of what we gave you have you taught? How did the students react to the new content? How did the teachers like it? Instead, there are all these extra things such as apps etc. I mean it was a good thing if it had been done well.

As a result of this lack of support from the vertical hierarchy, they relied on each other as a resource for pedagogical issues. Ghazala shared that,

The teachers were very supportive of each other during the implementation of the SNC. We discussed the problems we were facing and then we brainstormed solutions for those together. No one gave us a solution to our issues. And I still think that every school is teaching this curriculum differently.

Nazneen provided a practical example of this support where teachers adjusted their schedules to ensure they were able to teach even when they lacked specific skillsets like not knowing English.

We did support each other. For example, Ma'am Ayesha has difficulty teaching English. So, she took *Islamiyat* for my class and I would teach English to her class. We also discuss with each other how we are teaching different things. How much reading to give, or the method of teaching a specific topic. So, we do help each other out.

Sometimes, the teachers approached Uzma for help as Zahida shares "Sometimes we may go to ma'am for help regarding some issue. She might give us feedback or good suggestions."

For Ghazala, the lack of support from the government department adds to variability with which the SNC is being implemented in different schools.

I still think that every school is teaching this curriculum differently. Some are teaching it in English. Others are teaching it in Urdu. Some people are treating the curriculum as a formality and saying they have completed the syllabus and then before the exam, they are teaching the students the test because the students do not really understand anything.

This shows that the teachers were not.

Challenges to Policy Implementation

For the teachers, implementing the SNC in the classrooms was a challenging experience due to several aspects of the policy that were beyond their capacity when the syllabus was first introduced.

Language Issues-English

Chief among the issues was that of the language of instruction. Before the SNC, this school taught with Urdu as a medium of instruction and English as a subject. The SNC policy seesaws between English and Urdu as the medium of instruction for different subjects. For grades 1-3, subjects taught in Urdu include *Waqfiat-e-Aama* (general knowledge which was previously taught as social studies and science), *Islamiyat* and Urdu. In addition to having English as a subject, Math is now taught in English as well. From grade 4 onwards, *Waqfiat -e-Aama* splits back into Science and Social Studies. Science is taught in English and Social Studies (*Masharti Uloom*) continues to be taught in Urdu. For the teachers, language change is a huge problem in the classroom. For Ghazala, who taught grade 4 last year, it was especially problematic in science, “I taught 3 chapters of Science in English, but the thing was the students’ faces were completely blank. And in 35 minutes a teacher cannot give individual attention to all her students for spelling and other things.” She expressed frustration about the support she received when she informed her AEO that the children were struggling with Science in English.

We reached out to the AEO about how to teach Science in English. We wanted some guidance or permission to teach in English but shorten the syllabus a little bit and just teach the definitions as the students were struggling. But the response like the training was not helpful at all. They told us, teach like you have always taught. What does that mean? Now everyone can teach however they think best. What is the standard of this study (education)?

After deliberation with the principal and the AEOs Ghazala asked her students to buy the Science books in Urdu from the market and she taught the first three chapters again.

“We tried to teach them in English, but we did not get much of a response. The students were blank, so we switched back to teaching in Urdu.” Nusrat agreed with this, “You just have to teach them in Urdu. They do not understand the concepts in English.”

For Shabana, the SNC offered no difference in content but the difference in language of instruction was an added burden even when the teachers used the new Urdu books.

I think most of the difference is not content. Its language. For example, in science, in the chapter on viruses; Last year we were teaching it in Urdu, using the term *khordbini jaandar*, with English names such as microorganisms written in brackets. Now they just write the English word in Urdu which confuses us and the children. Just call it a *khordbini jaandar*. We can teach spelling in English but writing and teaching these (English terms) words in Urdu script was very difficult. This also makes the kids double minded. Either teach in English or Urdu.

For Nazneen the SNC did not impact the classroom in a positive way because the language-related confusion meant that the students were struggling.

I did not think it improved the classroom much.... in the new syllabus they switched to English. It became complicated then. For the students, English was taught as a subject before, and they could barely cope with that. It was very difficult for them to learn science in English as well.

In Nusrat’s grade 2 Math class she had to use terms in both English and Urdu to teach Math, “We have to then tell them about the terms in English and Urdu such as Ascending and Descending order (*nazooli and saudi*). We tell them it is a ladder.”

English remained the stumbling block, even as a subject. Almost all teachers felt that the syllabus was too overloaded for the students in this school who were coming back to the first regular school year post the COVID-19 pandemic. Nazneen used the English book as an example of syllabus overloading,

For example, let's take the English book. The exercises at the end of the chapters were more activity-based which is a good thing, but for class 2 and class 3, the lessons were made lengthier. Students in classes 2 and 3 could not really read or write well enough yet to keep up with the change in the length of the lesson. With the length of the lesson, it became more difficult to explain to the student the concepts.

On top of the length of lessons, the students are struggling with English vocabulary and Ghazala believed that it was a failure of policy design.

You have several words with the same meaning in English. Instead of choosing a simple one, they chose difficult ones. This is not possible for the students to learn. They need to make it a little simpler. The wording needs to be easier.'

Nusrat agrees that English should be easier for the students than it is, "the students do not pick the lesson quickly though. It takes time because of language. Students do not know words and meanings at all. It should be easy."

For the teachers, the student background plays a huge role in student learning especially in English. The average student in this school did not come from an educated home. As a result, the teachers felt that parents were unable to help the children with reinforcement of class lessons. Uzma claimed that the school faced difficulty with the language which resulted in the school taking exams in Urdu in part due to student background and in part due to the teachers. She said,

The students enrolled in this school are from hand-to-mouth families. Their family background is not that good that they can study in English. Then it is also dependent on the teachers. So yes, there was a problem. Then the government officers said that alright, you can teach in Urdu and take the exams in Urdu.

So, even though, on paper the policy demanded that certain subjects be taught in English, the teachers realized that their students did not have the capacity to absorb the change in language and advocated for change back to Urdu as a medium of instruction. The confusion and frequent switches between English and Urdu resulted in time lost for actual instruction; teachers had to reteach lessons, or they had to slow down to ensure that most of the students were learning something. Further, all of the teachers pointed out that in general, the student family background consisted of adults who had either not been to school or were not educated enough to help the students at home. As a result, the teachers were left to manage the fallout of decreased student learning.

Nazra

The other major challenge that the teachers encountered in the implementation process was the addition of *Nazra* (the teaching of reading the Quran in Arabic) to the syllabus. In the original plan of the SNC, *Nazra* was supposed to be taught by specially trained teachers from religious seminaries known as *qaris* or *qariahs*. The aim was to teach students to read the Quran with *tarteel* (Arabic word for reading the Quran with the proper intonation and rhythm). However, when the policy went into effect, the government never opened positions for *Nazra* teachers because the government exchequer could not afford more teachers on its payroll. As a result, the regular teachers were also given the responsibility of teaching *Nazra*, something which most of them did not feel they were equipped to do. Teaching *Nazra* was also an issue

because not all teachers had studied it the same way. Nazneen, who was supportive of teaching *Nazra* in schools, felt that to do it justice trained teachers needed to be hired,

I like the *Nazra* period, but they need to hire professionals to teach it. All the teachers have not studied the Quran with *tarteel* (hymnody). Before this, students used to go to the mosques in the morning and evening for *tarteel* and proper attention was given to them. With 53 students, we cannot listen to everyone in the 40 minutes of the period. So, if they want to teach *Nazra*, they need to hire *qaris* and *qariahs*. And then they do not have to teach in zero period. They can teach in *different* periods and spend more time on this.

For Ghazala who was vehemently opposed to teaching the Quran in school, *Nazra* presented challenges as it required that teachers teach the reading of the Quran at an accelerated pace,

Honestly, this is a joke. It is not possible to teach the Quran the way they want it taught. In private schools, the *qariah* (trained Quran teacher) is responsible for teaching prayers (*duas*) as that of before meals, before sleeping or going to the washroom etc. Even with a dedicated teacher, they do not teach the whole Quran. Now what they have done is that by grade 2, they want to teach students 8 chapters of the Quran.

Teaching *Nazra* was also an issue because not all the teachers had studied it the same way. As Uzma pointed out,

We have all learned to read the Quran differently. For example, we learned from the neighbor, someone read it with someone else. It is not necessary that everyone read it from a *qari* (trained Quran teacher). That is clear, but when a policy is created, you must carry it out. So, the teachers were able to teach it and they did not say anything about it.

Traditionally, *Nazra* comes with its own set of cultural and religious practices which includes ablution before touching the Quran. It is an important ritual that cannot be observed in schools

due to the number of students present in each class. Additionally, making mistakes in the reading of the Quran is considered a sin and the teachers felt that there was a moral burden on them in trying to teach this. Shabana said,

My job is then to get as much command over it as I can and to make sure I am not teaching anything incorrectly to students. The rest, God is forgiving and knows that I tried to give this religious instruction to the best of my ability.

Nusrat added that “Some students did not have the etiquette that is needed to learn the Quran. They did not know how to handle the Book and we could not ask them to take their shoes off. This bothered me a lot.” In Ghazala’s opinion, “the etiquette of teaching *Nazra* including ablution and cleanliness is not possible in school. The concept of treating our religious books with deference is also something that has finished.” Similarly, Zahida thought that by trying to teach *Nazra* in schools this way showed how society was treating moral learning, “it’s related to how we are treating our moral learning as well. As we are not respecting the Quran, we are leaving everything behind. In an effort to be modern, we are straying far away from our morals.”

Despite these difficulties, the teachers tried to teach *Nazra* as well as they could. They extensively relied on online resources to teach *Nazra* with hymnody as they did not have the training themselves. Shabana said,

I am very focused on doing it really well. Even when I read the Quran for myself. I read translations and explanations of the Quran as well. I want to do it well. We have to look up how the pronunciations of certain Arabic words are. I look it up on YouTube or in the apps. So, for the students, I have downloaded an app with a *qari*’s voice (trained teacher of Quran). And I use that in the classrooms. I replay the same Verse 5 times for the students so that they can pick up the pronunciation. I try my best that there is no mistake.

Despite their best efforts, students who kept up with the subject and did it well were already learning how to read the Quran at home. Nusrat said, “Some students who were also learning the Quran at home did so well. Others just could not do it as well.” She added that for other students, she tried to teach them the primer for Arabic phonics (*Noraani Quaida*) before starting on the first chapter of the Quran, however, she was given a directive by the government officers that she was not supposed to spend time on the primer. She was unable to finish the first chapter during the school year.

My students could not even finish one. The weak students barely coped with the *noorani qaida* (Arabic phonics primer). I wanted to spend some time teaching them the alphabet of Arabic, but the order came that no, you must teach them the first chapter directly. So, I started to teach the first chapter.

These two issues highlight that the agency of the teachers was quite limited by government directives. They were unable to find adequate support for the strategies they adopted to implement the SNC policy considering their own personal views on teaching *Nazra* or subjects like Science in English. Interestingly, Uzma felt that the teachers had an easier job of implementing policy than administrators,

This is a government job, so you do what you have too. Administration is a very tough job. Whatever policy comes, we are tasked with its implementation. That has problems. A lot of them. But we are ready for that. Administration is hard. Teaching is easy.

In the end, the desired outcome of the policy was not realized as the students did not have the capacity to absorb the use of English as the language of instruction or *Nazra* without getting additional help from their homes. The teachers were mostly supportive of the *Nazra* teaching in school as long as they were not tasked with teaching it.

Merits of the Single National Curriculum

Despite the challenges, there were parts of the SNC policy that were improvements on the previous curriculum. The teachers enjoyed teaching the new syllabus and the students enjoyed learning. One of the main things the teachers liked was that the syllabus was giving an opportunity to the teachers to teach something new. For grades 1-3, the combining of Science and Social Studies into *Waqfiat-e-Aama* shortened the syllabus. Zahida explained how she felt that this syllabus was closer to the private school curriculum,

The syllabus we were doing before this one was also a good syllabus, but it was very extensive and lengthy. This syllabus is appropriate in terms of length and can be covered easily. This syllabus matches the syllabus of the private publishers, *Afaq* publishers, which supply books to the private schools here. My nieces and nephews go to private school, and I find their curriculum to be better than public schools.

Aleena agreed that the shorter syllabus was easier than the previous curriculum and it provided the students with opportunities to think and move away from rote learning.

The lessons are short and not lengthy. They are good and informative. They have new words and vocabulary and they have done a good job. The exercises have true and false, and options have been given so students can pick the answer. They are giving students opportunities to think.

For Shabana, the shortening of the syllabus removed one of the tensions that teachers in public schools grappled with

The particular stress of teaching parts of the syllabus instead of everything is now definitely less. We do not have to be selective about what we are teaching because this

syllabus is shorter. Previously we would tell each other, let's teach this and leave that topic because it was not useful.

Zahida agreed that the books were comprehensive and contained all the syllabus topics so that the teachers no longer had to deal with parents who were worried that things from outside the books were being taught,

I like the books. The Urdu books are nice from the language perspective. What we are supposed to do for the year, the books cover all of it. We do not have to take tension that we will have to do things outside of textbooks. Because parents will then say to us that what you are teaching is not inside the books and we have to explain that we are covering all the things in the syllabus, and they should not worry.

The teacher's opinion on the SNC books was also positive when they compared it to their previous books. They liked that the books were colorful, and their students seemed to be more engaged with them. Shabana was happy that it seemed that a concerted effort had been made to improve the books, "The students like the books. They are more colorful. The previous ones were as if they had been downloaded from the net. Now, at least you can tell someone worked on these. It is more to the point." This was corroborated by Nusrat who felt that despite its shortcomings in English and *Nazra*, the new syllabus was a good change for the public schools, "In my opinion the books and the policy of the Single National Curriculum is good. The main issue is that of English. The rest of the books I like, and the children pick it quickly."

The Role of Values and Beliefs in SNC Policy Implementation

Two of the most highlighted aspects of this new curriculum that were debated endlessly in the media were gender and religion as these are the salient value frameworks that the Pakistani

society employs in making meaning of their lives. In the interviews, I asked questions about the inclusion of these in the new curriculum as examples of how implementers use their own values and beliefs to orient themselves to new policies.

Religion

At this school, religion was already a part of everyday education before SNC was implemented. Before the SNC, in the zero-period at the beginning of the day, teachers went over small prayers and surahs with the students or they would ask students to recite prayers if they were done with classwork. Zahida shared that,

The way we used to do it was that ma'am instructed us that if students are finished, make them recite small prayers such as the *durood* (venerations for the Prophet Muhammad) etc. This in my opinion was a good thing. Students liked it and would do it. We would also do things like discuss moral stories or the good thoughts of the day etc. This was not a lot. Then they introduced *Nazra*.

Since education in Pakistan already incorporated *Islamiyat* as a compulsory subject, my questions were centered on the teaching of *Nazra* because this was the new addition to the curriculum. Compared to the earlier method of teaching religion as *Islamiyat* and small morning prayers, *Nazra* was a more systematic undertaking aiming to teach the proper recitation of the whole Quran to students by grade 5. In response to the question of whether formal schooling should teach *Nazra*, especially in diverse societies the teachers had varied responses. Some like Aleena, strongly felt that "it is not my responsibility" and the task of teaching the reading of the Quran should have been left to the parents,

If your set up was such that your society was really educated, the people in your areas are very progressive and they have a lot of awareness, I could teach religion in that society, if

I am religiously aware myself. If I am not religiously aware myself, what will I teach the students? If I have done a course in theology, or I have learned the Quran by heart then I will teach *Nazra*. If I do not have these things, then you are creating a burden for me as a teacher.

According to Shabana, teaching *Nazra* in the way they were was not helpful. She said, “I would say that parents should do it in a good and thorough way at home. Or they should increase the time for us to teach *Nazra*.” Nazneen was of a similar opinion. For her teaching *Nazra* in school was a positive step by the government, “I mean, they need to hire people who have studied the Quran for years. Most of us do not have the expertise to be able to do that. But I think it is a good step to do *Nazra* in school.”

Ghazala echoed Aleena’s sentiments that teaching *Nazra* should not be her responsibility and added that you could not take religion as a subject,

First of all, you cannot take religion as a subject, and we are forced to teach it as a subject. This should not be possible at all. In any institute, all the students are not going to be Muslim. What do we do about the children who are not Muslim?

Interestingly, she was the only teacher who brought up non-Muslim students who were few at this school. When I asked her what they did with these students when teaching *Nazra*, she said, “What are we going to do with them? Nothing. We leave them free as we do not have a teacher for them. We do not actively teach them *Islamiyat* but otherwise we do not do anything with them.”

When I inquired from the teachers how equipped they felt to resolve conflicts that would arise from teaching religion between students who belonged to different Islamic sects they shared that they were not comfortable with being put in this position. Zahida believes that

children were in a learning phase and would have questions about religion which was something their parents should address. In the absence of that at home, teachers ended up shouldering this responsibility. She shared an incident from *Nazra* classes,

We have to teach *wuzu* (mandatory ablution) for *Nazra* according to the sunnah and there we can tell students (from different sects) are about to say something because this is different for Shias and Sunnis. And we tell the students to not talk like that. I have to distract them with a different incident that talks about some other aspect of Islam, so the children do not go and involve the parents.

Shabana shared another incident from her class,

We had two boys, who belonged to different sects, Shia and Syed, and got into an argument over it. I asked them who told them they were from these different sects. I told them they were both Muslims and that was all, and they were not allowed to talk about these things in my class anymore.

She, like Zahida, was afraid the parents would make a big deal of the situation if the teacher was perceived to have sided with one student over the other.

Overall, all teachers agreed that with their class sizes and differences in students' religious backgrounds, they were better off teaching smaller prayers and surahs as they had been doing before the introduction of the SNC. Aleena said, "They should not have done this *Nazra* thing. It should stay at the home with proper *qaris*." Ghazala agreed that "I liked how we used to do it. With a few surahs and prayers earlier". Outside of *Nazra* and *Islamiyat*, the teachers did not believe that the SNC had too many references to religious content in the other subjects. In Nazneen's grade 3 class, there was one chapter in English, "No. We only have the one chapter in English which used to be there in the previous syllabus as well." Shabana's class had similar

chapters in the Urdu and English books, but she did not feel that they were a problem. “Not a whole lot. Whatever they have done is fine. They have added a couple of chapters in Urdu and in English.” Aleena agrees,

No, not that much. *Islamiyat* is about the code of ethics and to teach *ikhlaqiat* (morals). It is the same thing we have been learning and teaching forever. Some of it is about the Prophets, which religious books were given to which prophets, how many prayers there are etc.

When I asked if it was redundant for religious stories such as events from the life of the Prophet Muhammad or his companions to be included in English or Urdu books, the teachers did not agree. Zahida said, “These stories are important for us. ”

On the topic of religion, the teachers were mostly conservative in their opinion. Their main issue with the addition of *Nazra* was that it had been made into their responsibility. Apart from Ghazala and Aleena who felt that they did not think formal education required this much religion, most of the other teachers believed that *Nazra*, if given to trained teachers, was beneficial for students. This belief came from their personal religious values where they thought of Islam as the main source of guidance on how to live life, as Shabana said, “Religion is a part of education. As a teacher, if we can take our students towards a good way of living life, why not add religion to it. Religion is what teaches us how to live a good life.” Despite the added burden of teaching a subject and a language they had no mastery over, their personal belief systems meant that there was little policy refraction from the SNC policy goal.

Gender

The teachers’ perspectives on gender followed a similar pattern to their opinions on religion showing a close relationship between the two value systems. When I asked the teachers

if the SNC depicted detrimental stereotypes for women and girls as highlighted by the critics, they disagreed. In the focus groups, when I asked if the depiction of girls and women wearing head coverings and veils showed a very conservative stereotype of how girls should dress, Zahida responded with, “I mean we are Muslims, wearing a veil (hijab or dupatta) is a reality.” Ghazala added that these were all “talk show topics”. The teachers thought that this issue as highlighted in the media was just to cause sensationalism around the new curriculum, “I think these points are being raised by people who want to create a mess around the idea of gender.”

Though they disagreed that the depiction of women in the books and in the SNC content was conservative, they did agree that the representation of girls and women was much less than that of boys and men. Women in the books were not shown as part of public life. When I discussed this with Zahida in her individual interview, she pointed out that the books were reflecting society, “Whatever is happening in our society, it is reflected in our textbooks. You can take it in a positive way according to your understanding or in a negative way.” Shabana felt that the students were too young to pay attention to the stereotypes the books showed,

To the extent of my opinion, I think the students are too young to notice any difference in the way gender is shown in the books. Maybe in the older classes they note these things and would have questions. Our students at this age do not understand this male and female thing. It does not matter to them. I did not take it as an important issue with the curriculum.

When I asked if there were role models for girls in the books like there were for boys with chapters on army officers, religious and political personalities etc., the only woman that was mentioned was Fatimah Jinnah, the sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah who was the founder of Pakistan. She was also depicted in a supportive capacity as the sister who helped Muhammad

Ali Jinnah in his political struggle for Pakistan. When I asked if there were any contemporary women or girls included in the books who could be thought of as being role models for girls, the name of Arfa Karim came up. She was a very young girl who was renowned for her computer skills, however, in the SNC books they had removed a chapter that highlighted her achievements. Ghazala told me,

No. There is nothing. There was a chapter on Arfa Karim, but that was before the SNC.

They took it out. It was added to motivate and inspire the students. Students see that someone has gone this far and that we can go farther. But I think they did not give gender much thought when they were changing the curriculum.

Aleena, agreed that the policymakers could have been more cognizant of this bias and tried to show more girls and women in typically male professions,

I did think it would not have been out of place if they had shown girls doing some of the thing's boys were doing. Like it is not compulsory that when you show a pilot it must be a man. It can be a female pilot too.

When I asked why gender equality was such an afterthought for policymakers or why more regular women could not be depicted in books like doctors and engineers etc., I received some complicated viewpoints. These hinged on the idea that girls and women needed to stay within religious and cultural boundaries even as they participated in the workforce. The most interesting exchange was with Zahida who stated that,

But I think if we add these things, the issue will become that God has created women as less than men. If girls are coming forward, they need to do that within their limits. Critics will not see that these women have skill in certain professions. They will only see them from a moral point of view. That they are models or actors.

When I said that we could add women in professions such as medicine and engineering, she pointed out that teaching was a great job for women, “We have so many teachers. When they recruit for the public sector, females have a greater number of reserved seats. It is a good job and allows women to help out their families by bringing in more income.”

In Ghazala’s interview, when I brought up whether female role models and positive independent stereotypes should be included in books, she agreed that it was important for girls to have them. She, a mother of two daughters, had lost her husband and was the sole earner in her household. While her husband who had been a science teacher in high school had been alive, he had forbidden her from working as a teacher even though she had made the merit list for a government position. So, for her, this question was a little close to home. She said,

Absolutely. This should be compulsory. Even our religion does not say that we should remain stuck in one place. With time, we should change as a community. That change has limits but we have not been told to stop in one place and for life to stop in one place. Time changes. 50 years ago, life was different, 30 years ago, even in my opinion 5 years ago was a different time period. We need to normalize the idea of jobs and work for girls and of independence. Life is unpredictable. We do not want our students to be dependent on the mercy of others if life takes a bad turn. The child should be able to look after themselves.

Nusrat was the only one who felt that the books for her class did a good job on depicting women in public life and are different from before. She said,

The new books are different. The women are shown as going out of the house and becoming doctors and engineers. The students are also noticing these things in real life. They look at us and want to become teachers and they tell us that. They also notice that

girls are now working in the government offices. They question what we can do in our life.

Aleena stated that the representation of women in the books mostly shows them as working in the home and that she found this problematic to a certain extent,

I had this issue too. Women are always doing housework and it always says that my mother does housework in the books. It is not necessary that if there is a picture of a judge, it must be a man. If it is the picture of the pilot, then it has to be a man. It can be a woman. They should not have made this so general. There is no issue or trouble with making this equal.

This aligns with her personal beliefs about gender. She has asked her husband to teach her how to drive a motorcycle so she can commute to work on her own and is not dependent on him for transport.

Books should tell girls that they are equally capable of doing things that boys do. You should also drive cars and motorcycles. In fact, I am learning how to ride a motorcycle and I will come to school on a motorcycle. I want to be independent. I am tired of waiting for someone to come pick me up. I told my husband I want to learn how to ride a motorcycle. He said, it is alright, you can learn. We should tell the children the same thing, girls can do what boys can.

The range of opinions voiced by the teachers on the depiction of women in the new curriculum highlight some complex underlying societal norms. Women's lives are very much constrained by the boundaries created by culture and religion and as enforced by fathers, husbands, and brothers as well as mothers and sisters. This limits the spaces where women can work such as schools. Nusrat's comment about how one of the most attractive things about teaching as a profession

was that teachers did not “work with a lot of men” highlights how the patriarchal norms of separation of men and women thrive even amongst highly educated working women.

Conclusion

This public school had a very rigid vertical hierarchy that spanned beyond the school itself and included the district education staff which maintained oversight on behalf of the government. In the vertical hierarchy there was little support to be found for the teachers who felt that they were overburdened with extra tasks that took time and focus away from teaching. In the focus group, when I asked when they made lesson plans, they all laughed and Ghazala said, “We look at the subject content and material and then we teach”. The teachers felt that the policymakers are separated from the ground realities of public schools and make policies that cannot be implemented well. Ghazala summed it up as,

You know, the problem is that the policymaker is not a person who teaches in a public school. They all have children in private schools. They pay between Rs. 20,000- Rs. 50,000 in school fees for their children who have a good environment and access to facilities. They make the policies at that level too. There is no one who is included from here who can tell them a different side to the story.

This statement also highlights the fact that the staff at this school felt like they were invisible in the policy formulation process and as government servants, they were obliged to implement policy even if they disagreed with it. This meant that due to the fear of being reprimanded and due to a lack of inclusive stakeholder engagement, policy refraction was quite limited. In spite of this, they were invested in the learning of their students and wanted them to have a shot at a better life which they believed was through education.

Chapter 6: The Low-Cost Private School

School Context

This low-cost private school was located on the main road of Kamalia. It was approximately 22,000 sq ft in land area with a single, stylish red brick structure with a huge lawn in the front. This school did not have a properly designed school building; it was being run in a large house which was being leased from a local family who had relocated to Lahore. The school served almost 500 students from pre-K to grade 9.

On my first visit, the electricity had been out for more than twenty-four hours in the whole city, and it was scorching. There was a security guard at the gate who let me enter the school and a board on the wall spelled out the school's name and contact information for admissions. On the school building, there were words such as unity, faith and discipline which are an oft-quoted motto of Muhammad Ali Jinnah appearing in many of his speeches most notably on 31st August 1947 immediately after the formation of Pakistan, he stated, "It is up to you to work, work and work and we are bound to succeed and never forget our motto: Unity, Discipline and Faith." (Ahmad, 2022). The name of the school was written over the main door and on entering the building, the administrative office was the first door on the left. It was a long room, which was carpeted and held 3 desks and several cupboards. The principal's desk was at one end of the office space. One of the other desks belonged to the school's accountant and the other to the only male member of the staff, who was also the principal's husband and the administrator of the school.

The school was well-equipped with a generator to deal with electricity outages, its own printer for printing exams, timetables, worksheets, and fee bills. The atmosphere in the office

was a little chaotic as the school was going through a small crisis; the landlord wanted part of the house back for their own use and that meant that the school no longer had enough space for all its classes. I spent some time with the principal chalking out when and how the interviews would happen, and she agreed that the administrators needed to be interviewed first as they were quite busy so close to summer vacations and with an administrative crisis to handle.

I was given a quick tour of the school by the vice principal, and I found this school to be quite a contrast to the public school that I had already visited. The size of the classrooms was different from each other. Some classes had large windows looking out at the lawn whilst others were much smaller and completely windowless. The tables and chairs were comfortable and colorful and faced the front where there was a teacher's desk and a white board hinting at a teacher-centered pedagogical system. The charts from the class walls had been taken down for storage for the next year, but I was assured that the teachers did a lot of "chartwork with the class". In terms of class size, the maximum number of students in class was 25.

Staff Profiles

I interviewed 5 teachers and 2 administrators (principal and vice-principal) at this school. Some of the teachers in this school had just started their careers right out of university and had advanced degrees in subjects such as Zoology and Botany. They had chosen to teach because of a lack of other career options in the city. Table 2 shows a snapshot of their age and experience. Fizza, who was the youngest of teachers I interviewed started teaching after doing an MSc. in Zoology because she could not find any jobs in her field,

Honestly, I did not find the opportunity in the field. So, after school in the evening I went to teach in the academy to 9th and 10th graders, so I feel that the knowledge that I gained is being used.

Table 2*Staff profiles for low-cost private school*

Name	Age	Designation	Highest Degree	Experience
Aaliya	50	Principal	Masters	13 years
Noveen	35	Vice Principal	Masters	10 years
Farah	36	Teacher	Masters	12.5 years
Fizza	26	Teacher	Masters	9 months
Romessa	32	Teacher	Masters	3 years
Shezil	27	Teacher	BSc	4 years
Maheen	27	Teacher	Masters	1.5 years

Shezil, who had a master's degree in English, had no support from her home for teaching. She said,

I had nothing else to do. I feel that with teaching, I meet a few people, I learn how to interact and speak. When I joined the school, everyone at home was like will you be able to hold a job?

The Principal, Aaliya, was cognizant of this lack of other careers for women. She felt that it was a result of a shift in the degrees that were being pursued in Kamalia by women,

Even when I was doing my masters, students came from Toba Tek Singh (administrative district) for English language master's to Kamalia. Now, it's the complete opposite, I cannot find language teachers in Kamalia. Everyone has an MSc in Chemistry, Biology etc. Such high qualifications and no jobs. In my staff of 27, I have 18 teachers with a higher education degree in a science field.

Aaliya herself had an extensive career in education as a teacher and administrator. She gave up a civil services appointment, which is a dream career in Pakistan, for a career in education in Kamalia. She currently lives in Kamalia and had been raised there.

I love the city of Kamalia, and I had a dream of doing something for it. I cleared Civil Services exams, interview, psychological (exam) and everything and was appointed in the customs service but I did not do that job on behalf of Kamalia. We used to live in the village, and my father devoted his entire life to our education. He wished that Kamalia had good schools, so parents did not have to leave their hometowns in search of better schools.

She had worked as a principal of a franchise of a chain of low-cost private schools, but she had a lot of issues with their management structure. So, she decided that she was going to open her own school.

This school is my passion. I went to visit my sister in Dubai and while I was fasting, I visited a lot of schools to figure out how to open mine and what it would look like.

Initially, I joined the franchise of a known private school chain with the same passion but for them this is a business and for me it is my passion. So, after a lot of clashes, I decided to open my own school. There were challenges but if you are passionate and determined, you can achieve your goals.

The school prepares students to appear for matriculation exams conducted by the provincial government in grade 9 and 10, which is the local education stream. However, the syllabi of this school are different from the public schools, at least for the early grades as Fizza pointed out, “At a younger level, we teach different things but in grade 9 it becomes a similar syllabus.”

From the perspective of cost, the school charged Rs. 3500 (approximately 12 dollars) monthly, but not everyone paid the same fee; however, with the struggling economy, the school had to stop giving fee concessions. Aaliya told me,

Its Rs. 3500 per month. Not everyone is giving the same. The students who were admitted earlier had their fees increased incrementally, but now we are not compromising on this. The monthly rent of the building alone is Rs. 140 000 (approximately 500 dollars) but the landowner took some of the rooms back, so we did not have anywhere to put grade 9. So, this coming year we will not have a grade 9 due to space constraints.

That does impact our bottom line.

As a business, this school was impacted by factors outside of its control which meant that the school was struggling a little bit financially.

Institutional Hierarchy and Arrangements

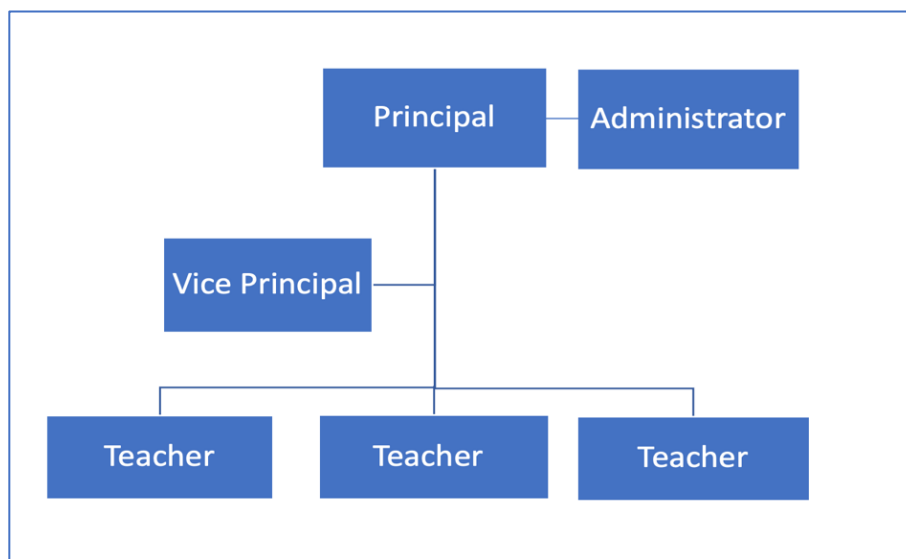
I found the hierarchy of this school to be very interesting with the owners being directly and heavily involved in the everyday workings of the school which made the school very similar to a family run business. On top of the organizational hierarchy were Aaliya and her husband Shakir, who was the only male member of the staff. Aaliya said, “We are an all-female staff with my husband being the only male member. He is an amazing and supportive man. A little quick to anger but otherwise he is essential to our operations.” Figure 4 shows the hierarchy of the school.

Shakir was the administrator and the main point of contact with the government personnel who interacted with the school. This school’s interaction with the government had not

been positive and Aaliya believed that the government used private schools to make extra money without providing any support to the private sector.

Figure 5

Hierarchy of low-cost Private school



When I asked if the school was taxed by the government she said,

Yes. They ask to check our records every month. My husband told me his system has almost 500 files and they keep asking for different kinds of data. I think they are afraid that we might hide something. Like earlier you could hide the strength (size) of your school. They also want to know how many students have withdrawn. We make a monthly Performa on the number of new admissions we have and per head, they will charge us 1000 rupees (approximately 3 dollars) per annum.

This constant check happened as the government was trying to bring private schools under a regularized system with some checks and balances on the quality of education. There was an electronic license portal where parents could check whether a private school is registered or licensed with the government (Government of the Punjab, 2023). However, Aaliya also felt that

by making schools renew their license every 4 years, the government abused this system to impose new taxes on private schools, “The government does not want us to progress. They want us to stay where we are. They just impose new taxes and that’s it.”

Supporting the principal in a leadership capacity is the vice principal, Noveen, who recently rejoined the school. She had moved away after marriage and had just returned to Kamalia with her family. She had a master’s degree in Urdu literature and a bachelor’s in education. She supported Aaliya in managing the Urdu components of syllabi and she oversaw the early grades in the school including nursery class. The school employed 27 teachers across all grades who made up the last rung of this hierarchy. Aaliya and her husband had different viewpoints when it came to managing the teachers. She said, “Personally, my husband and I have a great relationship but on the topic of school, we argue daily. He is strict and I am more amenable to compromise. We are a community.” She gave me examples of mechanisms she had set up which ensure that the teachers felt that they were valued and cared for

I recognize that private schools do not have pensions and security after the job is important to people. So, for anyone spending 12 years with us without a break, we will give them a 5 *marla* (approximately 1400 sq ft) plot in the city area. One of our teachers is going to reach that soon. This is to be given as a pension.

When I asked her how this was feasible financially, she said “Look, if someone is giving you 12 years of service, they deserve this. Besides, I think teachers are investments. My husband thinks teachers are replaceable, I do not. It takes me time to train teachers.”

In addition to the land that continuous service would guarantee for teachers, Aaliya believed that showing appreciation for her team of teachers builds trust and encourages teachers to stay with her in the long term.

We are very caring towards our teachers. We give gifts on Eid (Islamic religious holidays). We have weekly meetings on Friday at 11. And at the end of the month, we have a teacher of the month who gets a small token of appreciation. I accommodate them personally and send them on *Umrah* (religious pilgrimage to Mecca) because there is no greater gift than that. I believe in keeping my teachers happy.

The husband-wife duo had also managed to buy their own land, a little outside the city, for a purpose-built campus. Aaliya told me, “We have bought 9 *Kanals* (approximately 49,000 sq ft) on the bypass road. We will make a purpose-built campus there so we can increase our strength and become less reliant on landlords.”

The teachers also believed that communication with the administration is easy, and they can bring issues they are facing in class to their attention. Maheen said, “If we have an issue during teaching, we note it down and then discuss it with the administration later. If we want to do an activity or something specific, we take permission from the office.” The teachers plan lessons, and the administration approves them. Similarly, Romessa said “ We tell them what we are struggling with, and they give us a guideline to us about how to go about it.”

Learning Environment of the School

Aaliya and Noveen (principal and vice principal, respectively), believed that they have a purpose for education in the school which focuses on character building. Noveen explained to me that to operationalize this vision into action, they had chosen private publishers (*Afaq* publishers) that use elements of moral character building in every subject including math and science and that in all those pictures, the girls had their heads covered with scarves or veils. When I asked her if this was something problematic given not all students in a class would be Muslims, she said that it was our culture and if non-Muslims regularly interacted with Islamic

religious content, they would realize that Islam was a superior religion and convert to it. I visited the website of the private publishers to look at the books myself and the religious overtone across subjects is very visible. In a description for their *Nakhlah* series of books, it is clearly stated that “The integration of Islamic values and illustrations keeps the child-focused on his cultural domain” (Afaq Publishers, 2023). In all the illustrations, girls and women have their heads covered and even the boys are dressed in traditional clothes such as *shalwar kameez* which is Pakistan’s national dress . Aaliya added that to build the character of students, the school had added it as an additional element to the marking scheme for the report cards,

We maintain immaculate records of all students. We have a Performa which we created after consulting with parents which we send home at the end of each term. It asks the parents questions such as how much screen time does your child have? Is your child respectful towards adults? Is the child using abusive language etc. Does the child pick up after themselves? This Performa carries a grade which the students really want so they do behave well at home too. Regularity for example carries 5 marks as does cleanliness etc.

So, our school is not just about books.

Both Aaliya and Noveen were heavily involved in the teaching and learning that happened in the classrooms. Aaliya had come up with a weekly organized planner for each class which outlined the chapters, exercises and lessons that would be covered every day.

We do so much more with students. We have a planner which goes home with the student on Monday. It maps out all classwork that will be done within a given week. So even if the student is unable to attend school on Tuesday for example, the parents will know what the student is missing and what they need to cover. It contains the manner of the week etc.

The lesson plans are made by the teachers and looked over and approved by the administration.

Farah explained that,

On the weekend, we give them our diaries which contain our lesson plans. They review it and look at if our planning is going in accordance with our syllabus and where we are targeting to be at the end of the term. They also look at how the students are doing. We receive them (the diaries) back on Monday morning.

The summer homework, exams and other worksheets were made by the administration and given to the teachers to review. If the teachers have an issue with anything specific, they can bring it up with the administration before it goes for printing. Aaliya had extreme confidence in her entire team of teachers, and she appreciated the time and effort that teachers had put into building the school and its reputation with her. She told me,

I think I have built a rapport with you (interviewer), so I am telling you that I do not really feel that my school or team lacks anything. Even in events such as our prize distribution, I am relaxed as I have so much confidence in my staff. Our teamwork is exceptional, and I know that we will deliver. I have met such good teachers along the way. Girls who moved away because of marriage but they still wanted to work with me. Others who got selected in government service. In the beginning, teachers gave me their Sundays while we set up the school and classes.

One of the main challenges to the teachers and administration in the school was the lack of support from the parents despite regular communication from the teachers. Fizza explained that as a normal school process, teachers kept parents apprised of their child's progress.

We keep the parents informed as well. We write notes in the diaries, telling the parents how their child is performing in class and request if they need to pay attention to

something specific. Some parents who are attentive make the changes needed which improves the student's work. Others do not care at all and in those cases, we are the only ones who are able to help those students.

This made it difficult for the teachers to assign homework as not all students had adequate help at home. Whatever activities the teachers could supervise in class, they managed to finish whilst the activities assigned for home were done by only half of the students. Farah believed part of it was the fact that the learning environment at home,

I think there is an impact of the learning environment and the area in which the school is. There is a difference in terms of the student backgrounds as well. Some students whose parents are more invested and educated are easier to teach. Since this syllabus has more activities and assignments, it is difficult to keep on time. If we assign these for homework, most of the students do not do them because the parents will not help. For example, if we ask them to make a family tree and put pictures on it, some parents will find that problematic as well.

Maheen added that teachers would have to conduct the whole lesson in class the next day because a significant number of students had not the assignment at home. She said, "Next day, we will have to do these assignments in class anyway. If we do not do them, we will not be able to include them in the exams."

The school is exam focused with a lot of attention paid to student learning in terms of content; however, exam results are not something that is checked by any external personnel of the government, even those who came to follow up on SNC policy implementation. "No. Our exams are internal. And the government is not able to keep tabs on how schools are doing."

However, internally the school tracks exam results for students across terms and grades. In this way, Aaliya believes that she is able to protect her teachers if confrontations with parents arise.

When I see the results of the students, I compare the previous results of the students to see where we were and if we are making progress with the students. A parent complained about her child's science result in grade 8 and we showed her past results which showed that he struggled with science. I look at results term wise and know where each class and student are.

The institutional arrangements and hierarchy that is discussed in this section is specific to this school. All low-cost private schools are run differently in accordance with their own organization arrangements and values. This school was one of the first to open as a private option in Kamalia and was run like a much-loved family business. However, at the same time, whilst the teachers felt they were supported and free to communicate with the administration, most decision-making agency rested with Aaliya and Shakir. Aaliya also trained the teachers herself and her beliefs and perspectives were evident in how the school operated. These internal arrangements had a huge impact on the school's experience with the implementation of the SNC policy.

Experiences with the SNC Policy Roll Out

The administration of the school took the entire responsibility of dealing with the government officials for any issue that was related with implementing the SNC. This meant that to a certain extent, the teachers were shielded from direct government pressure, unlike the public schools. In Aaliya's experience, this was the first extensive policy prescription that the government had produced which had a direct impact on all aspects of education in the private

sector. For her, the experience was an unpleasant one both from a professional and personal perspective. In the beginning, Aaliya did not pay any attention to the SNC policy and decided that she would not implement this:

The actual thing is that I took the whole SNC thing easy. I thought that if we do not follow this syllabus, it will not be a big deal. When the (English-medium) books came, we started giving them out to parents.... By the time, it dawned on me that we were going to be teaching almost everything in Urdu, we had already bought and distributed the books.

As a parent herself with two children in the same school, she was upset as well. “Parents are of different kinds. Those who are study conscious were understandably very upset. I physically cried the day I realized that there was not any other option for this school.”

Even with all the effort the school put in, parental reaction to the curriculum change was quite negative and centered on the issue of the change in medium of instruction. Aaliya had to convince parents that this school’s philosophy went beyond being “English-medium”,

We had to convince the parents that we did not have any option but the SNC. Some parents came back with the books and complained that what kind of English-medium is this? All the books are in Urdu. Others took out their children and I had to convince them that English-medium is not just about books in English. Our distinction is that we involve the character building of students in all aspects of learning practically.

Parents were not the end of her negative experience. She also had to deal with the government personnel who oversaw that all private schools had implemented the SNC policy. The school had three visits within one week to ensure compliance with the SNC policy. The government had resorted to using judges from the lower courts of the judiciary to visit private

schools and tasked them with asking students to read from the Quran to see if the schools were implementing the *Nazra* lessons. However, the inspection itself was just a formality and the judges were just checking to see if the students had the relevant books.

One day we were told that *Nazra* is compulsory and the next day, we had an inspection.

We messaged parents in groups that these are the chapters of the Quran you must bring tomorrow. How is it possible that we message parents at 8 PM and expect them to bring the books the next day? Then the inspector was asking the students why they did not have the relevant books. The students explained that we were asked to bring the chapters last night and today was our first period of *Nazra*. And they came back after two days again.

That inspection also did not go well. They gave us a week before the third inspection. By that time, we were up and running with the *Nazra* syllabus.

When I asked if there were follow up visits, Aaliya said that with the crisis the government faced in the parliament with the impending no confidence vote for Prime Minister Imran Khan, no one had followed up since that week. But they also did not have to anymore, the coercive threat of losing the school's license was enough to comply. She told me,

The government has confused and scared everyone in education. I was in a training with another principal. She thought the government had given a compulsory syllabus and schools no longer controlled that. Even after many conversations, we were not able to convince her (that the government had given student learning outcomes).

Aaliya also admitted that since she had a good relationship with local politicians, her registers were not scrutinized often,

I will tell you the facts. I had a good relationship with the previous minister and the current one too, so my registers are not checked very often or very closely. It might be the case that in other private schools, the checks are stricter.

Despite the good relationship with the politicians, the school went out of the way to comply with the aspects of the policy that the government was focused on, which was mainly *Nazra*. Aaliya recalled that in the final inspection, the government officials informed the school that *Nazra* needed to have a full period,

The original timetable was adjusted, and we added the *Nazra* lessons and highlighted them in yellow so that whenever we get inspected, they could see we were complying with government policy. The inspection team took that timetable with them because they were probably answerable to their higher ups.

Overall, Aaliya felt that the SNC curriculum was an overreach of the government and it harmed businesses in the private education sector,

Right now, I know that private publishers had to pay the government Rs. 200,000 (Approximately \$1000 at the time of interview) for the NOCs (no objection certificates) for each book. The government has used the SNC to rob businesses and people. Ultimately, the cost will fall on the parents. I did not do an annual prize distribution because the books I used to give out are too expensive.

The salient thread in Aaliya's comments about the SNC policy was the confusion the government created around it for private schools. Whilst the policy was made to be implemented in schools across the board, the government had failed to bring the private school stakeholders into agreement about its necessity, its scope or how to implement it. Especially for private schools that essentially mirrored businesses, the policy hurt profit margins and forced a change

in the normal procedures of how they worked which according to Aaliya was detrimental to student learning.

Implementation Strategy of the School

Once the decision had been made to implement the new curriculum, the administration and teachers planned out how it would be operationalized in classrooms.

Aaliya spent her entire winter vacation with a core team of teachers planning how to switch to this new curriculum and to deal with the parental reaction and fallout.

We spent all of winter vacation trying to plan how we are teaching this syllabus. All the books are more functional now which means that there is a complete change of pattern and that is a lot more work.

This meant extra work for the teachers of the higher grades and the administration. Aaliya had realized that it was going to be a difficult change but as she and the teachers examined and planned the school's term from the given student learning objectives, she thought it was a positive change for primary grades,

For the teachers it was a difficult change. So, we called in the subject specialists, and we planned out our whole term. Before this, if someone was not available, we still managed. I personally took charge of planning English for grades 1-5 as I have a masters in English Language and Literature. The Chemistry teacher did the curriculum for science. Overall, it is a positive change especially in primary grades.

To make the transition easier on the teachers, the school employed a co-teaching strategy in all grades where *Nazra* was to be implemented. Aaliya said,

From grade 1-5, I created categories to make it easier for teachers to teach. For example, I attached English with Social Studies so one teacher was teaching both subjects. I also

attached *Islamiyat* with Urdu as they were the same language. Science and computers are taught by the same person and Math is a daily subject. What we do is that one day we teach English and the next week Social Studies. The teacher is the same for both subjects. Math had a double lesson daily. This way the students do not find it difficult to cover all the subjects. Since *Nazra* is supposed to happen daily, we took 20 minutes out of the double lesson of Math (the only daily subject) and adjusted it for *Nazra*.

For the teachers, who executed these strategies in the classrooms, administration's support was vital in what was a difficult year of teaching. The school had hired a *qariah* to help the teachers with *Nazra* and there was also a *hafiza* (a woman who has memorized the Quran) on the staff who provided the teachers with much needed additional support. Farah said,

The *qariah* said we do not want to judge what the students know right at the beginning. In the training she gave us, she told us we needed to come in as blank and discard our prior knowledge. Then we learnt the tricks and tips to teach *Nazra* from her.

In addition, the teachers who were especially worried about teaching *Nazra* wrong relied on the *hafiza* for everyday support.

We would consult with the *hafiza* who works in the school. We would ask her about any confusions and doubts before we went to teach. The students are also very smart and keep reminding us to not pronounce things the wrong way.

The school had also organized a training during the summer holidays for *Nazra* because the teachers were struggling with it. Aaliya said, "I know my teachers are struggling with *Nazra*, so the first 8 days of the summer vacation, the teachers will be in a training session to help with that. In the training, we will also work on *Waqfiat-e Aama*."

Co-teaching as a strategy also worked as a good support mechanism for the teachers. Shezil, who co-taught grade 3 said it made it easier to divide the workload. In her class, which had both boys and girls, she oversaw teaching the girls,

I am on the side where the girls are, and my co-teacher is where the boys are. We divide lectures. Sometimes, I teach reading and she does the exercises. If she is tired, I take charge of the class. In this way we divide the weekdays.

For Fizza, the co-teacher had to be cooperative for this to be a good arrangement in the long term, “ They need to be cooperative. It cannot be that they do what they will, and I do what I want. That would lead to disagreement between us.” Shezil echoed this sentiment, “If your co-teacher is nice, it makes it easier.”

In terms of other issues that arose in the classrooms, such as students who struggled with the new curriculum, the administration took on board teacher concerns whilst giving them the space to try and resolve the situation on their own. Romessa said, “They are very cooperative. Whatever they say is not a line in stone. We do have a say in how we solve problems.” Similarly, Shezil felt that the administration was easily accessible for the teachers. She reported “Teachers have gone for guidance to the admin repeatedly to overcome difficulties we were facing.” Farah added that,

The teachers told the administration that the students are not picking up the concepts. The administration was cooperative and understood that it was more important for the students to comprehend the concepts and since this was new for them. Even for the teachers, there was an added burden.

The teachers also had an incentive to work hard in the classroom. The school acknowledged the teachers who were doing well based on student performance and rewarded

them with a chance at winning a trip to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Aaliya showed me pictures of the teachers who had visited Mecca because of this sponsorship. She said, “For the teachers we also have a competition. Whichever teacher has a good result, disciplined and ideal class gets to go for Umrah (religious pilgrimage). Five teachers have gone on school sponsorship so far.”

Challenges to SNC Policy Implementation

Despite all the extra planning this school did to implement the SNC, the challenges that teachers faced in the classroom centered on the issues of *Nazra* and language of instruction. This school used private publishers’ books to teach the SNC curriculum but did not add any additional content to it. One of the main issues they faced was the merging of the science and social studies curriculum which had been separate subjects before the SNC curriculum was imposed. Another key issue was that the students were slow in picking up *Nazra* as a subject. Lastly, as with the public school, this school also struggled with the change in the language of Instruction.

Nazra

With its focus on character building and moral development of students, this school used to teach *Nazra* before the SNC. However, this was done as part of *Islamiyat*, and the students were only expected to learn several small prayers (*duas*) and surahs from the Quran. With the SNC, the government mandated that all private schools hire trained teachers to teach a daily *Nazra* period.

This school had complied with the government mandate and had a *qariah* on staff. However, due to the number of classes and sections, the teachers were left with the bulk of responsibility when it came to teaching *Nazra*. When I asked Aaliya how the students were coping with *Nazra* she responded that students were struggling with this as some of them were

not learning the Quran at home. This meant that the entire responsibility of teaching *Nazra* was on the school and with limited resources it proved to be an impossible task,

The students do not have command on the vocabulary of the Quran. How are they doing? Students do not understand it at all. How is it possible for a student in grade 1 to read the first chapter of the Quran? We are facing the same problems in grade 2, 3 and 4. The students that come to us from the village, they do not have any time. They are depending on the school to teach them the Quran. They have long commutes and when the van drops them off it is too late for them to have separate lessons for the Quran.

The school tried to comply with the extensive *Nazra* syllabus provided by the government but decided that since the students could not keep up, they were going to teach as they used to do before the SNC, “ We started teaching the *Nazra* books, but our students were struggling so we stopped and hoped that the government would think this over.” From next term, the school will fully implement the *Nazra* syllabus from the government. For this term, the teachers used their regular *Islamiyat* book to teach *Nazra*. Shezil said,

No, our book is from *Afaq* publishers. It has a lot of prayers (*duas*). For example, prayers for climbing and descending from stairs. We listen to surahs as well. *Ayat-ul-Kursi* is a must. *Surah Nas* is a must. What we do is we divide it into different terms along with prayers for drinking water, sleeping etc. For example, we did two pages of these prayers in the first term.

Maheen added that the school had to teach *Nazra* as a language with attention to Arabic phonics in the early grades as opposed to reading the chapters directly,

In grade 1 and 2 we definitely focus on how to sound the words using the *noorani qaida* (Arabic phonics primer). In class one, we are not teaching the first chapter of the Quran.

We are focusing on phonics. At the beginning of class 1, we teach how to sound Arabic words with the accents.

Despite the training and support from the *hafiza* and the *qariah*, teachers and students both struggled with *Nazra*. Fizza talked about the online resources the teachers used to help them teach Arabic, since they did not feel equipped to teach this without help,

My co-teacher teaches *Nazra* as well. She would look up poems and helpful videos from YouTube such as TPI poems (poems that highlight Arabic phonetic sound). We did not receive that training, so we searched up those poems on our own to use them in the classrooms. We write TPI poems as the search query on YouTube.

Whilst the school administration felt that the *Nazra* syllabus was extensive, Farah had a different opinion. She said that if translation was not included in *Nazra*, by grade 5 students would become fluent in reading the Quran, “I think if you are not doing translation, it can be done. The first thing to do is to teach them the sounds and the phonics of Arabic. Then they can complete that within the year.”

In this school, the administration made a calculated decision to comply with the easily checked metrics which the government personnel were going to look at. They had a *qariah* on staff and in their timetables, the allotted daily period for teaching *Nazra*. However, when they realized that the scrutiny on the classrooms and what was taught in them was minimal, they reverted to teaching a syllabus they were more comfortable with. This gained them enough time to increase the capacity of the teachers to be able to teach *Nazra* according to the government syllabus. The other added challenge that *Nazra* presented was space needed to hold chapters of the Quran in school. As the children kept bags on the floor, the teachers and the administration

were not comfortable with students keeping the Quran in the bags. So, after lessons, they were returned to the teachers. Aaliya related that,

We had to build cupboard space and collect the chapters from the students. The whole process was quite time consuming. When they were bringing Quranic verses as part of an Arabic book it was not an issue. But a *sipara* (chapter) is different and cannot be put into the bag.

Language Issues and the Overloading of the Syllabus

The SNC policy's language of instruction rollercoaster also created several issues in this school. Before the SNC, the school was teaching in English in all subjects except for Urdu and *Islamiyat*. By using *Waqfiat-e-Aama* as a replacement subject for science and social studies, the school was only left with computer studies as a subject that was taught in English. This brought a lot of parents to meet the teachers in school as Fizza explained, "Most of their objections have been related to written work and writing in Urdu. Now all the subjects are in Urdu including Social Studies and Science which used to be in English." When I asked her why parents were so concerned about students learning English, she thought that in Pakistani society, English carried a prestige that Urdu as a language did not. Fizza said, "I think we have become slaves to the English language. We think the person who speaks in English is modern and the one who speaks in Urdu is backwards." Shezil, in her interview, in response to a similar question said that English was considered the language of opportunity by people. She gave the example of job interviews and said,

Society believes things like if you go to a job interview and give that interview in Urdu the interviewer does not give you the job. If you speak English well then even without a degree, they will say *jee bismillah* (In the name of Allah), we will hire you.

Noveen expressed similar sentiments about how parents felt about their child learning in English. She said, “parents think it will make their children good.”

Aaliya considered the merging of Science and Social Studies into the Urdu subject of *Waqfiat-e-Aama* to be an issue as now the students were confused and their concepts were no longer clear,

We were teaching Science and Social Studies in English. We had an oral portion of it as well and the concepts of the students were very clear. Eighteen of my teachers have graduate degrees in Science....Using English was not an issue in learning. Now we are forcibly asked to teach *Waqfiat-e-Aama* (General Knowledge) in Urdu to grade 1-3. In grade 4 and 5, it is *Masharti Uloom* (Social Studies) which is also in Urdu.

For the teachers, this switch in language meant that the students were confused with Urdu vocabulary. Farah felt that this was natural, “Obviously, there will be a little bit of a problem in the beginning. The students need to know the words first and what they mean before they can understand what passages mean.” Shezil told me that students were aware of the change and asked a lot of questions,

They are very sharp and know that they are being taught something different from the previous years. They also want to know the English translation of the words they are learning. They ask questions and we answer them, but we do tell them they have to learn it like it is given in. their books.

For Maheen, this meant that it took longer for her students to pick up concepts. So, she had to slow down her pace of teaching,

I think we must explain a little more due to the language issue. It is not a difficult syllabus, but we do need to reinforce it, especially when reading. The students had

become trained in English from the beginning so switching languages did have some difficulties. We must translate Urdu terms in the science chapters of *Waqfiat-e-Aama* (General Knowledge) in English for greater clarity. It bothers them that we are not using previous books for science. Even the teacher must think how to clarify the concept for the students.

Shezil gave an example of this additional step of bilingual vocabulary as follows:

For example, if we say “*maindak*” (frog), it is a Punjabi word for our students and when we say such words in class, they will say but Miss, we say “frog”. It is same for words like ‘butterflies’ and ‘parrot’ for example. When they were in earlier grades, they learned these words in English.

Shezil further added that the change from English to Urdu was not just limited to speaking and listening but also to written work, “I think language is mostly it (the problem). But it’s not just the listening and speaking part. Students are struggling with written work as well. Urdu is more difficult to write, and I have noticed that the children do not like it.” Aaliya added that as a parent she found that her children struggled with Urdu,

My own children are struggling. I help them with homework and their concepts lack clarity. The teachers are worried that when they give corrections for Urdu dictation (*imla*) it is a lot. Urdu as a language is very difficult. It has 52 letters in the alphabet including the different accents and emphasis. English on the contrary has 26 letters.

Further, the internet, which was a huge resource for the teachers when they had been teaching in English, was much less helpful with Urdu. Aaliya conveyed that the teachers faced pressure to teach Urdu correctly but sometimes, no one seemed to know the right vocabulary, “Some

teachers were not clear on Urdu words. I was not clear either. We searched it online and we did not get anywhere. If you look for something in English, the internet is such a great help”.

In addition to the language change, the new syllabus was overloaded and longer than what the teachers could cover in a year, so the administration shortened the syllabus. Romessa said that the teachers were just focused on making sure that their students understood what was being taught, “ We focused on the quality of our teaching because of the syllabus change. For example, in class 2 we only covered one chapter of *Waqfiat-e-Aama*. We wanted to make sure the students were comprehending what we were teaching.” Farah added that,

Right now, as we teach it, we are concerned that it requires a lot more time. Every chapter is taking longer to cover. If the syllabus is shorter than where it currently is in length, I think it is possible to teach it.

The difficulties that the students faced also impacted overall student performance on term exams which was a big source of concern for the staff. This was also because the school made exams according to the new more critical-thinking oriented activities of the SNC. Aaliya said,

We used to give exams with the standard template of multiple-choice questions and short questions. But now we are following the new way of this curriculum and made our exams according to this. The SNC pattern is interesting because it has included activities, emphasized creative writing and creativity in assignments.

Romessa added that the results for the term were going to bring a lot of questions from the parents, “When the results go home and the parents see the summer homework, they will complain.” Shezil added that the only reason the result was not worse was because the teachers slowed the teaching pace, “The only reason the result is not even worse is because the admin shortened the syllabus for this term.” However, shortening the syllabus was only a stop gap

measure and the school needed to find a way to cover the entire syllabus which created pressure on teachers as Romessa pointed out “I think, we are also under time pressure because, we must split the course into three terms and make sure we are meeting our targets.” Farah added that not finishing the syllabus in the school year might make parents pull out their children,

If we were teaching as much as we normally do, we would get worse results and some more parents might pull students out. Right now, some questions will be pushed to the end of year if we are not able to finish the syllabus on time.

Aaliya summed up the impact on students stating that “The student is not here nor there anymore.”

The challenges to implementing the SNC policy directives highlight the issue of capacity in low-cost private schools. Capacity here refers to the school personnel’s ability to implement policy (Viennet & Pont, 2017). In this school, the teachers, whilst highly educated, were relatively inexperienced to take on the huge challenges presented by changing the medium of instruction. Additionally, the students on whom this policy was being implemented and who came from backgrounds where neither English nor Urdu were spoken at home, did not have the capacity to absorb the language change. As a result, the school resorted to adjusting its regular targets and student learning goals, reducing teaching pace and covering less of the syllabus than they would have if following their own curriculum.

Merits of the SNC

Despite the difficulties that the school faced in implementing the SNC, the staff liked the new syllabus and the books that accompanied it. Noveen admitted that even though right now the teachers were struggling with the transition to the Urdu language, over time they would adjust.

Outside of the language issue, she felt that the syllabus had good content, activities, and exercises. For her, as an Urdu Literature degree holder, she felt that children learned better in Urdu and that the SNC was a move in the right direction for education. For Maheen, the curriculum was like the previous curriculum except in length. She said, “I think it is a good curriculum. Not very different from our previous curriculum but it is lengthy.” For Farah, the books of the SNC syllabus were a highlight of this curriculum, but they presented some problems. She said,

The books are nice and have a high degree of creativity. But there are some activities, which are not possible for students in the class to do. For example, there was an exercise in which students were asked to interview different people and collect information about their professions. This was assigned to level 2 or second grade. They are too young for this activity.

An additional positive element about the syllabus was that it contained lessons on ethics and values across all subjects. For Romessa, this was a positive attribute. She said, “ There are good things in this syllabus too such as the ethics and values in the syllabus.”

When I asked Aaliya if the school would continue with this curriculum in the future if the government lifted its enforcement, she said that she would keep it only if she was allowed to drop *Waqfiat-e- Aama* as a subject. She said, “ The change in this curriculum is good and I would keep to this, but I would change the book of *Waqfiat-e-Aama*. Otherwise, I see this as a positive change.” In the focus group, the teachers had a similar answer to this question. Farah said, “I think we will just change the medium of instruction. Otherwise, the new syllabus is good.”

Shezil added,

We followed the government curriculum in all subjects. It is lengthy in all subjects. But the exercises at the end of lessons are good. It is more creative and gives students more ways for self-expression. Overall, the changes in the syllabus are good.

Fizza also felt that if the language of instruction was changed back to English, the teachers would be able to finish the syllabus in the year. She told me, “We can complete it if it is in English since writing will not be an issue.”

These perspectives show that the teachers were able to recognize the positive changes in the curriculum and did not feel that it was too different from the one they were teaching before. Additionally, the interpretation and management of the challenges that the SNC presented largely rested on the administration which was able to make decisions such as choosing not to follow government prescribed curriculum because it was difficult for the teachers and the students.

The Role of Values and Beliefs in Policy Implementation

The teachers’ perspectives on gender and religion were similar to the perspectives of the teachers in public school and reflected the societal attitudes that prevailed in a small city which was the epicenter of several villages.

Religion

On the aspect of religion and its pervasiveness in the new curriculum, especially in the form of Nazra, most of the staff felt that it was not exclusively the responsibility of the school but needed to be a collaboration between the parents and the teachers. Aaliya believed that this

was a political stunt by the government, “I think the government used the SNC and Nazra as a controversial spectacle. Schools are only doing this out of fear of an inspection, and they have a hundred possible answers to any questions the inspectors might have.” Her focus on character building meant that the school already had some religious content even before the SNC but she perceived the teaching of *Nazra* in school was a burden,

It is the parents’ responsibility and we as a school and teachers can put our share in this and support this. Personally, when I used to commute from the village, my nephew and niece suffered a lot. Their father was a lawyer, and we did not have a set routine so we could not have Quran classes at home. Keeping that in mind, I added some values and religious teachings in our curriculum. But it is not our (the school’s) responsibility.

Religion is personal. Every sect has its own peculiarities. It is a sensitive and touchy matter, and we should not be doing it at all. Now the government wants us to do it and so we do it.

When I asked if they had any issues with parents due to Nazra, she said that as they were only teaching reading and not translation there had been no issues, “In the end, it is the Quran and that is the same for everyone. We might have some problem in translation later but right now it is ok.” This implies that while teaching the Quran in Arabic, (which the Muslims believe is the unchangeable word of God) is non-controversial, the translations of the Arabic text by different sects would create problems in later grades as they differ significantly across sects.

Romessa agreed that the Nazra required trained teachers because it was a sin to teach the reading of the Quran incorrectly, “Well, there should be a trained teacher like there is in this school. If we do not teach it correctly, it is a sin for us and then for the children that learn from us, it becomes a problem too.” She added that the etiquette required for reading the Quran was

not possible in school, “One more thing I want to point out. *Nazra* and reading the Quran requires ablutions (*wuzu*). That is time consuming if they go one by one to do that during lessons.” For Farah, teaching *Nazra* was a good step towards holistic education of Muslims,

I think this is a very good thing that the government has done. As Muslims, we should be able to read and understand the Quran. Once the students start studying the commentary (*tafseer*) of the Quran, their mind is automatically opened.”

When I followed up and asked if anyone without training was able to teach *Nazra*, she said that it was the teacher’s responsibility to train herself as teaching the Quran incorrectly was a sin,

Not all teachers can teach. For that, you have to take a training in Arabic phonetics and then you can teach. For 1-2 months, on the internet there is a *madni quaida* (*phonetics resource*) which shows the correct way to pronounce every word in the Quran.

Shezil thought the government probably introduced *Nazra* in schools because it felt that schools were not focused on teaching religion in favor of English and Science.

I think they may have felt that we are not teaching enough about Islam in the schools.

They might think we are focusing too much on English and Science. And even though we teach *Islamiyat* they might believe that we are not covering the basics of our religion in our schools.

She added that given that most people in Pakistan learn how to recite the Quran without understanding Arabic, teaching it as a language in schools might be beneficial for students.

We spent so much time on it (learning to read the Quran), and we still do not understand what we are reading. Now if we start teaching a little bit at a time from grade 1, by the time they are adults, they will learn and know something. For example, my nephew’s book on *Nazra* for nursery class has Arabic words next to pictures like we do for English.

So, when he goes into the older classes, he will understand what is being said. We will be blank compared to them.

Fizza felt that if the government wanted schools to teach *Nazra*, it needed to provide the resources, “If the government is giving the syllabus for teaching of religion, they should also hire the teachers to do it too. Without support, it is a pressure and extra burden on teachers. Despite that, we can cope and do it.”

Gender

The first thing I noticed when I asked very general questions on gender and religion such as “how does the new syllabus represent women in the books?”, was discomfort at talking about it. The younger teachers did open up when I asked about their own personal experiences. When I asked about their experiences with college and careers, they narrated interesting lived experiences. For Fizza, who had an MSc. degree in Zoology, the college experience was difficult.

I was not allowed to live in the hostel. I was a day scholar myself at the Agriculture University campus in Toba Tek Singh. I used to go every day to college on a local bus. We were a group of 17-18 girls who were commuting so we would find it easier to travel as a group. The bus would drop us at the University gate and pick us from there too. Shezil had similar issues. She started an MSc in Toba Tek Singh but was unable to continue because the commute was hard.

In my house when I finished my BSc in biochemistry and started my MSc., I was told that you cannot go to another city for college. So, I got admitted to Punjab Medical College in Toba Tek Singh. I had a transportation issue as the college did not provide it and because of that I had to leave my MSc. in the middle. After I left it, I re-enrolled in

an MA English course because it was at a college within Kamalia. I was not allowed to live in the hostel. I had no one who could accompany me every day to campus.

Shezil felt that most families policed women more than men. She said, “We are always checking them on behavior and etiquette, fix your dupatta (a south Asian variant of a scarf used by women). Do not leave the house without covering your head etc. We also call them to check up on them.” Fizza had similar sentiments and she thought that the policing stemmed from the worry that something bad would happen to girls if they went to different cities to pursue education, “I think parents are just afraid but if someone asks me, I was the first girl in my family who went to Toba alone and it was alright.”

These personal experiences colored how these teachers saw social attitudes towards women and how this was reflected in the SNC curriculum. When I asked about female role models in the SNC books, the teachers agreed that the new syllabus did not focus on women role models at all. Shezil added that it was because “... from the beginning we teach males that they are prominent, and we teach females that you do not exist outside the home.”

Farah added that more female role models needed to be added as students did not need to learn that women were not equal to men. She said, “I mean, I do not think there is a difference between men and women. Our Prophet used to do all kinds of tasks and household chores and as Muslims, we need to know that.” When I asked her what kind of women should be included in the books, her answer was religious personalities which showcased how her perception of gender was understood through a religious lens. She said, “I mean, I think they should add women more positively in the books. Our Prophet (PBUH) gave women a lot of respect and our teaching and values should reflect that.” Romessa agreed that religion was not an obstacle in women’s career ambitions,

I do not think religion prevents us from supporting women with ambitions. I think our girls are very smart and I wish we take care of them like we take care of our boys. I think an educated class will benefit us as a nation.

Shezil noted that the only women included in the syllabus were either Fatimah Jinnah or the first wife and daughter of Prophet Muhammad,

Yes, we always have a chapter on Fatimah Jinnah. I have personally noted this in the *Islamiyat* textbooks too. We talk a lot about the male companions of Prophet Muhammad, but we do not mention female companions other than his first wife Khadija who funded his quest to spread Islam as a religion or his daughter Fatima. We have chapters on these figures in every class, but we do not talk about others.

Fizza felt that more female role models in different professions needed to be included in the books because it would help normalize different professions for women,

I think more female role models (in non-teaching professions) should be included in books. When girls finish studying subjects like MSc Zoology or MSc. Botany, they tell us that this is not the field for girls. Boys can do the same subjects and they have options such as becoming forestry officers or to start careers in wildlife preservation. But for girls there is only teaching that is considered acceptable.

Aaliya thought that the syllabus had space for more female role models and agreed that in our society, we consistently tied gender with religion. She said, “I think that that the way we show things is that if we have to show a businesswoman, we talk about the Prophet Muhammad’s first wife *Hazrat* Khadija.” With reference to the syllabus, she said that there was the addition of a couple of women personalities, but the curriculum was male dominated. She said, “I think they have added some chapters in the student learning objectives on female

leaders, but men definitely dominate the curriculum.” She further added that the school tried to redress this imbalance, “In our extracurriculars and in our prize distribution, we emphasize female role models a lot and the girls are really happy about that. They dress up as army women and other professions. They enjoy it.” However, despite her views on women and careers, she believed that limits imposed by gender and religion were integral to children’s education especially since the media had created a lot of exposure for children,

The media has already made our children limitless. If we do not talk to them about limitations, it will be problematic. The only thing you can do is separate boys and girls. They say that “if the palm of my hand is a problem, the back of my hand is a solution.” There is a solution to everything. It is just how you convey it. So instead of taking this negatively, you can find a way to make it positive.

Conclusion

This low-cost private school was organizationally structured as an independent family business with the locus of control residing with the business owners. Aaliya, who was more involved with the curriculum being implemented in classrooms, had great influence on how closely the teachers were expected to follow the SNC policy. In accordance with the resources of the school, she complied with the policy directives that were checked during the government compliance checks such as having the Quran in classes and teaching *Waqfiat-e-Aama* in Urdu instead of Science and Social Studies in English. Overall, the values of the staff at this school did not differ from those incorporated in the SNC curriculum on religion. However, like their administration, they felt that additional responsibility of teaching Nazra should not have been delegated to them. On the topic of gender, the school acknowledged that the new curriculum was

male-dominated and needed to have more female role models, however, personal beliefs and life experiences colored these perceptions; for some teachers who had experienced negative gender bias, such as the curtailing of their education ambitions due to their gender, women were absent in the public space and that was reflected in the curriculum. For others, who were religious, the level of freedom given to women was to be limited by the edicts of Islam. The latter believed that Islam had plenty of space for women's progress. From a content perspective, the SNC was a good curriculum for them however, the confusion around language made a negative impact on their ability to teach it well. Aaliya believed that the ultimate loss in this confusion was that of student learning, "The worst impact is on the students who are again being confused by the language."

From a capacity perspective, the school did not have enough resources to meet all government requirements. It had to drop teaching *Nazra* as prescribed by the government for a simpler form because both the teachers and students struggled with it. This was a calculated risk as the expectation was that given its political troubles with the Prime Minister facing a no confidence vote in the parliament, the government would not conduct a check on the school and in the event that such a check happened, the presence of the Quran in classrooms and the inclusion of the Nazra period in the timetable would be enough to satisfy them.

Chapter 7: The High-Cost Private School

School Profile and Environment

In Pakistan, several private schools are chains with several branches across the country. These branches are further divided into several categories that have different fee structures to provide private education to middle- and lower-income classes. This private school, which is part of a larger chain of schools, is one of the most prestigious in Lahore. This school is co-education but after the students complete grade 1, they move onto separate branches for boys and girls. The main sister schools for this school are for girls only. Located in an elite neighborhood, it boasted a colorful, purpose-built campus. However, there were signs of tight security around the school. The boundary wall of the school was high and covered in barbed wire. There was a sniper posted on the roof of the main building, and visible security cameras could be seen in several places. Following an attack by the Taliban on an Army school in Peshawar in December 2016, where over a hundred students died, the government had issued new guidelines which required that schools, especially private schools, take strong safety precautions against intruders, terrorist attacks and bomb threats. At the gate of the school, there were several custodians who ensured that the students were getting in the right cars with people who were authorized to pick them up. When I introduced myself, the gatekeeper phoned ahead to the office before I was allowed into the school. I was also made to sign in a visitor logbook that was maintained by gate staff.

The school was large with a front yard for playing, colorful benches and games painted directly onto the floor such as snakes and ladders and hopscotch and a maze. There was also a world map painted on the courtyard tiles with different continents in different colors. The school had separate offices for the administrative staff and the vice principal. In addition, there was a

printing office and an accounts office where the fee bills of students were generated. I had perused the school's website before my first day visit and in addition to the regular classes, the school had an extensive extracurricular program. They offered gymnasium classes, art, and dance. In addition to this, they had an Exploratorium where the students could do supervised hands-on experiments. The school had a large multimedia room for large showings and all classrooms had access to multimedia in their own classes. The school charged a tuition fee of about Rs. 40,000 per month (\$148). This is an astronomical price tag on primary education in the context of Pakistan as a country where the average median income of Pakistani households stood at approximately Rs. 41,500 (approximately \$155) in 2019, according to Household Integrated Economic Survey (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

The boards on the walls were also markedly different. They all encouraged student self-expression; On one board the word "BE" was surrounded by others such as "unique", "strong", "authentic", "yourself" etc. Another board proclaimed, "We are a box of crayons, each of us is unique, when we get together, the picture is complete." My favorite was the board that showed the sun, rain and clouds and instructed "When you cannot find the sunshine, be the sunshine".

Overall, the school was a stark contrast to the schools in Kamalia, in both size and resources on display. In the reception room to the Vice Principal's office, there was a wall-mounted thumbprint scanner for logging teacher attendance and punctuality. The administration rooms were large, covered in artwork with trophy cabinets for the school. As is customary, a picture of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, adorned the wall of the office. My meeting with the vice principal, Farheen, was excellent and she helped me chalk out an interview schedule over the week with teachers. A member of the custodial staff was assigned to help me in case I needed something or if I wanted to find a specific office or staff person. The classroom that I used for

interviews and focus group was on the third floor of a new building. The chairs were tiny given that the school only had 3 class levels: playgroup, nursery, and grade 1. It was air-conditioned and the school had its own generator in case the electricity went out. Class sizes in this school were small with no class having more than 20 students.

Staff Profiles

I interviewed two administrators and 6 teachers at this school. Table 3 shows the profiles of the staff interviewed at this school.

Table 3

Staff profiles for high-cost private school

Name	Age	Highest Degree Achieved	Designation	Experience
Farheen	51	Bachelors	Vice Principal	26 years
Razia	35	MPhil	Literacy Coordinator	12 years
Sara	42	Masters	Teacher	15 years
Noor	51	Bachelors	Teacher	31 years
Maira	60	Masters	Teacher	26 years
Nasreen	50	Bachelors	Teacher	10 years
Qudsia	54	Bachelors	Teacher	28 years
Raheela	39	Bachelors	Teacher	7 years

All the teachers interviewed taught grade 1 across all subjects except Urdu and *Islamiyat*. One teacher, Qudsia, taught Urdu and *Islamiyat* (as medium of instruction in *Islamiyat* was Urdu). The teachers hailed from educated backgrounds and except for the Urdu teacher, they conversed almost entirely in English. Unlike the schools in Kamalia, none of the teachers I met were conservatively dressed. Most of the teachers had been teaching in this school for more than

a decade and only Raheela had a teaching experience of less than 10 years. All the teachers belonged to Lahore except Nasreen who was from Karachi which is Pakistan's largest metropolis. Most of the teachers had attended private or semi-government schools and universities like Kinnaird College, which is a pre-partition women's liberal arts college. Most of the teachers hailed from well-to-do families. Nevertheless, while private education in Pakistan is expensive and teaching in an elite private school brought several benefits including tuition waivers for children of teachers in addition to substantial salaries. Farheen had been a teacher for 21 years at the higher secondary branch of this school before being promoted to the post of Vice Principal. Similarly, Razia, the Literacy Coordinator came into the role after teaching in this branch for 11 years. She also had a specialized degree in English Language Teaching which was a main focus of the school.

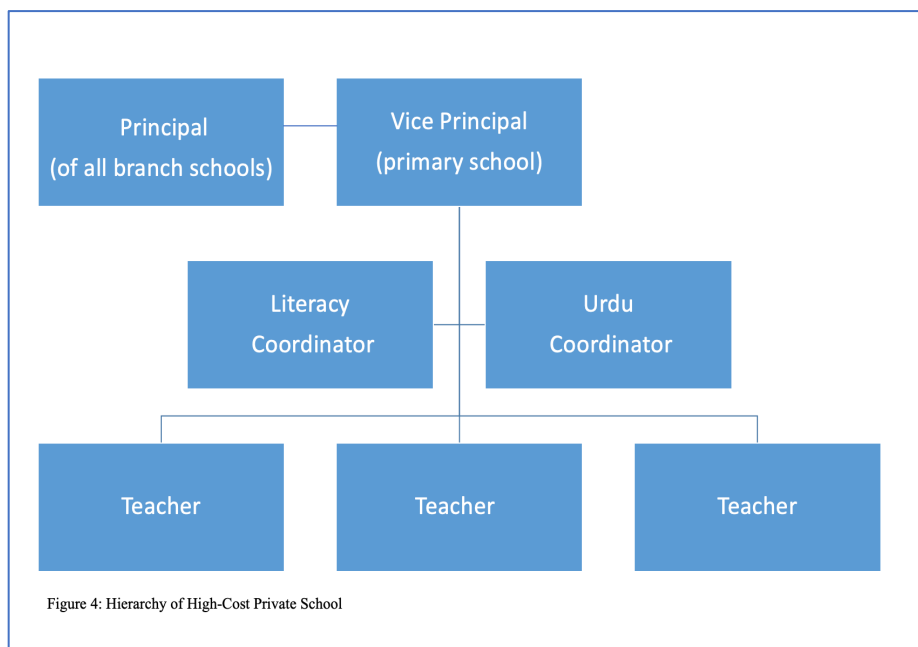
Institutional Hierarchy and Arrangements

This school is a lower-level primary feeder school for its sister schools which cater to higher grades and offer students a chance to sit for Cambridge Board international exams in grade 11 and grade 13 (known as Advanced levels). As this school is integrated in a larger system of schools its hierarchy extends beyond the walls of this campus. The principal of this school has an office in the high school which is located in a different but no less elite neighborhood. Within the school, the Vice Principal, Farheen, is the head of the administration. She is in charge of the everyday functioning of the school but other major decisions such as the implementation of the SNC were taken in consultation with the principal and other administrators from different branches. When the SNC was being talked about as a potential policy Farheen recalls the principal bringing it up, "Only once the principal asked me if I had

seen what the government was doing about the curriculum, and I said that I have not really followed it. I have occasionally read an article, but I have not really followed it.” The principal of the school was extremely against the new SNC policy. Figure 5 shows the hierarchy for the school.

Figure 6

Hierarchy of High-Cost Private School



Supporting Farheen in the administration but with more focus on pedagogy and classroom curriculum was Razia, the Literacy Coordinator who plans the extensive English Curriculum with its several components. The Urdu teachers also have a coordinator who teaches in the middle school and makes visits to this school. The teachers are in charge of their own classes except for the Urdu teachers who teach their subjects in different classes. The teachers feel that having coordinators for subjects is one of the best things about teaching in this school. Noor said,

Actually, one of the best things is that they have coordinators for each subject. At the other school where I used to teach, we had no coordinators. We had a principal to whom we used to go to, and we asked her for everything. Here, because they have coordinators, it's a devolution of authority. They are easier to access.

The teachers at this school seemed to have a good working relationship with each other. The administration also tried to include teachers in feedback loops that made them feel like they also had agency and a voice within the school. According to Nasreen, a perk of teaching in this school is that they constantly strive to improve the teaching and learning experience. She said,

I feel that they (the school) obviously want to bring them (students) to a good level and every year we have few changes because what we do is that we sit down together and we talk about the pros and cons, what went wrong and what went well or and what helped.

According to that, every year we work on improving that thing which did not go well.

This is a good point about the school is that every year they try to improve on whatever is lacking and bring it to that level where we want it to be.

Similarly, the teachers were part of the decision-making in the curriculum over the years and included in the decision-making of what to include from the student learning objectives given by the SNC. Sara said,

The thing is that this school is always about its own curriculum. And it values a different perspective altogether. Because if you talk about other private schools, they do not have their own curriculum. They have a set standard that comes from the head office or whatever. We (as teachers) have been part of this process of making the curriculum and that is what the school is all about. So, we were like ok, we can put this (SNC) in, but we will also do our own curriculum because we have to raise the standard.

Razia, similarly pointed to the experience and teamwork of the teachers which made adapting to the SNC easier. She said, “ We have been doing this for so many years, we actually know how to get started. If it was someone new, they would have definitely struggled.” Given the more inclusive hierarchy, the relationship amongst the teachers and the administration is friendly and the turnover of teachers appeared to be quite low. Raheela said,

Generally, the vice principal and the other teachers are very supportive. Whenever we are working on something that you know we have not tried before, we consult each other.

We look at the pros and cons of those things and how we can do it better so that was always there. The Vice Principal is always there, and she helps us out in different things.

Along with the easygoing teamwork and camaraderie amongst the staff, the school is also very organized as a workplace. Attendance, punctuality, and other rules of workplace expectations are clear as seen by the biometric punch clock. Additionally, the teachers are regularly observed in their class and given feedback on their pedagogical practices. These observations are taken by the Coordinator Razia and the Vice Principal, Farheen. Sometimes, teachers from higher grades from the sister schools also come in to take observations. Unlike the public school, where the teachers were apprehensive of observations, the teachers at this school did not express any negative sentiments towards them such as the feedback was given in a positive way. Qudsia said, “ Sometimes, we get called into the office.” Raheela added that “ In a very polite way, they tell us that these are the things you can add.” Nasreen also reported a similar experience, “ rather than saying that this was mentioned in the work plan, and you did this, or this was not there, it might be better if you do it this way.”

School Learning Environment

The learning environment in this school is student-centered and the school has very clear values on what educating young children is supposed to achieve. Because the children who attend the school are very young, the teachers are called “Aunty” instead of “Miss” or “Mrs.” because in South Asian culture older adults are referred to as such. Alumni of the school hold high positions in society and are visible personalities on social media and television. In addition, they are journalists, lawyers, businesswomen, teachers, doctors, and government ministers as well. Their success in male dominated professions such as politics and journalism set the benchmarks of expectations for the students here but also brings negative attention to the school. Farheen pointed out how this was a double-edged sword,

Fatimah (interviewer), look at all of the girls that are alumni of this school and in the workforce. Have you seen (names a well-known constitutional lawyer), she is so outspoken on the news? She is so good. That also puts us in the limelight. And we have a lot of children in this school of bureaucrats and government officials. The Chief Minister’s daughters were in this school and so were the daughters of other politicians... because we have these students, we had to be extra careful of what we were doing (with SNC implementation) and what were the optics of that.

When asked by teachers what the focus of education in the school was, Sara summed it up as, “Starts with the student, what they are able to learn, how they are learning etc. Very mindful and intentional teaching.” For Nasreen, it was about creating discipline in the lives of the students,

I feel like you know it's very important socially also because obviously when children come to school it is not just academic, but you know you are just teaching them discipline. We are teaching them rules and regulations, how to mix around, how to

behave around other children.... There should be a little bit of strictness because this is the foundation.

For Maira, the key purpose of education in this school was developing confidence in the students with a specific focus on creativity and developing their skills in English. Maira said, “Well, I think the school really wants the students to be confident, well-spoken especially in English, they should have a lot of creativity, they should know how to investigate and explore topics. It should not be rote learning.” For Raheela, the key was teaching students to be out of the box thinkers,

Basically, what I think the value of this school is to make the child independent and better prepared for the future. To prepare them in a way where you know they are able to analyze a situation and think outside of the box.

Sara thinks the school caters to the need of the hour and fosters self-advocacy in children which is very different from the previous generations were brought up,

First of all, confidence is very important. Now, it's the need of the hour. We were suppressed as students and kids. Do not talk to older people, do not speak up about what you are thinking, you need to be constantly respectful etc. That time is now past. Time is very different now.... I would like my children to come up to me and tell me, that ok, ‘Aunty this is something we have done wrong.’ Or if they are having a problem with another person, I want them to be able to come and tell me because I would like to know you better.

Noor added that the school employed resources to give learning freedom to different types of students,

I think we have given enough freedom to the children and with the way of teaching it is very interesting because it is all activity based learning and audiovisual learning to cater to the different kinds of children we have in class. The environment is also very friendly. Another key reason this school stood out in the public perception was their secular stance on teaching religion (*Islamiyat*) as a subject in school before the SNC was introduced. Whilst the sister schools teaching grade 6 onwards were teaching *Islamiyat* because it was required by law, the earlier grades did not teach religion. Farheen said this meant that implementing Nazra was a problem because,

We did not do *Islamiyat* as a subject in this school. It was values and ethics, and children were introduced to a few surahs or stories of the Prophets and basic important days in religious calendars, but we did that from the point of view of Christianity as well as Islam because we have a large number of Christian custodial staff and to cater to their sensibilities, we did a lot of activities around Christmas. So obviously when we had to implement Nazra, it was a problem.

Maira added before the SNC came into effect *Islamiyat* was not a focus for the school, “I mean we used to teach them moral values etc. and focus on that. Like we used to tell them acts of kindness etc. *Islamiyat* was not our focus as a subject.”

The school’s student-centered learning approach is also visible in the student assessment structure. There are no formal exams in this school, only internal assessments that track how well a student is doing in different aspects of learning. Following repeated school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the school slowed down its curriculum planning as the coordinator and teachers were not comfortable assessing where the students stood due to online learning.

This school does not have formal assessments, but it does have internal, teacher-designed assessments. We were waiting for the children to come back to school so that we could assess them. It was not a curriculum that was fully planned because we needed to see what the needs of the children and plan were accordingly.

The overall approach to learning made this school in demand amongst parents who could afford it. With the arrival of the SNC policy, parents did question if the school could maintain the same approach and the administration had to assure them that regardless of the changes the SNC required, the school would maintain its pedagogical stance. Farheen said,

This was a fear that we had from the parents... They would say why do I have to send my child to your school now that everyone has the same curriculum. And I told them that our teaching method has not changed. Whatever we are teaching, we will be bringing the same pedagogy to that.

The school's focus on teaching English as a skill was evident in my conversation with Razia who was in her first year as the school's literacy coordinator. When I asked her what the aim of the curriculum was, she told me that it was intentional and planned to keep in mind components such as phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension,

We are teaching them skills and strategies to segment words, pull out the words. And reading is the main focus area for our students.... Language acquisition works in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and we combine all of that throughout the literacy block. The children have chances for show and tell, they have chances for role play, they have opportunities to come up and talk about the things that happened in their morning routine. Everything is very focused, aligned and very targeted.

In addition to this, the school also subscribed to a specific phonics program and its teachers were trained to teach that. Razia said,

There are proper workshops for teaching phonics and there is a jolly phonics app. We also have the jolly phonics book which teaches teachers how to teach phonics. We are always sending them links to refresh themselves on the workshops.

The school believes teaching phonics requires training as Razia pointed out, “Some of the concepts such as consonant blends etc., you need to have properly trained teachers to do that. Everybody cannot teach phonics. We do not even recommend parents to teach phonics.”

Farheen added that the emphasis on English meant that a lot of time is devoted to teaching it, “ We have 9 lessons of English, some are called guided reading, communication skills and problem solving.” In addition, there is a writing workshop where the school fostered creativity and self-expression in its student body. Nasreen explained that in the writing workshop,

We do not dictate to them. We tell them that this is the topic and now whatever comes to your mind you just write it down. We do not even care about spelling. Use your imagination and write it down. Just make pictures and it does not matter if you know how to make pictures. Just be creative and we encourage them for that.

The learning environment of the school and the hierarchy described here were the conditions in which the SNC policy was implemented. The school was rich in both human resources and physical resources needed to achieve its selected outcomes for students. Teachers felt much more included in the decision-making processes such as selecting the books taught in the classrooms. The presence of subject coordinators, with specific expertise, also gave them more access to support from the vertical hierarchy in addition to support they received from each

other. As such, the school expected to be able to adjust to SNC directives without losing sight of their own pedagogy. The expectation was that the school would absorb the changes in a manner that closely aligned with their own institutional goals and values. At the same time, the school was apprehensive about the SNC Policy because it was going to effect a forced change in the school's secular stance on religion.

Experiences with SNC Policy Implementation

The SNC policy was extremely controversial in elite private education circles because the private schools had always had free reign over their curriculum. Even in the beginning when rumors about this policy started circulating in the for-profit education circle and the media, Farheen paid it no mind because she felt that the government did not have the capacity to enforce such a sweeping agenda. She said,

I seem to have spent that year, you know completely ignoring it, frankly. I would get some feedback from the founder and Principal of the school and from my sister-in-law also who does follow these things. So, I would read the occasional account of it but apart from that I was not following it at all....Partly because the government starts so many things and there are not many that they actually go through with.

However, with contacts in other schools and in political offices, the school was able to confirm which of the rumors flying around were the truth and which were baseless. Farheen relayed the entire process,

We found one of the notifications another school sent to its parents and then we asked around (to other schools). One of our teachers, her husband, is a bureaucrat so I asked her if we could get some clarity on this. She found out from the Education Minister's

secretary that all the things we were hearing, the hearsay, were confirmed from there like teaching *Nazra* is a must.

Outside of the confirmation that the policy would apply to private schools, there was no further information received from the government about what was in the SNC syllabus or what was expected of the schools despite coordinators attending meetings with the School Education Department. As a result, the school was unable to plan its implementation strategy in advance. Farheen added,

So, slowly from word of mouth and what other schools had found out we learned more.

Also, two of our coordinators from a sister school had been in these SNC meetings and obviously the questions they were asking were offending these people because they were asking ‘how are you going to do this?’, ‘why are you doing this?’ etc. and I am sure these coordinators were getting very agitated as to where we were being dragged as a school system but there was no clarity on how it was actually to be implemented.

In May 2021, the Principal sent over the copy of the government SNC documents with the vague instructions that it needed to be on prominent display in the administrative offices in case government officials came to visit. The documents were unclear in how schools were going to implement the government’s demand, and whether this was likely to not be strictly implemented at all,

In the first instructions, we were told that the teachers can have one set and we will not ask the students to get these books and that we would essentially be doing a lip service to this policy implementation. And that’s where we were. I tried to get their books and I found out that there are no books at the moment.

The lack of books showed that the government's own departments were confused with how to provide the resources needed for this policy to schools, lending credence to public opinion in liberal circles that this was a political stunt to rouse the support of the government's religious base. The lack of books meant that the school, which generally would have reviewed and finalized its books for the 2021-2022 academic year, in April of 2021 was unable to create a booklist before the summer holidays. At this point with no sign of any guidance from the government, Farheen looped in the teachers. She said,

In our school we review books for the next year in March or April for the next academic year. We were now in a limbo as we did not know which books we could prescribe....But we could not prescribe books till we received clarity from the government, and they said right now there are no books. I also told the teachers that this is a thing, and we will have to do some lip service to it, but we will keep doing what we are doing.

Razia recalled how the staff held a negative opinion on the SNC policy at the outset,

We found out about it from the Vice Principal and the media, television, and newspapers and all. And right from the beginning, there was a lot of criticism of this policy, and I think we had already developed this mindset that probably we will not like it. The criticism was kind of influencing us.

Sara recalls that all teachers were apprehensive about the curriculum because of a lack of clear information,

We were very apprehensive about it, about what is going to happen, what will we do about it, are they going to hire some teachers or do something else? And the school was worried about the books we were teaching. Eventually when it came to it and we saw that these are the books, I think it was hard in the beginning for us.

The government created SNC books became available in the market in August of 2021 along with a declaration that all schools had to teach from PCTB books. However, the established private publishers, such as Cambridge and Oxford University presses, that created the books for the elite private schools sued the government for blocking free enterprise and the government relented to a certain extent. Schools could teach from books by private publishers if the books were approved by the PCTB. Farheen recalled that,

We got the books in August. Initially we did not know some books were compulsory. I ordered the books that were available including *Islamiyat* and *Waqfiat-e- Aama*. But we did not know these were a must. Then PCTB sent a notification that for the first year at least these books are compulsory as we have printed them now. At the same time, other publishers were forbidden from printing or selling books to any school, and they (the private company publishers), went to court because they said that it was illegal for the government to stop free enterprise. So, the government changed their tactics and told the private publishers that we will approve your books before they can be used in schools or sold in the market.

This additional step of making private publishers obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the PCTB resulted in delays of books being available for printing. Overall, the lack of preparedness and strategies in the government departments led to confusion amongst the private education sector personnel.

Additionally, without creating a sound monitoring process, the Government Department started visiting schools in the beginning of the school year to confirm compliance to the SNC policy. Farheen's experience of this process highlights the lack of clarity within the education department on its own policy. Farheen was contacted by the School Education Department that

their employee would be visiting the school and she needed to fill out some forms that could be downloaded from the internet. She complied and the meeting happened with a female staff member,

She sat with me and went through all of the curriculum outlines, for all the different subjects of the SNC. And she came in and said that my form was not acceptable, and she would give me her own form, which was not largely different from the one that I had, and we had downloaded it from the internet as we had been told to do (laughs). Anyway, we filled it, it needed to be stamped etc. and we did it. She did not have a problem. I explained that each lesson we had was for 30 minutes and we have completed 90 minutes this way because you have asked for 3 periods of Nazra. She said OK. She asked if we were doing it during the school day. I said yes. When the School Education Department staff member went to the middle school, they said that the Nazra was not happening during the school day.

Because the middle school branch was teaching Nazra as an extra-curricular, the primary school was slated for another visit. Farheen said,

Then the School Education Department sent another team. This person was just an education officer, EDO or something, visiting. After that we received a notification that a whole team will visit which would include a magistrate, and he will be accompanied by other officials and they will have a security team including police and we got the heads-up that they were going to come and see, physically and talk to the children to gauge what they were actually studying.

On the third visit, the school was lucky to have a sympathetic magistrate. He told Farheen he was unaware the school had such young children, and he did not want to conduct an inspection with

them “He said that I do not want to do that. They are too young; they will freeze up and I do not want to do this.” Farheen recalled that before coming to this school the magistrate had visited another primary school with young children and that inspection had gone badly.

He said that his experience of the other school where the whole group of adults were asking students questions, they froze up and forgot their recitation and that became an issue. The other members of the team made the magistrate write it down that in this school children did not know a specific verses. He said that I could see that the children were scared, and it was not that they did not know the surah or had not learnt it. He said that I do not want to repeat that here. Please give me all this to me in writing and tell me what all you are doing to comply with government requirements.

When I asked Farheen if she knew of any school where lack of compliance had resulted in school closure, she said, “ Other branches of this same chain of schools were fined because other principals did not bother to implement any of the government instructions or use the PCTB books.” Moreover, it was the fear of government reprisal that seemed to force this school into compliance as Farheen pointed out, “ technically, they could have fined the school, sealed it or shut it down. They could have done anything.”

Implementation Strategy of the School

Farheen and Razia used the grade wise student learning outcomes (SLOs) of the SNC and compared it to their own curriculum to decide the amount of overlap and find ways to supplement their curriculum if they were forced to use all of the government issued textbooks. From the perspectives of the SLOs, there was significant overlap and they appeared to fit with what the school taught to some degree. Farheen explained,

The document, I am told, a lot of it was copy pasted from different places. For our level, the SLOs were fine keeping in mind that these are young kids, and you have to implement them across the board in the entire country. They seemed fine. Their expectations in Urdu were greater obviously and a little less in English, but it was similar. The teachers who also went through the document also said that it covers most of the things we are doing even if it does not go beyond.

Despite the overlap, the school felt that the level of their students was a grade above what the SNC was prescribing. Farheen said,

The content they (the government) had reduced. They were telling us to do with grade 1 what we do with prep (pre-k). It was that different. But we were allowed to add things as long as they were not given the names of the subjects that the government removed. And all this we found out, you could say, through osmosis. Found something from here and something from there.

Through this osmotic exchange of information among the elite private schools the final understanding of the implementation criteria of the government was that *Islamiyat* and *Waqfiat-e-Aama* were compulsory, and no subjects could have the name of the subjects the government had removed therefore, science and social studies had to be renamed. Additionally, photocopies and worksheets were alright to use as long as they were not stapled together because binding them made them into a book and schools were not allowed to teach from books not approved by the government.

Therefore, the school decided to add what the government wanted but also retain almost all of its original curriculum. It kept teaching Science and Social studies in addition to *Waqfiat-e-Aama* which meant that on the whole, the school's original curriculum remained intact.

The difference in the level of student knowledge was also reflected in the textbooks. Razia and the teachers reviewed the English book from the PCTB and found them to be too basic as it did not cover the extensive English curriculum of the school. Razia took her concerns to Farheen, who discussed this with the other administrators at the other branches as well. When I asked Razia in what ways were the books not up to the mark she explained,

I mean, it was too basic. The students we have in prep class could do it. Our students in grade 1 would have finished it in the first term. Of course, it had concepts such as nouns, verbs that we used to teach but grammatically there were errors, there were printing errors in the book and the quality of English that was used in the PCTB book were too basic for us. ‘This is a ball’, ‘This is a bat’ .

Raheela added that the teachers who reviewed the Punjab government English book felt that it was not appropriate for their students who covered similar content in previous grades,

When we saw the English book, the SNC one, the basic one from the Punjab textbook board, we thought it was way below our level. This is something we generally teach our kids way back and not something we should be doing in grade 1. That was a unanimous thought, and the teachers did not accept that book.

Maira further added that the SNC curriculum lacked inferential questions which this school focused on. She said, “There is some mismatch. This school focuses a lot on children being able to do inferential questions, not just literal questions. That is lacking in the SNC curriculum. It was entirely based or focused on the writing of students.”

Apart from English, the school staff was also concerned about using *Waqfiat-e-Aama* as a replacement for Social Studies and Science. Farheen said,

I mean you can say that in English the gender issues and the religious issues are problematic but the topics that are covered in social studies are what our children do in nursery and playgroup. So simple. I found those to be more problematic. I have always liked the Urdu books from the PCTB and personally I think we should use those to teach children because they do help children improve their Urdu. They have very good exercises. Yes, printing and the quality of the paper are not attractive to the children, but the content is good.

The school opted for the Cambridge publishers' books that had been approved by the government as SNC aligned for all subjects and PCTB books for Urdu and *Islamiyat*. However, Cambridge publishers were unable to provide them with copies at the start of the school year. In the meanwhile, the school administration provided the teachers with relevant activities in the form of worksheets to teach, Sara recalled having a conversation with the administration about the lack of clarity on government guidelines,

This is what the school did with us. They sent us relevant activities but we were all so lost. We did not know anything, and the admin was like when the books come, we can talk about it. Right now, we do not know anything. We were not even sure of whether the curriculum was going to be in English or in Urdu. The *Waqfiat-e-Aama* part, we were sure if that was in Urdu or English.

Razia reached out to the private publishers for support, and they provided the school with soft copies of the first four chapters of the books. The books finally became available in December 2021. All the financial costs of the photocopying, and books were passed onto the parents.

Farheen said,

It was such a financial burden on the parents. First, they paid Rs. 800 for the photocopies of each of the four subjects, 2 each for English and Math. And then they had to buy the books the publishers were recouping money they had to pay for approvals as well. I believe it was between Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 70000 for each book. So, the parents had to give money in three different layers.

In the face of the new policy, the elite private schools, showed a lot of mimetic coupling with schools adopting strategies from each other that helped them maintain their original curriculum, standards, and pedagogy, whilst at the same time, allowing them to comply with government demands which remained vague and confusing even to the School Education Department's own personnel. As the cost was to be passed onto parents regardless, the school staff had their pick of learning materials within the confines of government approval.

Challenges to Operationalizing the SNC Policy

The school had the capacity to absorb the changes demanded by the SNC policy by adding more tasks on to its teachers. Class teachers now had to teach *Waqfiat-e-Aama* in addition to Science and Social Studies and the Urdu teachers had to also teach *Islamiyat*. This process was not smooth initially as the teachers and administration tried to find new ways to incorporate an unfamiliar curriculum to their way of teaching and their value systems. Academic year 2021-2022 also presented another challenge to the learning environment as the students in grade 1 came to in-person school for the first time since nursery and the teachers had the added task of helping them adjust. This was an additional issue because the students suffered from a range of problems. Sara said, "They would not take out books from the bag. They would not know how to go to a chapter in the book." Nasreen added that, "They wanted us to give them everything as

homework so that they could do it with their mums.” For Qudsia they struggled with writing in Urdu and Raheela pointed out that, “Their gross and fine motor skills were not developed because parents were writing for them most of the time.”

Razia agreed with the teachers’ assessment that online learning meant that most of the parents were heavily involved in the student learning,

It's because Mama was doing everything, even online the teachers used to feel that there was too much parent involvement.... the parents made sure that every spelling was correct, and every sentence was correctly punctuated and all and when students came the poor things could not even copy from the board.

In light of these challenges, the school adjusted its normal routines to implement government requirements of the SNC.

Making Space for the New Subjects

Nazra was one of the most difficult adjustments this school had to make.

The principal was dead set against having religious instruction for students at such a young age and took pressure from the entire administrative staff across all schools to convince her otherwise that the government had not left any wiggle room in this area. Farheen recalled a meeting where all administrative procedures to implement the SNC were decided and the methodology to teach *Nazra* was also determined,

We had this grand meeting with all the coordinators and the principals and in that one of the vice principals told her we have to do this. We do not have the option of saying no. We had to collectively explain that the government was very serious about this, and we had to do this. In this meeting we made decisions on what we were going to name the subjects that covered our old curriculum, and how we were going to tackle *Nazra*. We

made classes and then decided that we would do online lessons for *Nazra* to be guided by the teachers.

This strategy was implemented and the teachers' used links to already recorded *Nazra* lessons from the PTV (Pakistani State-run media) to teach *Nazra*. However, the government issued a notification that the school needed to have a certified *qariah* (Quran teacher) on staff and that *Nazra* needed to have at least 3 periods in a week. The addition of *Waqfiat-e-Aama* and *Islamiyat* had already taken up several lessons from extra-curricular activities and the new requirement meant that more needed to give way to make space for government-mandated curriculum.

Farheen said,

We took one of the games lessons from the students and then we shortened all the morning lessons to 30 minutes from 35 minutes and made 4 slots of fifteen minutes each and one 30-minute slot and that's how we managed the time. And it was decided that it would be included in the timetables and those can be accessed by everyone (from the online website).

In addition to *Nazra* taking time, one of Razia's prized storytelling lessons in English also had to be sacrificed to make space in the timetable,

One of my story time lessons was sacrificed for *Waqfiat-e-Aama* and that was a big heartbreak for me because at this level children need to hear a lot of stories to build a sophisticated vocabulary and listening comprehension and engage with the text. What we were left with was the library lessons and the comprehension lessons.

Timetable adjustments meant that there was a reallocation of time given to what the students were expected to learn. With extra-curriculars, science and social studies, the addition of *Nazra*

and *Waqfiat-e-Aama*, the administration was forced to decide on what was the least important lesson for their students.

Nazra and Islamiyat

As per government requirements, the school hired a *qariah* for teaching *Nazra*. Farheen recalled,

I do not know what they wanted. This was now late August; the school is about to open, and we are still scrambling because we get a notification that you need to have a certified *Nazra* teacher. And then the head of *Islamiyat* at the high school took out the books for us that this is the *noorani qaida* (Arabic phonetics primer) you should be using. She did that in consultation with the principal. When we received the *Nazra* notification, she started looking for *Nazra* teachers and the principal interviewed them and approved one.

Whilst the *qariah* could not take all lessons at the school, she took a 30-minute slot for each class and explained to the teachers what they were to reinforce in the 15-minute sessions every day.

Sara said,

We had a *Nazra* teacher, but we had to teach it because of the frequency. Again, we had to take help from the internet. Still, we were doing it all from the internet. The teacher for *Nazra* came in on only one day and we were supposed to cover the time period that the government had told us.

The Urdu teachers were given the *Islamiyat* lessons as the *Islamiyat* books were in Urdu. This was an added burden on them as they did not have such a structured curriculum for *Islamiyat* before. Qudsia said,

We did not have *Islamiyat* like this before. We used to teach the students the first and second *Kalma*, Surah *Fatiha* (common prayers) in the first grade. We used to recite these

in the morning before class. In the *Islamiyat* period itself, I would review other small surahs with the class and ask if a student who knew it wanted to recite it. And then I would talk about one of the Prophets like Moses or Abraham or Adam. I would relate the stories of these Prophets which are necessary for children to know as moral stories. The focus was on morals such as do not lie, share, help each other, listen to your parents and adults and how to live with each other and things like that. I guess you could call it manners.

Despite the extra workload, Qudsia was happy with the support she received during the adjustment period, “The administrators were very supportive. And it was because they also understood that there was a load on us. First of all, before we were only teaching Urdu. Now we had a whole new subject as well, so our work doubled as we also had to check that too.”

The imposition of *Nazra* and *Islamiyat* on the school also brought challenges of teaching non-Muslims enrolled in the school. Farheen said,

We have been forced into doing it and there have been issues. I might have mentioned it to you also, but there were three girls who are Christian in grade 1. If I had known the degree of implementation that was required, I would have made sure they were in the same section.”

The fact that they were in separate sections proved to be an administrative issue for Farheen who did not want the students to have to sit through *Nazra* lessons, so she invited the parents to discuss the options available for these students.

I told them that I want to tell you this because this is the situation. We have to teach *Nazra*, and these are the times when we will be teaching it. How do you want to do this? I cannot offer you an alternative... I also tried to talk to the parents to see if any one of

them would volunteer to teach Christian religious instruction in the time we were doing *Nazra*. It ended up that all three of them were from different denominations and even though they all agreed to volunteer the other parents were not happy about that. So, I decided that it was not going to be possible.

In the end, Farheen decided that the Christian students would go to the library during the *Nazra* lesson and for the *Nazra* lessons in the morning the students could come in late. This solution did not work for long as the Christian students did not like having to leave class due to peer pressure,

As it happens, when only 1 student leaves, she stands out and children do not want to stand out that way. They question why they have to leave and why they are different and then eventually, I think two of them stopped going to the library and they used to sit in the class, and they learned. When the class was learning the phonics book for Arabic, they learned it too and a few of the verses that were done in class as well. And the teacher said that I would not ask them to participate when I was doing the review, but they would insist that I call on them too and that they wanted to do it. And I guess that is the intention of this policy.

Maira also recalled that it brought up a lot of questions in class when the one non-Muslim student did not participate, “But before when we just did the morning prayer, she would stay. She learned all the *duas* (prayers) and I would tell her to take a book and read it, but she would listen. In that, the other children would ask why she is not reading the *dua* (prayer) with us? And I had to explain that different people worship in different ways.”

Language Issues-Urdu

From a language perspective, this school prized the effort it put into teaching English as a skill, and it was the medium of instruction. Therefore, the focus on Urdu as a language was much

less and it was taught as a subject. The inclusion of *Islamiyat* and *Waqfiat-e-Aama* in the syllabus meant that the students were now using Urdu a lot more during the school day.

According to Sara, it was a good thing because, “Now, they had *Waqfiat-e-Aama* and *Islamiyat* in Urdu. So, they acknowledged Urdu as a language taught outside of Urdu lessons...It’s natural for us to speak in Urdu.”

To facilitate the addition of more Urdu in the overall curriculum, the school opted for using the PCTB books for Urdu. Qudsia said, “The Urdu book used for the SNC is thick. Before that, the Urdu books we used were a lot easier. They had a workbook that came with it.” She believed that the students struggled with Urdu because they were not used to learning Urdu at this advanced level.

In our other (older) books, there were fewer exercises. At most there was fill in the blanks or sounding out written words. The students did not have the vocabulary for any more than that. This year, because this was the first time, I think it took the students a little while to grasp it and it took us some effort to prepare them....For Urdu medium students it would have been a piece of cake. For English medium students it was difficult, but we did manage to do all of it.

This was compounded by the fact that the home environments from which the students came were more likely to speak in English. In the focus group, the teachers talked about student reaction to hearing Urdu outside of the Urdu lessons. Qudsia said, “The children who come here think that only the Urdu teacher can speak Urdu and she cannot speak English. That is how it was for the rest of them (teachers)”. Raheela added, “The children were very surprised. They were like, ‘Aunty, you also know Urdu?’” Parents were also very nervous about the addition of subjects taught in Urdu. According to Qudsia,

If you look at the level of the children of this school, or any other English language school, their dilemma and the dilemma of their parents is the same that they say that we do not know Urdu. And the reason for that is that we do not even talk in Urdu at home. And our children obviously pick up what they hear again and again. So, this is what happened: that when it (SNC) came, we became very apprehensive when we saw the book.

Sometimes, this preference of language in the home manifested in subtle ways, but the students picked up on it,

The environment of your house is really essential to language learning. If you are speaking to your children in English, make an effort to speak to them in Urdu as well.

But if you are telling your children that you have to finish your English work first before you do Urdu then that child will not learn Urdu. You need to tell them we will first finish this and then do English work. Parents say they do not know Urdu and are reluctant to teach it, but children will not learn if they do not try.

Given the level of the students and the lack of help from their homes where parents exhibited a preference for English over Urdu, Qudsia did not teach the full book with the support of her coordinator. She said,

When I gave the outline of my lesson plans to the coordinator, I told her that these things have a connection and a sequence, and I can do them and these other things we will have to skip, and she said that you do what you feel is best.

The issues related to Urdu were not just limited to the students and their parents. The teachers also had a difficult transition to teaching a subject in Urdu. In the beginning, they struggled with

making lesson plans for *Waqfiat-e-Aama* especially writing them out in Urdu script. Raheela said,

Initially we were having trouble with you know how to go about *Waqfiat-e-Aama*'s lesson planning. So, we asked her (Farheen) how we should do it and she made one for us to let us know how it should look and that it was really very easy. So, she was there to support us and to let us know that we could do this thing and it would be fine. With the passage of time, everything just became easier, and we were able to do it.

I assumed that the teachers were writing in Urdu, and I brought it up in the focus group. They laughed and Sara said, "I am sorry, but we did not write our lesson plans in Urdu. We wrote them in English (script) because of course we had to understand what we were doing ourselves as well." Farheen mentioned the issue in her interview that the teachers did not feel comfortable writing in Urdu. She said,

It was very difficult for them as well. In the beginning, their planners were, they used to sit with me and make them because they were used to writing in Urdu. They were confused about how we should go about this. When our students came into class one, they could not read that much Urdu and they could not do the given exercises in the textbooks. And I calmed them down that no one is asking you how you will teach this. You read this to the students and do the exercises collectively. And that's it, done. If there is some place where students are being asked to write something, make them draw it instead. So, I calmed them down, that it's alright and we can do it.

Despite these instructions, *Waqfiat-e-Aama* was difficult for students and teachers in the beginning especially since the same teacher would also teach English, Math and Science. As per

general rules, students in most private schools are not allowed to speak in Urdu in these lessons.

Raheela explained that

Initially, I think it was Urdu language because they did not know how to read (in Urdu) and at the same time, since we were doing English and Math and we would tell the children we will not be talking to you in Urdu, you have Urdu lessons for that and then we would completely take a U-turn and start talking to them in Urdu in *Waqfiat-e-Aama* and switch from English instructions to Urdu instructions.

Overtime, the students and the teachers adapted to the curriculum, and it became easier. The teachers felt that the SNC was not imposed on them. As Noor said,

I think the credit goes to the vice principal because she did not put pressure on us that we have to do it this way under all circumstances. She told us you can do it in your own way. Whatever you find convenient and age appropriate, use your own vocabulary. The bottom line was children were able to comprehend and learn something from it, teach it that way.

The dilemma in this school rested on the inclusion of more subjects in Urdu without replacing the ones that were taught in English. The capacity of the teachers to cover both languages to this extent was helped by the administration understanding that the teachers were under pressure with all of the different changes being made to their daily routines due to the SNC.

Merits of the SNC

The teachers' view on the merits of the SNC curriculum were complex and highlighted the huge difference in the education they provided as compared to the public schools. When I asked questions about the merits of the curriculum, Nasreen said,

I would say with this curriculum it was not as bad as we expected, because English and math was almost same and the new subjects which were added were also very useful in a

way. Because of *Waqfiat-e-Aama* students picked up lot of words in Urdu language and it used to talk a lot about general knowledge so that was good for them. And because of *Islamiyat*, parents are no longer going to ask us why we do not teach it. So, it was not so bad.

Sara felt that the students and teachers were improving their Urdu language because they had no option, “I agree. I think this happened because they got stuck in it and we got stuck in it too. So, we ended up revising our Urdu as well. We had forgotten it as well.” Noor, who liked the *Waqfiat-e-Aama* book, said, “I feel like we were forcibly made to revise our Urdu. We found the exercises interesting for the children. There were different things in the exercises, such as color the flag etc.” The teachers also felt that having a subject such as *Waqfiat-e-Aama* gave the chance to students from non-English speaking backgrounds to participate in the class as well. In the focus group, Maira said,

They could express themselves in their own language. Whereas in Science and Social Studies, which is in English, only the students that are good in English feel confident to express their ideas and the rest of the class is listening and not participating.

Sara agreed with this, but she found the *Waqfiat-e-Aama* to be very simplistic,

It’s about what’s a family., what’s around us, what our school is like. A little bit about what are the buildings for a specific religion. Something about sports. That’s it. It was very general and something that children could relate to very easily too. They really liked and enjoyed the discussions because everybody knew something about it.

Maira also struggled with the font and vocabulary of the *Waqfiat-e-Aama* text. She said, “The font needed to be bigger, and the passages needed to be shorter. The material was a lot. We would read out the text, if the paragraph was smaller, it would be more effective as the students

could read themselves.” Nasreen agreed with this assessment, “The topics were good, and the length was fine....I had to read to them and explain it. I think the words were a little difficult for them and they could not spell it out because the font was so small.” For Qudsia, *Waqfiat-e-Aama* had the added benefit of improving the Urdu of students.

I think that there were some students in my class who did not participate in English because they did not think they could, they participated in *Waqfiat-e-Aama*. *Waqfiat-e-Aama* was also a great help to Urdu learning because they had more reading and listening exposure outside of the Urdu lessons.

With the help of the administration, and the positive response from the students to *Waqfiat-e-Aama*, they got comfortable with the subject. At the same time, they felt that this curriculum should not apply to them because the education they provided or the ones which their children were receiving was at a level which the SNC did not meet. In short, it was good for the public schools but not good enough for elite private education. Raheela said,

I think this is a basic line of all the schools in Pakistan. Basically, what I think is that this government targeted the public sector. That was the reason. But when it comes to the private sector, the children over here are way advanced. They know these things earlier like in pre-K, so it was very basic.

The Role of Values and Beliefs in SNC Implementation

The degree of alignment between the values and beliefs of the implementers and the underpinning values of the SNC policy varied across the teachers with respect to gender and religion. As noted earlier with the interviews of the schools in Kamalia, some teachers exhibited discomfort with questions regarding gender representation in the curriculum. On religion, their

views ran the gamut from some who believed that the SNC helped the school fill one of its deficiencies by introducing religion as part of education to others who felt that teaching religion in schools created a non-inclusive environment for minority students and was an overreach by the government.

Religion

The views of the teachers on the inclusion of religion in the school were diverse. This school did not have a formal *Islamiyat* lesson in its timetable before the SNC which was a representation of the school's secular values. For Farheen, teaching religion in school was a minefield of potential issues. She said,

There are so many minefields in this especially if any teacher says anything a little bit controversial. I have told the teacher who is teaching *Islamiyat* to please, please, please be very careful. And I am so grateful that my responsibility is only till grade 1. I went through the *Islamiyat* syllabus before giving it to the teachers and I figured that this was okay, and the teachers will be able to handle this with ease. Furthermore, there was no controversial topic in it. But, in the senior school, grade 7 onwards, for which this curriculum was in the pipeline, the principal did receive complaints that if the children are from the Shia sect, they should not be learning from a majority Sunni point of view. We did not know what the approved translations or exegesis for the Quran that were approved.

Sara was of the opinion that the school did not need to include religion in the curriculum,

Everybody is learning *Nazra* at home, I am sorry. Do they need it in schools? No, they do not, and we are not professionals qualified to teach it either. We were not very happy

about that. *Nazra* is another thing in which you should know how to teach Arabic. In it, you have to read it and teach children how to read it.

When I brought up how some teachers across the school had mentioned the children's enthusiastic response to Quran classes Sara said, "They are children. They are enthusiastic about everything and then they get bored. The thing is that I thought it was kind of disrespectful. It was disrespectful, I must say." Nasreen who had received her education at a missionary Convent, expressed that religion needed to be a choice for the parents, "I think it should be optional so if parents want to opt for it, they are sure and if they do not it's their choice." For Maira and Noor, it was essential that the school continue teaching *Islamiyat*. Maira said, "I think some knowledge of *Islamiyat* is essential for children. I think when we did not have this, the exposure the children were getting from the television and media, the culture, especially western culture, they were absorbing that a lot." Similarly, Noor felt that even if the school was given the option of rolling back the SNC, it should decline because, "I think they should keep it. I mean, *Islamiyat* for example. Our children never had *Islamiyat* books. And we introduced *Nazra*. These three subjects (*Islamiyat*, *Nazra* and *Waqfiat-e-Aama*), they have helped our Urdu language." For Raheela, whose son was studying *Nazra* in school, it was a good addition to the syllabus, "The thing I found as a parent you know, my son was more into religion.... So, I think it is a good thing."

Qudsia felt that the syllabus of the SNC was too extensive and whilst teaching some practical aspects of religion were important, *Nazra* was the parent's responsibility,

Students should know some things about their religion. Smaller surahs, moral lessons etc.

The child should be taught how to learn, and we should be able to do that, but you have to do it in a way in which it is a skill so that they can remember it later on.

For her, an additional aspect of teaching Quran in school was that it undermined the cultural practices that were considered necessary for learning,

We learnt under cultural practices of how to study religious things. How you had to be pure through ablution, etc. to do it. Now they think that if you are a student, the old way of doing it does not apply because you are a student. I do not think you should do that with teaching students how to read the Quran.

When I asked Farheen if the school felt that it had space to revert to not teaching religion, she pointed to the recent lynching of a trader by a mob on blasphemy allegations,

If you came on to this track like we did, if you try to get off it, you have to have an explanation for that. And human life is so important. I am thinking about the lynching of the traders, I mean the mob mentality that has developed in this society. I am extremely scared of that because if you say anything slightly controversial, and someone incites a mob....

Qudsia had a similar opinion on this.

(Society is) too conservative. If you try to take it out now, people will make a really big deal out of it. If the government decides not to implement it, the government schools might be ok, but the private schools will have trouble facing it.

Gender

Staff values on gender were a mix of liberal and conservative reflecting the diversity of the metropolis to which they belonged. Raheela's reaction to a question on how gender was depicted in the SNC government textbooks was interesting,

I do not have any comments on that. I do not know; they might have something in mind. What I feel is, while bringing up my daughter, I want to give her as many opportunities

as I give to my son. So, I do not know, it's up to, I guess it depends on the parents as well. How they want to bring up their child. I want my child to be comfortable. I want them to understand what is right and what is wrong. What her boundaries are. What are the things she is ethically bound to do and what are the things that are way off limits. As a parent that is something I have to teach her.

When I clarified that I was asking about whether she felt that gender representation in SNC was stereotypical, she dismissed it as a non-issue,

Generally, if you look around, children are more influenced by their parents. At this stage, if they see their parents acting in a specific manner, they tend to copy that. Right now (grade 1) I do not think it matters too much. What matters is the basic brought up of the child and what we are showing as teachers.

For others, gender representation was problematic in that it was too conservative and stereotyped women as homemakers and absent from public spaces. Razia said during the review of books, this was one of the concerns,

There was a picture I saw, of a mother sitting on the floor I do not know if this was grade one or grade 2, but the mother was sitting on the floor and the father, and the son were sitting on the sofa. And in another picture, there was a very young girl who was wearing a hijab and underneath her dress she was wearing tights. Even in this book, this is the basic impression of what to expect in the illustrations in the book.

Farheen described the stereotypes in the government textbooks to be especially in the division of labor: "When they are showing work, they are showing clearly defined gender roles. Mothers are working in the kitchen, washing dishes, washing clothes and fathers are working in an office. You know the general stereotyped roles." My follow up questions asked if such

images were present in the books of the private publishers and she said, “They were very careful, and I have not seen this thing over there. But this tells you the mindsets of those who made the SNC books. The private publishers are more interested in the content.” She felt that this was deliberate on the part of the government to show gender in such a traditional manner,

Once upon a time, I used to think the same that maybe they do not know but now I think this is very deliberate. These subliminal messages are something they have been sending for a long time. Why do 5-year-olds have to cover their heads?

She felt that the conservative idea of gender was being pedaled through various avenues to create a more conservative social mindset, “It’s not just this. Look at all the plays on television, the advertisements, and the films.” For Noor, this way of representing gender was outdated and did not reflect the new reality of women’s lives,

In the books they do show that women work exclusively in the home. This needs to be changed a little bit. Times have changed. It is not how our mothers used to do or our grandmothers used to do. Every woman, I think, is different now. They need to show women as having equal rights and equal contributions in the house. There is a need to change the mindset.

For Sara, *Waqfiat-e-Aama* subtly included patriarchy in simple topics like family. She said, “They showed paternal grandparents and there was nothing about maternal grandparents. It was in the family tree. And we were like what, trees grow outwards towards both sides.” Therefore, to correct the conservative ideas woven into the *Waqfiat-e-Aama* text, the teachers took on the role of balancing the children’s views themselves. Nasreen said,

I actually used to talk a lot about it when children would say I've forgotten to bring this or that because my mom did not put it (in my bag). Then I would briefly tell them that

you know, mom is also very busy and it's your responsibility to do things. She was working and doing equally important work as your dad and she's running the house also. In fact, she is doing more work. You should be responsible for your own things instead of going to your mom and saying pack my bags and I just put it in their head you know that we were equally important.

Sara gave a more specific example from the curriculum,

We do it our way. The text was there. But when we would have discussions, we would ask “what about your *nani*’s (maternal grandmother) side of the family”? We were balancing it out ourselves. The students were themselves asking about this. They are very quick about this. They asked, ‘what about my *nani* (maternal grandmother) and *khala* (mother’s sister)?’ And why is this girl in a hijab? They look at everything. They are critical.

Most of the teachers felt that gender representation in the curriculum was conservative and did not fit with their own or their school’s values. Some felt that the children were too young to absorb conservative representations of women especially when they had personal examples from their lives to counteract these depictions. For those that disagreed with the representation shown, the onus of mitigating its impact on children rested with them.

Conclusion

This high-cost elite private school had experienced similar issues with the SNC policy to that of the schools from Kamalia. Their experience showcased how top-down the SNC policy was with no recourse for established and well-known institutions to get exemption from it. Farheen summed it up as, “This particular school does not have it (leeway) because we are

highlighted always. A lot of the smaller private schools have not implemented the SNC. They said we did not do anything, and no one asked us anything.” Rather, the high-profile nature of the school made it a target for inspection by government officials who ensured that it was followed at least in aspects such as *Nazra* which were part of the government’s talking points. Teachers within the school had a very privileged reaction to the curriculum. For most of them, the curriculum was good but below the level of the school. For example, Raheela said,

I totally agree that our public sector lacks this. Their basics are missing, and this thing is going to provide them with the basic outline. That is good for them. But when it comes to the private sector, I think they should be given this much leverage, they should be able to choose the books they want to implement which are going to help the children in their future.

For others like Sara, teaching in Urdu was the problem.

They were happy with all the Urdu stuff. They were like *Waqfiat-e-Aama* is in Urdu, *Islamiyat* is in Urdu. They were unhappy about how they were going to manage, and their children were going to like it. And they asked if anything could be done about it. Or if there was a school that was not going to teach this. We were like, no we are sorry, we are stuck, and you are stuck with this.

For others, the school had the capacity to absorb the new curriculum because the really controversial issues would crop up when the SNC syllabus for the older classes went into effect. Noor said, “I think our (students) parents were very confused. In senior classes it will be more difficult because they have never seen such a curriculum and they have to appear for O and A levels. Obviously, that is worrisome for them.” Raheela did not find it problematic, “As long as they do not implement it before my daughter goes into O-levels.”

To adapt to the SNC curriculum, the school added it to their current curriculum instead of switching over to it by including *Waqfiat-e-Aama* and *Nazra* but maintaining their own program of learning. This was because the school deemed it beneath the level at which it expected its students to be before they transitioned into sister schools. When I asked that if the option of private publishers' books was not on the table would the students be prepared for the O-Level stream the response was negative. Razia said, "If this had definitely been forced on us, we would have had to use a lot of supplementary material." From a capacity perspective, the school had the human resources and the technical knowledge to develop core competencies in their students which were necessary for them to succeed in higher grades whilst coping with the additional burden of the SNC subjects.

Chapter 8: Cross-Case Analysis and Findings***

Large scale policy prescriptions, such as the imposition of a uniform curriculum in diverse education systems, assume a homogeneity in institutions on which the policy applies. It ignores relevant attributes of these institutions that have some degree of influence on the policy implementation process such as resources, purpose of education and teacher capacity. As highlighted in chapter 3, people and places have a significant impact on how policy is enacted (Bell & Johnson, 2006; Honig, 2006; Viennet & Pont, 2017).

This means that the defined policy outcome of the SNC policy, which was to remove the ‘education apartheid’ cannot be met without acknowledging the diversity of institutional contexts which govern operationalization of the policy or the values and beliefs of the teachers who implement it in the classroom. The case studies presented in chapters 5-7 showcase the complexity of the policy implementation process in different types of schools and offered answers to the sub-questions of this research study:

- a. What are the perspectives of teachers and administrators as agents of change, on the Single National Curriculum (SNC) policy especially on the issues of gender, religion, and the quality of the course curriculum?
- b. Do the views of teachers and administrators differ according to the type of educational institutions (Public or Private) and the institutional arrangements within which they work?
- c. What role does institutional culture (public or private) play in the adaptation to or the circumvention of the SNC policy?

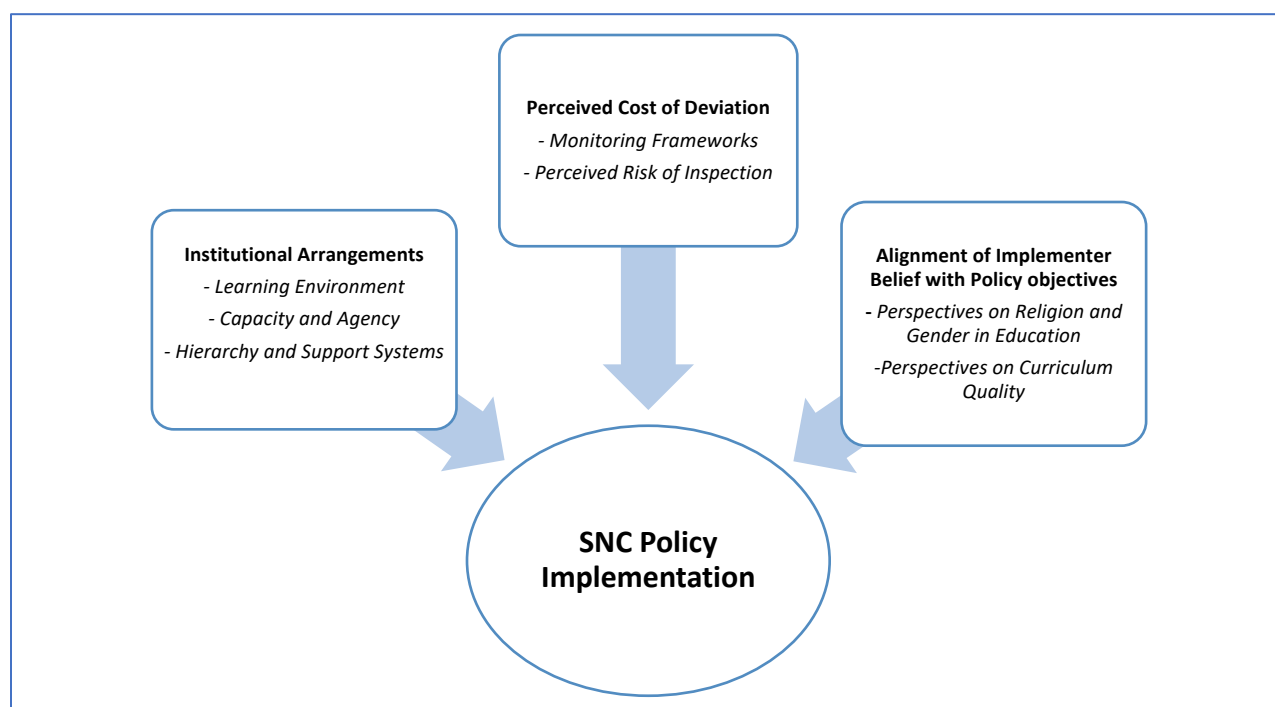
This chapter brings together the within-case analyses to address the themes that answer this study's overarching research question:

How do schools (as institutions) understand, interpret, and implement the Single National Curriculum Policy in Pakistan?

When I looked closely at the implementation strategies, the institutional structures, the monitoring and accountability frameworks and the outcomes of education at each school, three salient themes that influenced how the SNC policy was decoded, operationalized and the degree to which it was implemented were generated from the data of my case studies. The sub themes nested within the larger themes are all key factors that influence not only the strategies schools used to implement policies but also the level of deviation from the SNC policy which Bell and Johnson (2006) termed as 'policy refraction'. Policy refraction of the SNC policy was dependent on the unique combination of these factors in each school.

Figure 7

Theme Map of Findings: Factors that affect Policy Implementation of the SNC



Theme 1: Institutional Arrangements

All schools exhibited different institutional arrangements which impacted how policy was understood and implemented within them. I categorized these arrangements as the learning environment, capacity and agency, and hierarchy and support systems. Together, these aspects of each school impacted its ability and commitment to implement the policy.

Learning Environment

The three schools presented starkly different learning environments and resource portfolios. The public school was expected to implement the SNC curriculum in its entirety with its limited resources. The main issues were the new subjects of *Nazra* and *Waqfiat-e-Aama* and the confusing language policy of switching between Urdu and English for different subjects. Under the directive of the government, which retained centralized control on hiring processes, the school added the teaching burden of *Nazra* onto the shoulders of class teachers who did not feel equipped to handle it. This meant that the teachers were left with the burden of coming up with ways to teach a subject they were unfamiliar with. Without accompanying physical resources such as multimedia access for classes, they resorted to using their phones and playing *Nazra* lessons from certified instructors on the internet. Despite this, only those students who were studying it at home were able to make any progress. Nusrat, who taught grade 1 in the public school, said, “I spent so much time on it and the children still could not learn (to read) the first chapter (of the Quran).” For the other subjects, the language transitions between English and Urdu meant a lot of staff adjustment because all teachers were not proficient in English. Ghazala recalled that this created a lot of issues, “It was problematic for a lot of teachers. Some

teachers are older and cannot teach in English. So, the periods were changed. Teachers who could teach in Urdu were given classes where Urdu was the language of instruction. ”

Additionally, student background had a huge influence on the level to which the SNC policy could be executed at this school. Overall, the teachers felt that the students who attended the public school were from poor backgrounds, with mostly uneducated parents as Nazneen explained, “Children also come from different backgrounds. Some children have educated parents who can help. Others come from homes where there is not enough to eat.” This meant that for these students, English as a medium of instruction was an almost impossible task. According to Zahida’s assessment only 5 percent of students in any class would have been able to attempt an exam in English.

For the low-cost private school which had a focused selling point of teaching in English the SNC also strained resources. The school’s purpose of “education for character building” as described by Aaliya and Noveen meant that before the SNC policy came into effect, the school had been doing a limited version of *Nazra* for which they had a qariah on staff. However, one expert teacher did not mean that all the other staff members could keep up with the extensive syllabus prescribed by the SNC policy. As a result, the school reverted to teaching *Nazra* in the way it had been doing before the SNC. This was all couched in language which stressed the inability of the students to learn Arabic. As Aaliya explained, “ We started teaching the *Nazra* books, but our students were struggling so we stopped.” In addition, the school staff felt that the language change that was pushed by the SNC was detrimental to the school’s profit margin especially given that most parents sent their children to this school because it was “English-medium”. According to Shezil, “If you take out Computer Studies and English, now all the books are in Urdu which is not useful according to parents in this day and age.” The students

also struggled with the change in medium of instruction, and this was visible in their performance on exams.

The elite private school considered the SNC curriculum to be at a lower level than their own curriculum and chose to implement it as an addendum rather than a replacement. They continued to use supplemental material, teach science and social studies, and have books from private publishers. Additionally, although the staff acknowledged that online learning due to COVID meant that their students were below the expected level at the start of the school year 2021-2022, the SNC curriculum, especially in English, was still not advanced enough. Razia said, “It was still too basic pending on the standards that we have created for core competencies.”

Material resources were not an issue because they were able to pass on the cost to the parents to maintain the outcomes of education for which they were renowned. For example, to maintain the level of their English program, they opted for books made by private publishers and passed on all the cost of photocopying to the parents. Razia acknowledged that this was a financial burden on parents as “these books were very expensive.” Part of this school’s strategy of teaching the SNC as an addendum was the belief that the SNC curriculum was not a good match for schools at this level. Teachers like Raheela suggested that the government should give a pass to private schools as they were already covering the competencies the SNC introduced. The discussion on language in this school’s learning environment mirrored that of the low-cost private school and the public school with one glaring difference; it was all centered on the difficulties of teaching in Urdu.

Here, Urdu was an issue for the teachers, the parents, and the students. The teachers felt their “spelling in Urdu was not strong”, they were making *Waqfiat-e-Aama* lesson plans in “Roman Urdu,” and they felt that they “were forcibly made to revise our Urdu.” Adding to the

discomfort of the teachers was the fact that in the homes, most of the parents were speaking in English. Many of the students' parents confessed that they did not "know Urdu," "and were worried because as Sara put it, "They were unhappy about how they were going to manage, and their children were going to like it." According to Qudsia, Urdu was difficult for the students, "they struggled with writing in Urdu." In addition, the constant messaging from teachers and parents that exhibited a preference for English over Urdu meant that students expressed a dislike for Urdu. Sara put it as, "It's the way its taught and the way they are discouraged from using it. I do not know. Students, for example, do not want to borrow an Urdu story book even."

Capacity and Agency

In light of the differences in the learning environments, each school adapted its daily routines and classroom practices to accommodate the new policy whilst maintaining previous levels of learning. This was the most difficult for the public schools where class sizes were large with each teacher supporting the learning needs of around 50 students. Due to forcibly having to teach in English, teachers in this school were using bilingual teaching strategies in class because as Nusrat described it "the new syllabus, given the environment from which our students are coming, for them, it is tough." In addition to the syllabus being overloaded and lengthy, according to Ghazala the students struggled because, "English is complicated for the level of the students". Teachers in the earlier grades like Nazneen and Nusrat resorted to translating math terms such as 'ascending order' and 'descending order' into Urdu. Ghazala, who tried to teach Science to grade 4 with English as a medium of instruction, switched to teaching in Urdu because the students were "blank". Additionally, the teachers felt that following a curriculum prescribed from the top without adjusting was almost impossible and they needed to adapt to

classroom needs including language needs. They were confident that they had the skills to figure out how to implement the SNC in the classrooms. Shabana said,

You have given us the curriculum; it is now our responsibility to teach it. We know better according to the ability of our students, how we are going to teach it. It is not necessary that we follow the methods they have told us. We can do it according to our own experience keeping in mind what the students can follow.

Zahida echoed similar sentiments and felt that the graduate level of education the teachers possessed gave them the ability to adapt the curriculum to student needs, “We train ourselves. We all have a master’s degree and we figured that the vocabulary was not very difficult, and we would be able to teach it.” This adaptive capacity is an example of the necessity of mediation by teachers. As explained by Viennet and Pont, (2017) “an arbitrage may be necessary between respecting the policy logic and making it happen.”

From the perspective of agency, whilst the teachers had some agency to effect different strategies to implement the SNC in the classroom, the staff overwhelmingly felt that it had no decision-making abilities with regard to how the SNC could be implemented effectively. Staff members used phrases such as “we have no rights”, “this is a government job, so you do what you have to”, “its government policy that the school follows” and “if they (the government officials) say you have to teach, this then it means that you have to teach it”. All teachers expressed opinions which highlighted their lack of inclusion in the policy process and the invisibility of their school environment to the policymakers. Ghazala pointed out that the policy makers were “not looking at the ground realities” that the teachers faced. Despite this lack of agency, the teachers and the school did apply bottom-up pressure to deviate from the language policy of using English as a medium of instruction in science.

In the low-cost private school, the main locus of agency with regard to following the SNC rested with Aaliya and her husband Shakir. She took on the responsibility of training her teachers to be what she called, “model teachers”. Therefore, all pedagogical ideas being practiced in this school were based on her conceptions of teaching and learning, “I want my teachers to do their best, be model teachers and train model students but that is not always possible.” Aaliya was also active in creating the plan for SNC implementation in classrooms with a few chosen subject specialists. In fact, she planned out the English curriculum implementation herself during the winter holidays “I personally took charge of planning English for grades 1-5 as I have a masters in English Language and Literature.”

In the classrooms, teachers had to adapt to using bilingual translation of concepts from Urdu to English in subjects such as Science. Maheen explained that students had been trained in English and adjusting to more difficult Urdu terminology was a struggle. She said, “We have to translate Urdu terms in the Science chapters of *Waqfiat-e-Aama* in English for greater clarity.” This strategy of teaching in two languages ended up slowing the pace of instruction in the classrooms. Romessa felt that the books were good and for the first term, the teachers had skipped very little,

We really just focused on the quality of our teaching because of the syllabus change. For example, in class 2 we only covered one chapter of *Waqfiat-e-Aama*. We just wanted to make sure the students were clearly comprehending what we were teaching.

Some aspects of the curriculum could not be implemented in the low-cost private schools because some activities were not age appropriate for the classrooms. Farah gave the example from the grade 2 book, “For example, there was an exercise in which students were asked to

interview different people and collect information about their professions. This was assigned to second grade. They are too young for this activity.” The adaptive capacity of the school to a different book, medium of instruction and *Nazra*, showed that once this school had adopted the SNC, teachers used strategies they thought appropriate to maintain student learning levels in the classrooms but overall teaching and learning direction remained in the control of Aaliya with teachers not having enough avenues to impact it.

In the high-cost private school, the teachers had high confidence in their capacity to adapt the SNC to their requirements, due to their extensive teaching experience. According to Qudsia, any curriculum change came with pressure because of its novelty, “There was pressure on us. In the first year of any curriculum change, there is always pressure. If you want to teach something to the students, you need to learn how to do it first.” But despite this apprehension, teachers in the high-cost school were confident in their adaptive capacity based on their ability to access resources and the experience they had accumulated over the years in teaching primary school. Noor said, “In private schools, we are able to adapt things to our style. For the public schools, it may be different, but for us, we know what we have to do, and we do it accordingly.”

In addition, the teachers in this school were given a roadmap by the administration to teach the new lessons: In *Nazra*, the school hired a qariah (albeit under pressure) who then helped plan the review lessons with the teachers and in *Waqfiat-e-Aama*, Farheen provided teachers with strategies that allowed them to meet the students at their level of Urdu. For the whole school, *Waqfiat-e-Aama* was an extra class that was not consequential to their student learning outcomes. Since the school felt that its students were at a higher level in science and social studies (the subjects *Waqfiat-e-Aama* replaced in low-cost schools and public schools), they treated it as an avenue for students to participate and practice Urdu. This was also evident in the repeated use of

the term ‘discussion’ by the teachers in the interviews with reference to *Waqfiat-e-Aama*. This strategy bore fruit and the unanimous consensus amongst the teachers and the administration was that the students were improving their Urdu vocabulary through this subject.

From an agency perspective, the teachers felt more included in decisions that impacted the classrooms such as the selection of books and sharing of information about the SNC from the school administration. The teachers were given student learning objectives recommended by the SNC to compare with their own curriculum and also the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on which books to use. Raheela said, “I think as a school we were given options, and we chose the Cambridge books.” Further, feedback loops in the school seemed to be an established phenomenon. Nasreen said, “what we do is that we sit down together and talk about the pros and cons ... So according to that, every year we work on improving whatever is not going well or whatever is needed.” The ability to absorb additional subjects, close the COVID-related learning gap for its students and return to its pre-pandemic level of learning testifies to the breadth and depth of its capacity. Raheela stated,

You know, we did take a step down from our actual curriculum in this regard because the children were not able to comprehend the challenging text. But right now, from next year, we will be making our text a little more challenging. We will be adding more things to our supplementary resource to bring their level a little higher than it already is. To take it to the level we used to have before COVID.

The adaptive strategies of the teachers at each of the schools were a reaction to teacher-perceived learning capacities of students combined with a confidence in their own skills as teachers and the agency they felt in contributing to conversations in which the operational strategies of the SNC were determined. In the public school, teacher capacity and agency were

limited by a difficult learning environment and a lack of participatory voice. In the low-cost school capacity and agency resided with the administration with limited feedback opportunities mostly related to student performance. In the high-cost private school, it was characterized by extensive teacher experience, established feedback loops and inclusion of teachers in decision making about operationalization strategies for the SNC. These differences were factors that impacted how policy was implemented in classrooms and how satisfied the teachers felt with their performance in implementing the SNC.

Hierarchy and Support Systems

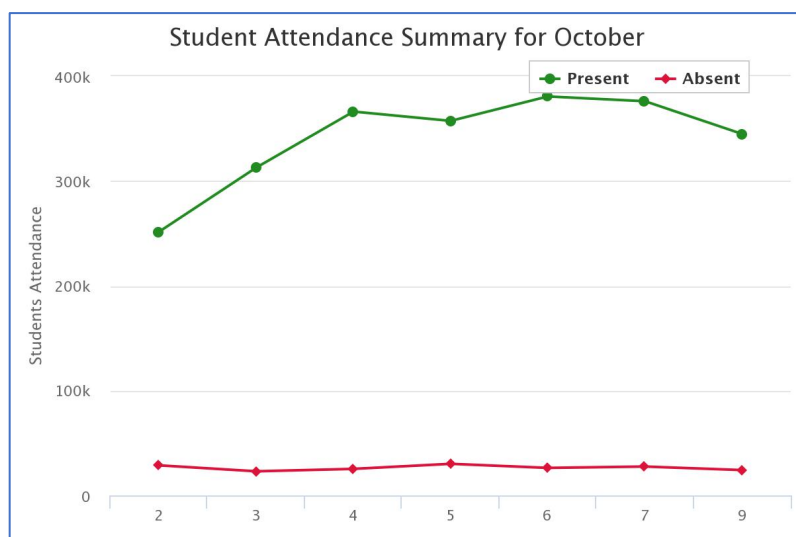
Another key element in the institutional arrangements of the schools was the structure of leadership and the support systems available to teachers as they dealt with a policy imposed from above. Hatuala et al., (2018) referred to tight coupling in educational systems as the increased “reliance on rules and procedures which then govern the behavior of teachers and pupils.” This was visible in the public school, which was under the same organizational structure as every other public school in the province. The hierarchy of the school included teachers, the principal as well as AEOs and other higher ups from the District Education Office and they were also monitored by Monitoring and Evaluation Assistants from the PMIU. As mentioned earlier, the teachers did not feel they had any agency to impact the strategies for SNC implementation and part of the reason was that all rules of behavior for teachers had been formalized from above; They could not have any input on their workload, disciplinary issues of students, or the learning assessments of their students.

In addition, the issues that were of interest to the government and the AEOs were mostly attendance, enrollment, and infrastructure related. Zahida said, “They check the cleanliness of the school, the classes etc. It is their priority to check the infrastructure of the school.” This tight

coupling with other public schools is visible in the databases of the School Education Department and the PMIU which indicate teacher and student attendance, teacher presence, boundary walls, functioning toilets etc. Figure 8 is an example of data that can be downloaded from the government school information system website.

Figure 8

An Example of Data Available from The School Information System Maintained by PMIU



Note: From *Online School Information System*, School Education Department, Government of the Punjab, 2023. (<https://sis.punjab.gov.pk/dashboard>)

It should be noted that some of these policies and procedures cater to an audience of donor institutions that tie aid for education development to acceptable figures on these metrics. An example of this was the repetition policy in the school. In international education development statistics, a repetition rate reflects the internal efficiency of an education system. The teachers at the public were expected to advance all students to the next grade regardless of their learning level as exhibited by exams which were central to how this school was organized. In the Education Statistics factsheet for Punjab produced by UNICEF (2022), the repetition rates

for primary grades were between 4 and 7 percent which reflect a trend towards passing most students to the next grades without regard to their performance in class.

Within a hierarchical system designed to focus on administrative metrics as opposed to learning outcomes of students, the support from the vertical hierarchy was minimal and the teachers were left to rely on each other with regard to pedagogical and class management issues. In response to questions on support, the teachers said they “brainstormed solutions together”, and “helped each other out” because “no one gave us any solutions for our problems.” The relationship between the principal and the teachers appeared to be cordial but any help from Uzma was mostly advisory, especially if the teacher became entangled in a government related inquiry. The relationship between School Education Department personnel and the teachers was built on an awareness of power differential. The teachers felt that the AEOs belittled them and did not provide them with any useful support especially from a pedagogical standpoint. As Nazneen put it, “ They are not very helpful.”

For the low-cost private school, the hierarchy was limited to the boundaries of the school because it was independent and family run. Therefore, Aaliya and Shakir were at the top of the hierarchy (owners and, respectively, principal and business manager) , with Noveen (as vice principal) in a supporting capacity followed by the teachers. This meant that Aaliya also decided the nature of the support system available to teachers. She changed the organizational structure of teaching in the school to implement the SNC. She said, “From grade 1-5, I created categories to make it easier for teachers to teach. For example, I attached English with social studies so one teacher was teaching both of these subjects. I also attached *Islamiyat* with Urdu as they were the same language.” She also introduced co-teaching as a support mechanism for the teachers because she felt that it reduced the burden on a single teacher.

Additionally, the principal (Aaliya) seemed to be a key resource for the teachers for issues regarding pedagogy regardless of the subject. When teachers struggled with Urdu words, they came to her for clarity and help. She also planned the training on difficult topics for the teachers. She said, “In our weekly meetings, these are the issues that come up and I plan the training around the issues raised.” The teachers also discussed their relationship with the administration in a positive vein, however, it was my observation that it was not a horizontal relationship with Aaliya assuming the guide and mentor role for the teachers. This may have been because most of the teachers I interviewed at this school were relatively inexperienced as compared to Aaliya who had a long career in education and a dominant hold on school direction and policies.

For the private high-cost school, which was part of a system of sister schools, the hierarchy was a little more devolved. The principal and head of all sister-schools was supported in the administration by vice principals school (e.g., Farheen at the school in this study). In addition, for all the subject categories, there were coordinators who supported the teachers with their pedagogical needs. Despite being the owner of the school, the principal listened to advice and counsel of her administrative staff even when it went against her own value systems with regard to the SNC. She was opposed to teaching *Nazra* in school and wanted to refuse to implement the SNC. However, due to bottom-up pressure, she agreed. According to Farheen, “We had to collectively explain that the government was very serious about this, and we had to do this.” This meant that every level had the ability to exert a bottom-up pressure on how the school operated.

From the perspective of the administration, the SNC policy was operationalized through consensus building that found a middle ground acceptable to the principal and the schools.

Farheen recalled, “In this meeting we made decisions on what we were going to name the subjects that covered our old curriculum, and how we were going to tackle *Nazra*.” This process was much more participatory than the process in the low-cost private school and it was replicated by Farheen with her own staff. Whilst Razia and the other coordinators supported pedagogy for specific subjects, Farheen took the responsibility of providing support for *Waqfiat-e-Aama*. She facilitated the transition period for the teachers who were unsure of their Urdu skills and helped them create lesson plans in Roman Urdu along with teaching strategies for a subject that was causing the apprehension. She said, “So I, you know, calmed them down, that it is alright, and we can do it.”

From the teachers’ perspective, the admin was “wonderful”, and they felt that having access to a subject coordinator made their work life easier. Additionally, the teachers were supportive of each other, and planning the classroom curriculum seemed to be a teamwork exercise. Raheela said, “Whenever we are working on something that we have not tried before, we consult each other.” The coordinators also exhibited high trust in the teachers allowing them to come up with alternate strategies to teach the curriculum as Qudsia explained, “We could tell her that we can do this topic in this other way, instead of this way and she would say ok, I support it and you can do it the way you think best.” Similarly, Razia felt that the teachers knew how to teach a new curriculum in a way that aligned with their own expectations. She said, “We had a lot of team meetings, we worked it out.”

The institutional arrangements described here showcase how the organizational hierarchies, relationships between teachers and administrators, relationships amongst the teachers, the perceived voice and agency the teachers believed they had within the organization

and the learning environment were all instrumental in influencing the operationalization of the SNC policy.

Theme 2: Perceived Cost of Deviation from Policy

The second theme that was generated from the data was the perceived cost of deviation from the policy which had two main aspects. Firstly, the monitoring encounters of the schools with the government personnel in charge of ensuring policy implementation and secondly, the risk associated with inspection by the government.

Monitoring Frameworks

The monitoring and accountability framework that was decided on by the government focused on three aspects. Firstly, *Nazra* was non-negotiable for the government checklist. This included the teaching of *Islamiyat*, the presence of a certified *Nazra* teacher for the private schools, *Nazra* lessons accounting for a total of 90 minutes per week or 3 class periods and the *Nazra* syllabi which included actual chapters from the Quran and not just select verses or prayers. The second aspect that was checked was *Waqfiat-e-Aama* which replaced science and social studies from grades 1-3 and which was to be taught in Urdu. The last thing the inspection teams focused on was the use of government approved textbooks for all subjects.

In the public school, the monitoring and accountability of teachers continued in the same vein as before the SNC because the school had no agency to alter any of the edicts of the SNC policy. The books that were prescribed to students were government issued and the zero period (first period of the day which used to be extra-curricular) was changed into the *Nazra* period. At the same time, the school was not allowed to hire a certified *qariah*, which was a requirement of

the SNC because the government exchequer could not add more teachers to its payroll. Teachers were expected to shoulder the additional burden of *Nazra* and teach the prescribed curriculum.

For the low-cost private school, which was visited thrice in one week to ensure compliance with SNC, some parts of the monitoring process were difficult. The school started implementing the SNC a term after it was introduced and was not following the SNC syllabus. Therefore, when the inspection team visited, the school was not implementing *Nazra* as required by the government or teaching *Waqfiat-e-Aama*. This was a problem as Aaliya explained,

I do have to say that principals are honorable people in society and when the judges came to inspect the SNC implementation of *Nazra*, the fact that a principal had to ask for leniency due to the short time to implement the change is not a good thing. Over there, I was a bit upset. But when they asked why you used a different syllabus, I explained that you (the government) are not clear. We were informed about *Nazra*, not about a specific syllabus.

The school figured out its *Nazra* strategy within the week and switched to the government approved books and syllabi the following term. It also highlighted the *Nazra* period in its timetable for future inspections to satisfy government personnel.

For the high-cost private school, the monitoring and accountability procedures meant filling multiple forms, meeting the ever-changing *Nazra* requirements, adjusting the timetables with the appropriate allocation for *Nazra* and hiring a *qariah* for the school which did not even teach *Islamiyat* before the SNC. Farheen's meeting with the various government officials went well because this school had been proactive in following the SNC policy to the extent that it satisfied government requirements. They had made space for *Nazra* and were teaching *Waqfiat-e-Aama* and whatever the school heard through the grapevine of the elite private schools, it

applied before it was inspected the first time. For example, the school found out that you could not make photocopied booklets of worksheets for students (a standard practice in private schools) because, “If it is bound, and it is in a book form then it also has to be approved from PCTB... the whole year, we gave students loose worksheets. Usually, we would have worksheet booklet made for the whole term.”

Perceived Risk of Inspection

Risk of being inspected was an important element in the decision-making of the institutions with regard to the SNC implementation. Across the education sector, the government had intentionally created the aura of surveillance and monitoring akin to the effect of the panopticon as described by Foucault (1975/2008),

Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So, to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary.... in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.

A key element of this monitoring structure was the lack of clear guidelines and instructions and the fear of unknown consequences. In addition, all schools reported that government inspections happened on short notice. For the public school, where the teachers would bear the brunt of government sanction, the risk of deviation was considered too high by the class teachers who complied with all government demands. Zahida explained it as pressure from additional tasks of the SNC,

We also have pressure on us from the government, but that pressure is different. Since the introduction of the SNC, there are a thousand additional burdens, there are apps they made us download and instructions on these are all the additional things you must do.

In my conversation with the teachers, Toba Tek Singh, where the district education authorities were based for Kamalia, was a source of concern and fear. Personnel from the district conducted surprise inspections of the schools, classrooms, and teachers. Aleena reported that “If we break the rules we have to go to Toba.” When I asked if she or anyone she knew had gone to Toba, she responded in the negative. But she had heard rumors of what happened if you went to Toba, “They have created this bogeyman, and it is better to not to find out what happens in Toba.” Under the assumption of getting penalized if found deviating from the policy in any regard and without any support or help from the administration, the teachers did not dare deviate from the policy.

In the private schools, the cost of deviation from the policy directly rested on the schools more than on the teachers. In the low-cost school, Aaliya admitted that she had taken the SNC policy lightly in the beginning and the issues arose when without much notice, the school was visited by an inspection team who found them in non-compliance. Within that same week, there were three visits before the authorities were satisfied that the school was complying with the policy. Even though Aaliya decided to comply and switched over to the SNC books and curriculum, she maintained that the only reason the government had visited the school was because it was on the main road of the city which made it visible to the inspection teams. In her words, “the inspection was a formality” and the team just checked whether students had the right books and if *Nazra* was implemented for the correct time period. Therefore, she perceived her risk of future inspections as low.

The thing is, they made the policy so strict that you could not go against it no matter what level of private school you look at. The publishers could not publish anything that was not compliant, and schools risked closure, so the government essentially did not need any more checks after the initial ones they carried out. Another thing is the political anarchy in this country. They might have tried to keep a check and balance, but the political situation has them distracted.

As a result of this assessment, she felt it was worth it to deviate from the *Nazra* syllabus because her teachers and students were struggling with it.

For the high-cost private school, the calculus was different. Elite schools were hyper conscious of the political capital the government had invested in the SNC policy. Given that the state had justified the need for this policy on the premises of promoting equity in the different types of schools, ensuring that the private schools at least conformed to the religious and nationalistic aspects of the policy, such as *Waqfiat-e-Aama* and the compulsory teaching of *Islamiyat*, was paramount. When they realized how serious the government was about implementing the new curriculum, they made a conscious decision to comply with its requirements because they felt that the policy was targeted at bringing the elite private schools in line with the government's religious and nationalistic agenda. As Farheen put it "This is only for us. I think it is this (socioeconomic) class that was the target".

Further, the administration was aware of the reputation of the institute as one of the best in the city along with its secular stance on religion made the risk of inspection higher. In part, the school complied because there were no clear guidelines or instructions for them to follow. Farheen used phrases such as, "I do not know what they wanted", information was "trickling in" and "they could have fined the school, sealed it, or shut it down. They could have done

anything.” These encapsulate that the private school perceived that if it was not found in compliance with the government’s demands it would risk closure which would have a massive impact on the business.

The cost of deviation from the policy varied across the schools. In the government schools, the cost of not following the government edicts was an individualized burden on the teachers whereas the cost for the private schools rested with the institutions in the form of threats from the government of fines, revocation of licenses and the sealing of schools. As a result, whilst the government was unable to equalize the schools in terms of resources and learning environments, it did manage through coercive isomorphism, the inclusion of a certain amount of religion in all schools through *Nazra* and a return to teaching government prescribed social studies and history in *Waqfiat-e-Aama*. The use of Urdu as the medium of instruction for *Waqfiat-e-Aama* was a further throwback to the one nation, one language policies of old.

Theme 3: Alignment of Implementer Beliefs with Policy Edicts

The chances that a policy gets effectively implemented increase significantly when service providers, teachers, principals, and parents are on board with the reform as opposed to protesting it (Viennet & Pont, 2017). In all three schools, administrators and teachers exhibited a range of beliefs that either aligned with or disagreed with the underlying precepts of the SNC policy. Since all schools were implementing the SNC policy, these beliefs governed how closely they felt this degree of implementation in classrooms needed to be, or if they needed to apply a corrective pressure to maintain their desired student outcomes or purposes of education.

Alignment of Beliefs on Gender and Religion

As shown in the within-case analyses, implementer beliefs on gender and religion were intertwined to a great extent which is why I am choosing to discuss them together. In a country such as Pakistan which is built on the idea of religious unity of Muslims vis-à-vis their difference with Hindus, religion is a sensitive topic. Additionally, in Pakistani society, religion plays a regulatory role in defining gender; it delineates gender roles and perceptions of the equality of men and women which are formalized through the laws of marriage, inheritance, and testimony etc. These are manifested in society as the leeway for men to have multiple wives, women's inheritance being half of men's and the value of a woman's testimony being considered half of a man's in civil matters such as finance. Crimes such as rape, until 2006 were clubbed together with adultery and extra-marital affairs (Khan & Gul, 2017) . Here the onus was on women to prove rape and if she was unable to do so risk being sentenced for adultery (Imran, 2005). This snapshot is a reminder of the broader social context in which the interviewees grew up or worked and the messaging that was being promulgated around women in the society about their roles, behaviors, and position relative to men.

In response to questions on religion, teachers across schools expressed a spectrum of responses. Firstly, they were against teaching religion in school because they ended up shouldering the responsibility of teaching *Nazra*. This was problematic because most of them did not feel they were trained to teach it, personal views on religion meant that teaching it incorrectly was a sin, reading the Quran as they had done it was a cultural practice laden with rituals such as ablution, not putting the Quran on the floor and not wearing shoes whilst reciting it. For example, Ghazala from the public school felt that parents needed to teach *Nazra* at home because, "The etiquette of teaching *Nazra* including ablution and cleanliness is not possible in

school. The concept of treating our religious books with deference is also something that has finished.”

Similarly in the low-cost private school, the teachers did not want students to keep the Quran in their bags because the bags were kept on the floor. Aaliya explained, “When they were bringing Quranic verses as part of an Arabic book it was not an issue. But a *sipara* (chapter of the Quran) is different and cannot be put into the bag.” The school ended up building shelves for the Quran in the classrooms. In the high-cost private school, the teachers kept the Quran and the *Islamiyat* books in school because the children were too young to handle them, “The students kept the books in the bag and the bags were kept on the floor and that is not ok. So, we had to take their books and keep them in school. ”

Some teachers were in favor of teaching religion and *Nazra* in school because religion was a part of education and taught the way of a good life. For these teachers, *Nazra* was a good addition to the curriculum. In the public school, Shabana and Nazneen both favored the subject of *Nazra*. They would have preferred it if the school hired professional teachers for it but to them, removing it from the curriculum was unacceptable. Shabana said, “It is very sensitive, but we must have it as part of the curriculum.” She also added that it could no longer be taught to students who had graduated but it would be good for current students, “ For the student batches that have graduated, we cannot teach them. But we can introduce these concepts to our current students, these good values. We need to tell them good things though, we do not want to radicalize them.” This statement highlights how a teacher’s subjective lens bears on the teaching. Nazneen had a similar opinion, “I like the *Nazra* period, but they need to hire professionals to teach it.”

In the low-cost private school, Farah was vocal about her support for *Nazra* without any caveats, “I think this is a very good thing that the government has done. As Muslims, we should be able to read and understand the Quran.” Whilst other teachers like Shezil felt that most people in Pakistan were going to learn the Quran anyway so it might as well be taught as a (Arabic) language throughout K-12. For the high-cost school, Raheela and Noor were both firmly in favor of the introduction of *Islamiyat* and *Nazra*. Noor felt that even if given the opportunity to not follow the SNC, the school should keep it, “I think they should keep it. I mean, *Islamiyat* for example. Our children never had *Islamiyat* books”. For Raheela, whose son had started taking more interest in religion since the introduction of *Nazra* it was a positive addition to schools.

Another response to religion in schooling was that the new government syllabus was too extensive but some inclusion of religion in school was necessary for a good education. Teachers wanted students to learn smaller verses and prayers but not whole chapters from the Quran. In the public school, Ghazala felt that the new level of religious instruction in the SNC was too much, “We can teach prayers (*duas*) and surahs but whole chapters are too much” . In the low-cost private school, Aaliya who had already integrated *Nazra* into the curriculum, religious instruction of students was a joint responsibility of the teachers and parents, “ No. It is the parents’ responsibility and we as a school and teachers can put our share in this and support this.” As the main decision-maker in the school, she reduced the *Nazra* curriculum back to the pre-SNC days, partly because she was convinced that it was not entirely her responsibility.

In the elite private school, Qudsia who taught *Islamiyat* felt that there was too much religion. She wanted to teach things that were practical and of use like the verses used in daily prayers as opposed to whole sections of the Quran. She was also of the opinion that it was not

possible for the students to learn the Quran in school, “Look, *Nazra* does help. But children will not learn how to read the Quran by just doing it in school. It will need to be reinforced at home.” A stronger but rarer version of this response was from teachers across the three schools who felt that *Nazra* was not the teacher’s responsibility. For Sara, everybody was learning *Nazra* at home so repeating it in school was unnecessary, “Everybody is learning *Nazra* at home. I am sorry. Do they need it in schools? No, they do not.” Aleena from the public school was similarly clear in her response, “It is not my responsibility”.

Teacher and administrator views on gender followed a similar spectrum that was entangled in personal religious perspective. Some of the interviewees did not want to discuss gender representation in the SNC at all because they felt that ‘some’ people were trying to confuse children with ideas around gender. Questions as simple as “What is your opinion on the way gender is shown in SNC books?” would either draw silence or hedged replies. Asking about personal experiences as a woman in Pakistan seemed to help the interviewees open up. The high-cost school, whose sister schools were some of the best private schools for girls in the country, was liberal in its views on gender as well. Part of the reason they had not opted for PCTB English books was that they thought the visuals of girls in hijabs, and the reinforcement of Pakistani stereotypes of gender roles, were giving implicit messages of inequality in men and women to children. For the books that were compulsory, the teachers made a conscious effort to correct patriarchal stereotypes such as family trees that only included the paternal relatives. This was done at the direction of Farheen as Nasreen put it, “She (Farheen) said you have to be very careful with these things as they may go home and discuss it with the parents. You read it but you have to balance things out yourself.”

Gender and religion's close connection in the Pakistani mindset can be exemplified by the following exchange with Qudsia who brought up that one of the reasons why introducing the reading of the Quran in school was problematic was because girls and women who are menstruating cannot recite the Quran or say their daily prayers as they are considered impure,

You are expecting children to finish the entire Quran by grade 5. That is such a difficult task. How will it happen? Especially with girls? How will girls do it? When they hit puberty, they cannot read it during their period. And it will make them so conscious. If they do not read the Quran, they will be worried about how other people will know that they are on their period.

To Qudsia, this showed the blindness of the policymakers to half of the student body, "We do not only have boys in school we also have girls. So, they need to account for cultural practices that affect girls. And if they cannot, they need to remove such things. All students should learn religion and reading of the Quran at home." This was an effect of the policy that had not crossed my mind, but I could see parents allowing girls absences from school based on this belief system of menstruating girls not being allowed to touch or recite the Quran.

The educators at both the schools in Kamalia were more conservative on gender than the school in Lahore. On the question on gender and its inclusion in the SNC, the teachers from here did not feel that illustrations were regressive. In the focus group with the public school, Zahida explained that the pictures were not problematic because, "I mean we are Muslims, wearing a *dupatta* is a reality". For Ghazala, these were all "talk show topics". When asked specific questions about gender representation in the books, they agreed that no space was made for women role models and that generally, outside of a few illustrations which showed a working woman, most of the representation of women conformed to stereotypes. In the low-cost private

school, the responses to questions on gender were similar. As for the little girls dressed conservatively in hijabs, the school had deliberately chosen publishers that prided themselves on their focus on moral Islamic values which included the concept of modest dressing for women. In response to questions on whether the SNC curriculum needed more female role models and less stereotypical representation, the answer was always affirmative. However, for some of the more religious teachers, female role models could be found within Islam. For example, Romessa said, “Prophet Muhammad’s first wife was a trader and a businesswoman. So, we do have examples and in this time period as well, we appreciate our students who talk about having ambition.”

The idea of limits for girls’ behavior set by religion was something that came up with different teachers in all three schools. In the public school, Ghazala who was a strong proponent of encouraging girls to be independent and part of the workforce, this growth needed to be within limits. Zahida echoed similar sentiments, “If girls are coming forward, they need to do that within their limits”. For Fizza, these limits were already in place for women, “We create limits for the girls ourselves. One of the biggest issues is that they do not let girls go out of the city for education or jobs. The parents are very strict with girls.” For Raheela who wanted her daughter to have equal opportunities to her son it was still imperative that she understand the limits of her gender, “I want them to understand what is right and what is wrong. What her boundaries are. What are the things she is ethically bound to do and what are the things that are way off limits”.

Personal beliefs on gender and religion influenced how the aspects of the curriculum on gender and religion were taught in class. The teachers who supported the inclusion of *Nazra* in the curriculum, despite lack of training, tried their best to implement it well through a sense of personal responsibility. For example, they looked up resources online such as Arabic phonetic

poems and recitations to teach in their class. Similarly, those who viewed the illustrations and patriarchal norms in the *Waqfiat-e-Aama* books to be problematic, tried to correct the imbalances at least verbally causing some disruption in the messaging the children received from the books.

Perspectives on Curriculum Quality

In all schools, the teachers shared different assessments of the quality of the SNC course curriculum based on several aspects, including syllabus length, vocabulary usage, exercises and activities at the end of the chapters, language of instruction, appropriateness for grade level, quality of the physical books and whether these books were good resources to achieve their desired student outcomes. Interestingly, the opinions on the SNC quality were made on the basis of two considerations – first was the exam track (local matriculation system or International Board Exams) and second was in reference to the curriculum they had been teaching before the SNC was introduced.

The public-school educators felt that whilst the content that was covered in the books was similar to the content they had already been teaching, the books and syllabus were good. The merging of social studies and science into *Waqfiat-e-Aama* reduced the burden on the teachers as they now had to teach one subject instead of two. Additionally, the books contained everything that was supposed to be covered for the exams, so the teachers did not have to teach anything from outside of the books. As Zahida summarized it, “This syllabus is appropriate in terms of length and can be covered easily. This syllabus matches the syllabus of the private publishers (*Afaq Publishers*), which supply books to the private schools here.” For Shabana, the books were an improvement on the previous curriculum, “The students like the books. They are more colorful.” Aleena added, “The lessons are short and not lengthy. They are good and informative. They have new words and vocabulary and they have done a good job.” However, the negatives

of the new curriculum almost balanced out the positives and the end result was a stagnation of student learning. The most prominent of these issues was English, both as a subject and a medium of instruction, and the large class sizes. Teachers felt that the student population they taught came from poor backgrounds and for them English was not a language they interacted with outside of school. As a result, the students struggled with it, and in subjects like, science which used to be taught in Urdu, student learning was reduced. As Zahida put it, “But if I take a sentence in English such as ‘this is a garden’, I have to spell out each word. From that perspective, it takes time.”

For the low-cost private school, the SNC was a good curriculum. It changed their pattern of teaching because the teachers perceived the activities in it as creative and interesting for the students. According to Aaliya, “The SNC pattern is interesting because it has included activities, emphasizing creative writing and creativity in assignments.” However, some of the activities were difficult to do with the children because there was not enough support at home and the children were too young to manage without the help of adults. When asked if they would continue with the program if given the opportunity to return to their previous curriculum, Aaliya’s response boiled it down to the language issue which was her main point of contention. The school was founded on the idea of providing an education in English, which was more prestigious than an education in Urdu, and therefore Aaliya felt that if given the option, she would keep the curriculum only if they were allowed to teach *Waqfiat-e-Aama* in English, “The change in this curriculum is good and I would keep to this but I would change the book of *Waqfiat-e-Aama*. Otherwise, it’s difficult to accept positive change”.

For the high-cost private school, the staff viewed their own curriculum as superior to the SNC curriculum; they felt that they had an extensive, targeted learning program that was focused

on creating skill-based competencies in students such as writing and reading, which were necessary for them to be successful in the foreign board exam tracks of O and A levels. As they were comparing the SNC to their curriculum, they found it deficient as a standalone, even though there was some overlap in the SLOs and the books. As a result, the SNC was incorporated as an addendum in the current curriculum to satisfy the government, but the school continued to teach its pre-SNC curriculum. When discussing the SNC curriculum and its books, the staff from this school used words such as “basic”, “below our level”, “not meeting our targets or benchmarks”, and “so simple” to describe them. In addition, the educators at this school felt that the government books they had to use for *Waqfiat-e-Aama* were of low quality. As Sara put it, “the text and the book were not interesting.” Raheela summed it up as: “If we consider our children moving towards giving O-levels, the SNC books will not be enough. We have to have our own supplementary resources and we have to implement more strategies to make sure they are able to take these exams.”

An interesting tangent that had some bearing on this theme was the perceptions held by the teachers and administration on which type of school delivered quality education and the answer was private schools, with the lowest quality education being delivered by public schools. In all three schools, all members of the staff preferred to send their children to private schools and all teachers expressed views that the SNC would be taught better in private schools. This was because private schools had smaller class sizes, less restrictions and a clear capitalist transaction structure between parents, the school, and the teachers; the parents paid the school for the service of a good education and in a competitive market, they would withdraw their child if the private school was unable to provide this. For example, Ghazala stated, “People who send their children to private school, they keep a check and balance on what their children are

learning.” Additionally, a private school directly paid the teachers; therefore, it was able to ensure that they did their work, unlike public schools where teacher conscientiousness determined if teachers were doing their work. As Zahida explained, “If there are 10 teachers and 3 are doing their job and the rest are not, we cannot say these people are not working. If the government wants to change things, they need to bring in good people.”

Similar sentiments prevailed in the low-cost private school about the quality of education in the public schools and it was not an issue of the curriculum. According to Farah “They need to have more oversight. Yesterday a government schoolteacher came here for the admission of her child. She was here for 2 hours during the school day. She said it was fine.” Farheen, when reviewing the SNC student learning outcomes to check for overlap, questioned how the public schools were to teach a curriculum for which they had no resources or adequately trained teachers,

I sat there and thought, alright, we do half of these things anyway but how are they going to implement this in government schools which are not equipped for this. You do not have teachers trained for this and you do not have the infrastructure. It’s a simple thing, like making corners in the classrooms in early years (for reading, etc.). But when you do not have classrooms, where are you going to make these corners?

Further, the teachers at the high-cost private school felt that this curriculum whilst not appropriate for them was good for the public schools who lacked “basics”. Such perceptions were time and again repeated in the different interviews; teachers and administrators in private as well as public schools, felt that a curriculum was unlikely to bridge these quality divides.

According to Ghazala: “The truth is it is impossible to increase the standard of education from

here in public schools, so they have decided that it is better to increase the level a little bit in public school and then bring down the standards of the private schools.”

Conclusion

Viennet and Pont (2017) state that there is “no one-size-fits-all model’ for implementing education policy. One must thus pay attention to the specificity of the policy, stakeholders, and local context to analyze or make recommendations about the process.” The alignment of belief systems, the institutional arrangements of schools and perceived costs of deviation all influenced how closely the SNC policy was implemented in letter and spirit. In addition, education professionals were well aware of the difference between public and private schools and the overwhelming consensus was that private schools provided a better education than public schools. As a result, there was little buy in to the underlying idea of the policy that the curriculum would equalize education everywhere. This is evidenced by the fact that teachers across all schools preferred their own children to go to private school regardless of whether the curriculum was the same.

For the public schools, the institutional arrangements and lack of agency meant that bottom-up adjustments were limited to individual teachers and the strategies they employed in the classroom to ensure that students were learning something. Teachers liked the new curriculum because the students liked it, but the confusion created by the language switches between English and Urdu was problematic.

For the low-cost school, the calculus was similar. They liked the curriculum but the insistence of the government to provide extensive *Nazra* lessons in addition to the requirement that Urdu be used as a language of instruction hurt their selling point which was English-medium education. Overtime, they expected to not adhere to this curriculum once it was rolled back. For

the high-cost school, the SNC curriculum was not enough on its own for the student outcomes they wanted to achieve, so they complied with it as an addendum due to fear of punitive sanctions from the government monitoring apparatus. But they maintained everything their curriculum had before the SNC, science, social studies, extensive English curriculum, and pedagogical styles.

These different operational strategies indicate the mobilization of second-order institutional values which “deal with consequences, institutions and the methods through which objectives or goals are achieved by political bureaucracies” (Kogan, 2018/1975) for policy interpretation. In light of this mediation by schools and the personnel it employs, the SNC policy affected each school differently. What is certain is that due to the fear of government reprisal, most schools did implement a version of it to satisfy the authorities.

Chapter 9: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This dissertation research was undertaken to understand the implementation process of large-scale policies in diverse education institutions by studying the implementation of the Single National Curriculum Policy in Pakistan which was introduced in the academic year 2021-2022. As a Pakistani and as an education professional, I felt that I had a vested interest in the SNC policy prescription which is going to have a significant impact on our society and economy. Given my insider knowledge of our education landscape as a former pupil, teacher, and policy analyst from the province of Punjab where this study was conducted, my aim was to understand how a policy as elaborate as the SNC would translate into actions at the school level.

To explore the implementation process, I conducted a multiple case study in three different schools differentiated by cost: a public school, a low-cost private school, and a high-cost private school in two cities of Punjab. I did this to examine the policy implementation process in different institutions to see if the implementation strategies of the SNC and the outcomes of the SNC differed as well. The overarching research question of the study was,

- How did schools (as institutions) understand, interpret, and implement the Single National Curriculum Policy in Pakistan?

This chapter presents a discussion on the findings and how they add to the existing body of literature that examines education policy implementation. Additionally, I also explain the limitations of this study. This chapter also provides suggestions of future directions of research for this study.

The Complexity of Implementing Policy in Diverse Education Systems

The findings of the cross-case analysis presented in Chapter 8 highlight how top-down policy such as the SNC was not implemented in a uniform manner. According to the Ministry of Federal Education and Training (n.d.) the SNC was adopted toward creating, “One system of Education for all, in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction and a common platform of assessment so that all children have a fair and equal opportunity to receive high quality education.” .” However, the three schools in the study understood the policy in light of several factors such as the learning environment, student population and institutional values. In light of these mediating factors, the implementation strategies differed considerably across the institutions. Through the mobilization of their resources and networks, schools adjusted to the policy to the extent that it would satisfy the government but without the provision of extra resources to the schools. As of the time of data collection in May and June 2022, it appeared that the implementation of the SNC had not made much of an impact toward equalizing the quality of education across public and private schools and between private schools of differential costs. Thus, the ‘education apartheid’, which very much exists in Pakistan, continues on unabated.

For Viennet and Pont (2017), policy implementation as a process has three main characteristics: it is *purposeful*, *multidirectional* and *contextual*. All three of these elements were found in this research. The SNC policy’s intended purpose was to equalize the quality of education across different sectors in Punjab, without providing additional resources for the schools where education quality was considered to be substandard. The policy process was multidirectional in that various actors influenced it at different points forcing a change in the original policy. For example, teachers adopted strategies for classrooms that ran counter to SNC directives such as teaching in Urdu as opposed to English, the private publishers sued the

government to overturn the ban on schools banning them from using non-government books, and the administration made decisions about how much emphasis the SNC required in schools. The context for each school that has been described in great detail in the within-case analyses (chapter 5-7) demonstrate how despite the introduction of a singular curriculum all schools remained disparate in their students' socioeconomic classes, cultural outlooks, and student outcomes. Thus, the multiplicity of factors at work in each institution led to dissimilar results despite being forced towards teaching the same subjects.

Further, the SNC policy was the first time the government had decided to intervene in the curricula of the private sector. As a result, there was a degree of confusion in the private institutions about the extent to which they were expected to comply, where they had some leeway and whether the government had the will to follow through on such sweeping change. However, once the resolve of the government became clear, the process of interpretation and integration of the policy in the school's vision commenced. According to Ball et al., (2011) the principle of policy integration is the method through which the policy is assimilated into the ongoing vision of the school in some way. All schools had different visions for which they taught and the SNC curriculum was judged in accordance with these. For the public school, its vision was essentially the vision of the government and with little agency or recourse to alternative strategies of policy integration, the policy actors in this school implemented the policy as asked without any institutional level adjustments. Both the private schools had elaborate narratives for their purpose of education, the policy integration process was much more iterative to find the right mix of satisfying government criteria and maintaining the school's educational vision. At all times, they only wanted to commit to complying with the SNC policy to the extent that they had to.

For the low-cost private school, the narrative or vision was centered on its “English-medium” education with all of its underlying implicit meanings of quality, modernization, future success and prestige and the idea of “education for character building” that stemmed from the personal belief system of the owner. This narrative sold well in the small and conservative city of Kamalia because it promised the best of both worlds; an education that inculcated Islamic moral values as well as providing the opportunities of English education. This had garnered the school enough of a reputation to run as a profitable business. The SNC policy was difficult to integrate into this vision because it ran counter to its most fundamental aspect of the “English-medium” education. As a result, the school was clear that implementing this policy happened because of the fear of government reprisals as opposed to an organic adoption of the new curriculum based on its merits. Coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) coupled with a consequence-laden monitoring framework equalized what schools taught as far as the religious and nationalistic precepts of the policy went, but it could not go further.

In the high-cost school, the vision of education was the exposure of children to ideas and opportunities with the freedom to explore and question issues in a mostly secular environment. The SNC policy ran counter to this narrative with its focus on *Islamiyat* and *Nazra* and the teaching of *Waqfiat-e-Aama* in Urdu. For this school, integrating the SNC without losing its fundamental narrative was only possible by including it as a supplement to its main curriculum. On its own, the SNC was not advanced enough to replace the school’s own curriculum. The benefits reaped from *Waqfiat-e-Aama* in the form of better performance of students in Urdu, were completely unexpected. The school felt that the institutional values that it had compromised on such as teaching *Islamiyat* was something that would be difficult to reverse given the pervasiveness of religion within the society. This exemplifies that whilst government policies

can create greater *coercive isomorphism* in schools, this change is surface level; the fundamental inequities in the quality of education remain steadfast. All schools in Punjab now teach *Nazra* and *Waqfiat-e-Aama* but the gap in the learning outcomes of their students is untouched.

For Bell and Stevenson (2006), education policy implementation is not a straightforward act of implementing a government directive, rather, it is an interlinked web of processes through which people and institutions interpret, translate, and reconstruct the policy to align with their own goals. The findings of the within-case and cross-case analyses exemplify this and further indicate that because institutions, contexts, teachers and learning environments mediate policy implementation, policy refraction is inevitable. This study encapsulates the complexity of the policy implementation process as a calculus of different factors which mediate policy refraction. There is no doubt that the goal of wanting an equal education for all in terms of quality is a noble one, however, it lacks nuance which is necessary for policy implementation to be effective and yield desired end results. As discussed in Chapter 3, policy prescriptions are value-laden, political in nature and empower some groups at the expense of others. Mitigating the degree of this refraction should be one the goals of policies that are designed under the pretext of promoting quality of education across the board in fragmented education systems.

One of the key reasons that policy refracts is because there is a lack of trust between the policy actors and policy makers which according to Cerna (2014) is “an important variable in policymaking across a variety of policy areas, including education”. For Cheema (2013), inclusive governance as exhibited in countries with strong democratic norms and values, builds trust in politicians, political institutions, and public officials. This is largely absent in Pakistan, where democracy is consistently undermined by military interventions in the form of coups, election interference and a lack of law and order. Within this background, the SNC policy was

received with little conviction on the part of the schools that its grand aim of one education system for everyone would be achieved. On the part of the government, there was very little effort to engage with stakeholders in an open and transparent manner, which according to Viennet and Pont (2017) is a fundamental cornerstone of effective policy implementation. Thus, when trying to understand how policy is perceived by institutions research needs to focus on understanding two aspects on which this trust is built. Firstly, it needs to explore how education policies have morphed over the years in a given nation or locale and secondly, it should pay attention to how the policy implementers experienced these policies as stakeholders in capacities such as students, parents, teachers, administrators etc. These experiences have a profound impact on how these aspects influence the values and beliefs of the actors and impact the implementation of policy.

Additionally, not all people who enact policy hold equal positions in the arena of interpretation of policy, some have more influence, voice, and agency than others. Ball et al., (2011) describe policy actors such as teachers and administrations as “engaged, coping with the meaningful and the meaningless, often self-mobilized around patterns of focus and neglect and torn between discomfort and pragmatism, but most are also very firmly embedded in the prevailing policies discourses.” As these actors are not just passive recipients of policies, they impact implementation in light of their own alignment with desired policy outcomes. The motivations of the interpreters and the implementers range from moral and cultural to purely pragmatic and goal oriented.

The variation shown in the processes of understanding the policy and creating strategies for its implementation in classrooms shows that large-scale policy prescriptions such as unified curriculums are not implemented uniformly. Rather, the policy actors who are tasked with its

implementation bear influence on how closely it is implemented as intended by the policymakers. Given the complexities of the implementation process, especially in countries like Pakistan that are resource constrained, winning the support of the policy actors to achieve intended outcomes is necessary. This study is an example of examining policy implementation not through an evaluative lens, but through a lens that seeks to discover the factors that affect implementation, so more targeted research can be done on the conditions under which a policy is likely to work. It adds to the body of policy implementation studies and policy analysis as an example of the immediate aftermath of policy enactment. It also opens up a myriad of avenues of further research that can bolster the robustness of this field.

Limitations

As with all qualitative case studies, this study is limited in generalizability because the disparity in institutional contexts within the same cost group is large. One of the fundamental aspects of the analysis conducted herewith was the impact of different contexts on policy implementation as a process. This means that the schools, whilst of different types, were not representative of their category. For example, there are multiple elite private schools that are organized differently to the one described here. Similarly, a large number of low-cost private schools are run as franchises or businesses that get all policy direction from head offices in the larger cities. Similarly, not all public schools located in different contexts are the same. Further, the analyses in this study were done using a reflexive thematic analysis technique that centers researcher perceptions and does not try to eliminate researcher bias. All the conclusions and findings are constructed through my subjective lens, which negates the existence of some universal truth about the policy implementation process.

Additionally, this study was conducted in the post-COVID era, two years after the pandemic lockdowns. My decision to travel to the research site to conduct in-person research rested on several factors including documenting resource disparity, looking at school environment and technology issues such as the inability to conduct interviews via zoom with the teachers in Kamalia. Due to work commitments with my Graduate Assistantship, the time for this research was limited to the last 3 weeks of the academic school year 2021-2022 in Pakistan. In this time period, I conducted 22 interviews, travelled between the cities of Kamalia and Lahore. Some interviews were less informative than others due to a lack of adequate time to build a rapport with the participants. However, others were rich with details and very informative for my research questions.

The last limitation that should be acknowledged is the loss of some meaning in translation. This study was, in essence, bilingual as described in Chapter 4. Most of the research participants code switched frequently between English and Urdu and the translation had to accommodate this. Thus, the translations are done through my understanding of what was being said. I tried to be as thorough as possible in this endeavor and I have listened to the audio tapes multiple times during the translation process however, some nuance may still be lost in trying to adjust the translations for readability.

Future Research

Honig (2006) describes the current state of policy implementation studies as having moved into the era where the focus is on how and why the interaction of people, places and policies affect implementation in certain ways. This multi-case study provides valuable insight into the policy implementation process across different institutional contexts which can be useful

for policymakers and the researchers examining the conditions in which policy is effective. In light of this study's findings, I propose four areas of future research.

Firstly, this research looked at implementation process at the school level. An adjacent area of research, especially within Pakistan would be, studying the mechanisms of policy implementation in government departments or other non-school stakeholders such as the district offices of the School Education Department, the offices of PCTB which made the SNC books and the private publishers which supply books to the private schools. In the case studies and interviews, these were the government nodes that interacted with schools in the policy implementation process, and this is where the monitoring framework for policy implementation was housed.

Another key area of research would be exploring the implementation of policy in rural public and private schools that are even less resourced than the small city schools. An additional line of inquiry can be studies that center on the extent the mechanisms through which the SNC was adopted or disregarded by the madrassah schools. Research in this vein will add more nuance to the conditions of schools that are expected to implement policy designed centrally in urban centers. Similarly, research on small low-cost private schools in urban centers such as Lahore will also provide valuable insight to the complexities of policy implementation. Such research can further enrich the literature on Pakistani education policy and provide reference points to other studies being conducted in similar contexts.

Studying policy implementation in a global comparative context is one of the key areas where future research can yield a breadth of knowledge for policy implementation studies. Such studies will also be able to shed light on conditions that supported the implementation process across different national contexts. Vertical case studies (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006) that examine

the multiple policy edicts to which institutions are responding can also be an avenue that can be explored. Comparisons of the policy implementation processes between countries on the basis of trust in governance can be very informative for policymakers as they grapple with building the support needed to implement policies.

Conclusion

Policy implementation, like policy creation, does not happen in a value vacuum. Policy implementation literature tends to center on the evaluation of policy enactment and tries to determine whether a policy was implemented as it was created and if it yielded desired results. In light of the frameworks by Bell & Johnson (2006) and Viennet and Pont (2017) this research explores the policy implementation equations in different institutional contexts. The findings indicate that the same policy is received differently by different actors and even if implemented in the same way would yield different results. Given the uncertainty of policy outcomes, the appropriate questions to ask would not be whether a uniform curriculum can plaster the deep divides in Pakistan but, rather what support or conditions need to be created for the schools that are ‘substandard’ to make them equivalent to the institutions that provide education to the affluent.

Appendix A

Questionnaire - Teachers

The research will investigate the perspectives of teachers and administrators on the implementation of the Single National Curriculum in Pakistan in the academic year 2021-2022.

Participant ID: _____ (please match to signed consent form)

Participant Name: _____

Interview location: _____

General Demographics of Participant

1.	Note gender of participant.	
2.	How old are you?	
3.	How long have you been teaching?	
4.	Which grade do you currently teach?	
5.	What is the highest level of education you have achieved?	
6.	What is your educational background? Where did you go to school and college? Were these private or public institutions?	
7.	Have you taught at other schools apart from this one?	

General Perspectives on the SNC policy

1. In your opinion, what are the positive aspects of the SNC policy?
2. What are some of the negative aspects that impact students and teachers?

3. In your opinion, what are the main challenges of implementing the SNC curriculum in schools?
4. From your point of view, do you think the SNC policy can be successful in improving the quality of the Pakistani education system?
5. One of the main stated goals of the SNC policy has been more equitable education in public and private schools in terms of quality. In your opinion, do you think the SNC policy can achieve that objective?

Single National Curriculum - Impact on school policies

1. In your opinion, is there a clear, shared goal and vision within the school?
2. What do you think are the core values of your institution?
3. In general, do your school's values on education align with the intended outcomes of the SNC policy?
4. In your opinion, what is your school culture like? What do you think is the purpose of education for your institution?

Follow up:

- How do your individual views align with that of the administration?
5. In your opinion, in what ways did the school as an institution have to adapt to the SNC policy? How were these decisions made?
 6. In your opinion, did you receive adequate support from the school staff to implement the new curriculum?

Follow up:

- In what ways could the school have provided more support?
7. Can you tell me, in your view, how the school's own perspectives on education, pedagogy and curriculum impacted the implementation of the SNC policy?

Follow up:

- In what ways does the SNC policy improve your school's education and in what ways is it detrimental?
8. What impact do you think the Single National Curriculum policy has on school policies?

Follow-up:

- Has the SNC curriculum created issues and/or opportunities that were not available before the implementation of the SNC policy?

SNC policy- Perspectives of individual teachers on teaching the SNC.

1. In your opinion, how has the SNC policy impacted your own teaching?
2. In what ways have you had to change either your pedagogy or your syllabus to adjust for the new policy?

Follow-up:

- Are there any aspects of the SNC policy that you think are better than the previous curriculum?
 - Are there additions that you/the school do not agree with?
3. Are there any aspects of the SNC policy that you think are better than the previous curriculum you taught?
 4. What do you think about how gender is incorporated in the new curriculum?
- Follow-up:*
- Is it similar to or different from the curriculum before the SNC? How does it impact how gender is taught in class?
 -
5. Can you give examples of some ways in which gender content has been included in the policy?

Follow-up:

- Is this inclusion positive or negative in your opinion?
 - How has it been incorporated in school materials?
 - How do you feel about teaching this gender content?
 -
6. In your opinion, what is the role of religion within education?

Follow-up:

How does it align with the way your school views religion in formal schooling?

7. What do you think about the incorporation of religion in the SNC curriculum?
8. Can you give examples of some ways in which religious content has been included in the SNC policy?

Follow up:

- Is this inclusion positive or negative in your opinion? How has it impacted minority students in your school/class?
9. What do you think of the quality of teaching materials and learning outcomes prescribed by this policy?
 10. Are you using the materials (textbooks) prescribed by the government? If not, how has your school adapted to the additions in the syllabi for primary classes? If possible, please give examples.

Appendix B

Questionnaire - Administrators

The research will investigate the perspectives of teachers and administrators on the implementation of the Single National Curriculum in Pakistan in the academic year 2021-2022.

Participant ID: _____ (please match to signed consent form)

Interview location: _____

General Demographics of Participant

1.	Note gender of participant.	
2.	How old are you?	
3.	How long have you been part of the administration?	
4.	Have you been a teacher before?	
5.	What is the highest level of education you have achieved?	
6.	What is your educational background? Where did you go to school and college? Were these private or public institutions?	
7.	Have you worked at other schools apart from this one?	

General Perspectives on the SNC policy

1. In your opinion, what are the positive aspects of the SNC policy?
2. What are some of the negative aspects that impact your students and teachers?
3. In your opinion, what are the main challenges of implementing the SNC curriculum in schools?

4. From your point of view, do you think the SNC policy can be successful in improving the quality of the Pakistani education system?
5. One of the main stated goals of the SNC policy has been more equitable education in public and private schools in terms of quality. In your opinion, do you think the SNC policy can achieve that objective?

Single National Curriculum - Impact on School Policies and Culture

9. In your opinion, is there a clear, shared goal and vision within the school?
10. What do you think are the core values of your institution?
11. In general, do your school's values on education align with the intended outcomes of the SNC policy?

Follow ups:

- In what ways do they align to your school's values.
- In what ways are they different?

12. In your opinion, in what ways did the school as an institution have to adapt to the SNC policy? How were these decisions made?
13. Can you tell me, in your view, how the school's own perspectives on education, pedagogy and curriculum impacted the implementation of the SNC policy?

Follow up:

- In what ways does the SNC policy improve your school's education and in what ways is it detrimental?

14. In your opinion, did you receive adequate guidance and support from the government education officials to implement the new curriculum?

Follow-up:

- In what ways could the government have provided with more support?

15. What impact do you think the Single National Curriculum policy has on school policies?

Follow-up:

- Has the SNC curriculum created issues and/or opportunities that were not available before the implementation of the SNC policy?

16. In your view, has the school been able to adequately adapt itself to the SNC policy?

Follow up:

- In what ways have you been able to incorporate the SNC curriculum in your syllabi. What aspects of it do you not emphasize or focus on?

SNC policy- Perspectives of Issues of Quality, Gender, and Religion

1. In your opinion, how has the SNC policy impacted teaching in classrooms?
2. In what ways have you had to change syllabi and pedagogy to adjust for the new policy?

Follow-up:

- Are there any aspects of the SNC policy that you think are better than the previous curriculum?
 - Are there additions that you/the school do not agree with?
3. What do you think about how gender is incorporated in the new curriculum?

Follow-up:

- Is it similar to or different from the curriculum before the SNC? How does it impact how gender is taught in class?
4. Can you give examples of some ways in which gender content has been included in the policy?

Follow-up:

- Is this inclusion positive or negative in your opinion? How has it been incorporated in school materials?
5. In your opinion, what is the role of religion within education?
 6. Traditionally, how does your school view religion in formal schooling?
 7. What do think about the incorporation of religion in the SNC curriculum?
 8. Can you give examples of some ways in which religious content has been included in the SNC policy?

Follow up:

- Is this inclusion positive or negative in your opinion? How has it impacted minority students in your school?
9. What do you think of the quality of teaching materials and learning outcomes prescribed by this policy?

10. Are you using the materials (textbooks) prescribed by the government? If not, how has your school adapted to the additions in the syllabi for primary classes? If possible, please give examples.

References

- Abenante, D. (2023). Evolution of the civil-military relationship in Pakistan in the post-covid era. *Il Politico*, 258(1), 96-106. <https://doi.org/10.4081/ilpolitico.2023.815>
- Ahmad, I. (2004). Islam, democracy, and citizenship education: An examination of the social studies curriculum in Pakistan. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 7(1), 39-49. https://www.tc.columbia.edu/cice/pdf/25710_7_1_Ahmad.pdf
- Ahmad, M. (1971, December). Failure of nation-building in Pakistan?. In *Pakistan Forum* (Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 7-14). Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2569082>
- Akhter, Z. (2021). Imran khan's single national curriculum: an overdose of religion? – Analysis. *Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis*. <https://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/imran-khan-single-national-curriculum-zakhter-010621>
- Babar Ali. (1987). Pakistan's Decade of the Generals. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22(28), 1123–1127. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4377213>
- Ali, S. (2012). Education policy borrowing in pakistan: public-private partnerships. *Education in the broader Middle East: Borrowing a baroque arsenal*, 23-40. https://ecommons.aku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1123&context=book_chapters
- Ali, S., & Farah, I. (2008). Schooling in Pakistan. In A. Gupta (Ed.), *Going to school in South Asia* (pp. 143-166). Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press. https://ecommons.aku.edu/book_chapters/97/

- Altaf, Anjum (2021). *Critical Reflections on the Single National Curriculum and the Medium of Instruction*. Folio Books, Pakistan.
- Andrabi, T., Das, J., & Khwaja, A. (2002). The rise of private schooling in Pakistan: catering to the urban elite or educating the rural poor?. *World Bank and Harvard University*.
https://www.academia.edu/download/30173805/pakschool_march29.pdf
- Andrabi, T., Das, J., & Khwaja, A. I. (2008). A dime a day: The possibilities and limits of private schooling in Pakistan. *Comparative Education Review*, 52(3), 329-355.
https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/588796?casa_token=UO0_jgtBCwAAAA:0Q08zTb8V1kK1EHh1JMak0iiQrjwl0yOYgFK-flWcSnEeDItM2L2kBlSyaLg6OErlfa-g4sn-g
- Andrabi, T., Das, J., Khwaja, A. I., Vishwanath, T., & Zajonc, T. (2007). Learning and Educational Achievements in Punjab Schools (LEAPS): Insights to inform the education policy debate. *World Bank, Washington, DC*.
https://www.academia.edu/download/30173847/leaps_report.pdf
- Anjum, M. I., & Sgro, P. M. (2017). A brief history of Pakistan's economic development. *Real-world Economics Review*, 80, 171-178.
<http://www.paecon.net/PAERReview/issue80/whole80.pdf#page=171>
- Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), (2021). Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi. Retrieved from
https://aserpakistan.org/document/aser/2021/reports/Report_Card_PUNJAB_2021.pdf
- Apple, M. (2004). *Ideology and curriculum*. Routledge.
- Arnett, Ronald C. *Dialogic education: Conversation about ideas and between persons*. SIU Press, 1997.

- Ashraf, S. (2021). *Finding the Enemy Within: Blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence in Pakistan* (p. 270). ANU Press.
- Awan, M. S. (2012). Impact of radical Islamisation of education on Pakistani society. *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*, 4(2), 45-55.
<https://pakistaniaat.org/index.php/pak/article/view/163/163>
- Ayres, A. (2008). Language, the nation, and symbolic capital: The case of Punjab. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 67(3), 917-946. https://read.dukeupress.edu/journal-of-asian-studies/article/67/3/917/341673?casa_token=8o7AB1v7GFAAAAAA:hhqqF2RL7WKtSLRvBpwmkLHmE-ail3nbUjEq1vIY1xOcuAtRqXBWPii46VMil5CRY6dEpg4
- Babar, F. (2020. August 14). Why a Single National Curriculum is dangerous. *The Friday times*.
<https://www.thefridaytimes.com/why-a-single-national-curriculum-is-dangerous/>
- Ball, S. J. (1993). What is policy? Texts, trajectories, and toolboxes. *The Australian Journal of Education Studies*, 13(2), 10-17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0159630930130203>
- Ball, S. (1994). *Education reform: a critical and post structural approach*. McGraw-Hill Education, UK.
- Ball, S. J. (1997). Policy sociology and critical social research: a personal review of recent education policy and policy research. *British Educational Research Journal*, 23(3), 257–274. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1502044>
- Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., Braun, A., & Hoskins, K. (2011). Policy actors: Doing policy work in schools. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(4), 625-639.
- Baloch, S. (2023, August 10). Pakistan: Election likely to be delayed in latest political crisis. *British Broadcasting Company*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66446957>

- Behuria, A. K. (2005). Myth of the monolith: The challenge of diversity in Pakistan. *Strategic Analysis*, 29(1), 61-78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2005.12049791>
- Bell, L., & Stevenson, H. (2006). *Education policy: Process, themes, and impact*. Routledge.
- Bengali, K. (1999). History of educational policy making and planning in Pakistan. *Working paper series, number 40*, Sustainable Development Policy Institute. Islamabad.
https://www.academia.edu/download/57702964/W40-History_of_Educational_Policy_Making.pdf
- Benz, A. (2012). The crisis of school education in Pakistan. Of government's failure and new hopes in the growing private education sector. *Internationales Asienforum*, 43(3-4), 223-244. <https://hasp.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/iaf/article/download/186/181>
- Birbili, M. (2000). Translating from one language to another. *Social research update*, 31(1), 1-7. <https://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU31>
- Blakemore, K., & Griggs, E. (2007). *Social Policy: An Introduction*. Mcgraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Blakemore, K., & Warwick-Booth, L. (2013). *Social Policy: An Introduction: An Introduction*. Mcgraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Boyd, William Lowe. "Paradoxes of educational policy and productivity." *Educational Policy* 13, no. 2 (1999): 227-250.
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0895904899013002001?casa_token=fjkeUaqfJOoAAAAA:caWEbeojt72H_3gxb4YO5BMWDxipisOSeS0ap0CgpwdYoNqc44fskTXkSxjbBdQRTv1Dyih6krg
- Boyd, W. L., & Crowson, R. L. (2002). The quest for a new hierarchy in education: from loose coupling back to tight?. *Journal of educational administration*.

https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/09578230210446018/full/html?casa_token=3hOBnp9LebMAAAAA:2m3ydzJ64IeMXnqfQugWQufbzMScoR6H5-hfw9lI0q10wMBbSHVYdI_esGO_ESe6Ot-7Fjj4GeLxqYBjnJi_2yEA1rlNgKeLWXnwzhzyIY4_Dsynw

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). Can I use TA? Should I use TA? Should I not use TA?

Comparing reflexive thematic analysis and other pattern-based qualitative analytic approaches. *Counselling and psychotherapy research*, 21(1), 37-47

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/capr.12360?casa_token=0KN9x5SrcDwAAAAA:R0-k367tXL7_Dwkt80UslwKNUj4iBVwtmD5dgUs7cWPvhyeyg39bIxY8ll0xzXJBdjFSGW8SmZkhPA

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. SAGE Publications (UK).

Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & quantity*, 56(3), 1391-1412. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>

Candland, C. (2001). Institutional impediments to human development in Pakistan. In *The Post-Colonial States of South Asia* (pp. 264-280). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Christopher-Candland/publication/314374185_Institutional_Impediments_to_Human_Development_in_Pakistan/links/5ab9264ca6fdcc46d3b9cbf0/Institutional-Impediments-to-Human-Development-in-Pakistan.pdf

- Cerna, L. (2014). Trust: What it is and why it matters for governance and education. *OECD Education Working Papers*. No 108, OECD Publishing, Paris.
<https://doi.org/10.1787/5jxswcg0t6wl-en>.
- Cheema, G.S. (2013), Building trust in government: An introduction, in Cheema, G.S. & Popovski.V (eds.), *Building trust in government: Innovations in governance reform in Asia*, (pp. 1-21). United Nations University Press.
<http://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:2502/ebrary9789280811896.pdf#page=18>
- Cho, J., Isgut, A., & Tateno, Y. (2018). Pathways for adapting the Sustainable Development Goals to the national context: the case of Pakistan. *Asia-Pacific Development Journal*, 24(2), 53-87.
<https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/APDJ%20chapter%203.pdf>
- Crawford, S. E., & Ostrom, E. (1995). A grammar of institutions. *American political science review*, 89(3), 582-600. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2082975>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.
- Dacin, M. T. (1997). Isomorphism in Context: The Power and Prescription of Institutional Norms. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 40(1), 46–81.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/257020>
- Das, J. (2023). No School Stands Alone: How market dynamics affect the performance of public and private schools. *Education Next*, 23(3), 32-38. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1397917>
- Diem, S., Young, M. D., Welton, A. D., Mansfield, K. C., & Lee, P. L. (2014). The intellectual landscape of critical policy analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in*

Education, 27(9), 1068-1090.

https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/K_Mansfield_Intellectual_2014.pdf

DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101>

Durkheim, E. (1995). *The elementary forms of the religious life* (K. Fields, Trans). The Free Press (1912)

Durrani, S. (2021, November 13). More of the same. *Dawn News*.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1657804/more-of-the-same>

Dye T. R. (2017). *Understanding public policy* (Fifteenth). Pearson.

Easterly, W. (2001). The political economy of growth without development: A case study of Pakistan. *Paper for the Analytical Narratives of Growth Project, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University*, 1-53.

<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=e20717b3d4536ae0967039fb4695d4a91a897318>

Easton, D. (1985). Political science in the United States: Past and present. *International Political Science Review*, 6(1), 133-152. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1600975>

Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American journal of theoretical and applied statistics*, 5(1), 1-4.

https://www.academia.edu/download/55796997/Comparison_Convenience_and_Purposive_Sampling-2016_4p.pdf

Farah, I., & Rizvi, S. (2007). Public-private partnerships: implications for primary schooling in Pakistan. *Social Policy and Administration*, 41(4), 339-354.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2007.00557.x>

Farooq, U. (2022, December 17). Punjab, KP assemblies to dissolve on Dec 23 : Imran. *Dawn News*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1726841>

Fennell, S. (2013). Low-fee private schools in Pakistan: A blessing or a bane. *Low-fee private schooling: Aggravating equity or mitigating disadvantage*, 65-82.

Fielden, M. B. (1998). The geopolitics of aid: the provision and termination of aid to Afghan refugees in North West Frontier Province, Pakistan. *Political Geography*, 17(4), 459-487.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298\(97\)00034-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298(97)00034-6)

Foucault, M. (1975). "Panopticism" from "discipline & punish: The birth of the prison. *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*, 2(1), 1-12. Original work Published in 1975. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/252435>

Fuchs, M. M., & Fuchs, S. W. (2020). Religious minorities in Pakistan: Identities, citizenship, and social belonging. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 43(1), 52-67.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00856401.2020.1695075>

Fusarelli, L. D. (2002). Tightly coupled policy in loosely coupled systems: Institutional capacity and organizational change. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 40(6), 561-575.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230210446045>

Government of Pakistan, Finance Division., Pakistan, (2018). *Pakistan Economic Survey 2017-2018*. https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey_1718.html

Ghani, A. (2022, January 9). The implementation conundrum. *The News on Sunday*.
<https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/923545-the-implementation-conundrum>

Ghias, Shehzad (Host). (2021, November 4). Defending the Single National Curriculum- Dr. Mariam Chughtai-Director NCC-(137) [Video Podcast]. In *The Pakistan Experience*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rsSmLsbNHU>

Ghias, Shehzad (Host). (2023, August 23). How to fix the education system in Pakistan- Dr.

Faisal Bari-(288)[Video Podcast]. In *The Pakistan Experience*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIL3jri-fbY>

Gilmartin, D. (1998). Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian history: In search of a narrative. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 57(4), 1068-1095.

<https://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~sj6/gilmartin%20partition.pdf>

Giunchi, E. (2007). Rewriting the past: Political imperatives and curricular reform in Pakistan. *Internationale Schulbuchforschung*, 375-388.

Government of Pakistan, Finance Division (2021). *Annex IV Covid*.

https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters_21/Annex%20IV%20Covid.pdf

Government of Punjab (n.d). *Private Education Provider Registration System*. Retrieved

October 11, 2023. <https://pepris.punjab.gov.pk/>

Government of Punjab (2018). *Punjab Education Sector Reform Plan 2019/2020-2023/2024*.

<https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/education-sector-plan-2019-2024-punjab-province-pakistan>

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2(163-194), 105.

http://miguelangelmartinez.net/IMG/pdf/1994_Guba_Lincoln_Paradigms_Quali_Research_chapter.pdf

Haleem, I. (2003). Ethnic and Sectarian Violence and the Propensity Towards Praetorianism in Pakistan. *Third World Quarterly*, 24(3), 463–477. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3993380>

Hautala, T., Helander, J., & Korhonen, V. (2018). Loose and tight coupling in educational organizations—an integrative literature review. *Journal of Educational Administration*.

https://trepo.tuni.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/104041/loose_and_tight_coupling_in_educational_organizations_2018.pdf?sequence=1

Hill, M. (1997). The policy process. *Harlow, UK: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf.*

Hodgson, G. M. (2006). What are institutions?. *Journal of economic issues*, 40(1), 1-25.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00213624.2006.11506879>

Hodgson, G. M. (2015). On defining institutions: rules versus equilibria. *Journal of Institutional Economics*, 11(3), 497-505. doi:10.1017/S1744137415000028

Honig, M. (2006). Complexity and policy implementation. *New directions in education policy implementation: Confronting complexity*, 63, 1-25.

Hoodbhoy, P. (2020, July 18). Education: PTI's plan exposed. *Dawn News.*

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1569679>

Howlett, M., & Mukherjee, I. (2017). Policy formulation: Where knowledge meets power in the policy process. In *Handbook of policy formulation*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Hurwicz, L. (1994). Economic design, adjustment processes, mechanisms, and institutions. *Economic Design*, 1(1), 1-14.

Imran, R. (2005). Legal injustices: The Zina Hudood Ordinance of Pakistan and its implications for women. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 7(2), 78-100.

<https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol7/iss2/5>

International Monetary Fund (n.d). *Pakistan*. Retrieved August 28, 2023, from

<https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/PAK>.

Jalal, A. (1995). Conjuring Pakistan: History as Official Imagining. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27(1), 73–89. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/176188>

- Javed, H. (2020, August 26) Single National Curriculum: All hat and no cattle. *Daily Times, Pakistan*. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/659263/single-national-curriculum-all-hat-and-no-cattle/>
- Jimenez, E., & Tan, J. P. (1987). Decentralised and Private Education: The Case of Pakistan. *Comparative Education*, 23(2), 173–190. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3098985>
- Khan, S., Gul, S. (2017). The Criminalization of Rape in Pakistan. *Chr. Michelsen Institute Working Papers* 8, <https://www.cmi.no/publications/6323-the-criminalisation-of-rape-in-pakistan>
- Khattak, S. G. (2014). A comparative analysis of the elite–English-medium schools, state Urdu-medium schools, and Dini-madaris in Pakistan. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Comparative Studies*, 1(1), 92-107. http://www.ijmcs-journal.org/IJMCS_April214_Khattak.pdf
- Khokhar, M. (2007). Reforming militant madaris in Pakistan. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 30(4), 353-365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100600932751>
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2005). *Critical constructivism primer* (Vol. 2). Peter Lang Publishing Inc. New York.
- Kogan, M. (2018). *Educational policy-making: A study of interest groups and parliament*. Routledge (1975).
- Krishan, Y. (1998). The unfinished agenda of the partition. *Asian Affairs*, 29(3), 278-286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/714041360>
- Kuper, A., Lingard, L., & Levinson, W. (2008). Critically appraising qualitative research. *Bmj*, 337. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18687726/>

Labaree, R. V. (2002). The risk of 'going observationalist': negotiating the hidden dilemmas of being an insider participant observer. *Qualitative research*, 2(1), 97-122.

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1468794102002001641?casa_token=G_nOJak9bIIAAAAA:RNfrdGd62rAQ0dgXsfcoJhJGIU5_FUPeVu4HEntlgq7XYE9_DRxa3Owv6Dy82ITYv1v8an8bqo

Lee, S. (2017). The bilingual researcher's dilemmas: Reflective approaches to translation issues. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 22(2), 53–62. doi:10.15663/wje.v22i2.568

Luke, A., & Hogan, D. (2006). Redesigning what counts as evidence in educational policy: The Singapore model. In *World Yearbook of Education 2006* (pp. 190-204). Routledge.

Mahboob, A. (2020). Has English medium instruction failed in Pakistan?. *Functional variations in English: Theoretical considerations and practical challenges*, 261-276.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344372069_Has_English_Medium_Instruction_Failed_in_Pakistan

Malik, S. J. (1989). Islamization in Pakistan 1977-1985 The Ulama and their places of learning. *Islamic Studies*, 28(1), 5-28.

<http://irigs.iiu.edu.pk:64447/gsd1/collect/islamics/import/v28i11.pdf>

Malen, B. (2006), Revisiting policy implementation as a political phenomenon: the case of reconstitution policies", in Honig, M. (ed.), *New directions in education policy implementation*, (pp. 83-104). State University of New York Press, Albany.

Martens, K., & Niemann, D. (2010). *Governance by comparison: How ratings & rankings impact national policy-making in education* (No. 139). TranState working papers.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/47758625_Governance_by_comparison_How_ratings_rankings_impact_national_policy-making_in_education

- McLaughlin, M. W. (1987). Learning from experience: Lessons from policy implementation. *Educational evaluation and policy analysis*, 9(2), 171-178.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1163728>
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). A guide to design and implementation: Qualitative research science and education. Jossey-Bass Publishers
- Meyer, H. D. (2002). From “loose coupling” to “tight management”? Making sense of the changing landscape in management and organization theory. *Journal of Educational Administration*.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235297491_From_loose_coupling_to_tight_management_Making_sense_of_the_changing_landscape_in_management_and_organization_theory
- Meyer, H. D., & Rowan, B. (2006). Institutional analysis and the study of education. *The new institutionalism in education*, 1-13.
https://sunypress.edu/content/download/451693/5494028/version/1/file/9780791469057_imported2_excerpt.pdf
- Meyer, J. W. (1977). The effects of education as an institution. *American journal of Sociology*, 83(1), 55-77. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/226506>
- Ministry of Federal Education and Training, (2020). *Single national curriculum* (SNC). Ministry of Federal Education and Training, Government of Pakistan. Retrieved October 19, 2020.
<http://www.mofept.gov.pk/ProjectDetail/MzkyNDc2MjMtY2VjYy00ZDA4LTk5OTUtNzUyNDI3ZWZmMzN2Rm>
- Ministry of Federal Education and Training, (n.d). PM Reforms. Retrieved September 19, 2023.
<https://ncc.gov.pk/index>

Miraj, M.H. (2013, September 16). The kot of Kamalia. *Dawn News*.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1043306>

Morton, S., Pencheon, D., & Squires, N. (2017). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and their implementation A national global framework for health, development and equity needs a systems approach at every level. *British medical bulletin*, 1-10.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29069332/>

National Institute of Population Studies & ICF. (2019). *Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18*. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR354/FR354.pdf>

Naqvi, M. (2021, October 4th). Single National Curriculum & educational disparities in Pakistan. South Asia. *LSE South Asia Center*.

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2021/10/04/single-national-curriculum-educational-disparities-in-pakistan/>

Nazeer, A. & Khan, A. (2021) *Single National Curriculum; Critical Analysis and Policy Recommendations*. Institute of Development Research and Corresponding Capabilities, Islamabad.

Noorani, A., & Hussain, N. (2021). *Agents of Change: the problematic landscape of Pakistan's K-12 education and the people leading the change*. Oxford University Press.

Nudzor, H. (2009). What is “policy”, a problem: solving definition or a process conceptualisation. *Educational Futures*, 2(1), 85-96.

<https://educationstudies.org.uk/journal/ef/volume-2-1-2009/policy-problem-solving-definition-process-conceptualisation/>

Olive, J. L. (2014, March). Reflecting on the tensions between emic and etic perspectives in life history research: Lessons learned. In *Forum qualitative sozialforschung/forum*:

qualitative social research (Vol. 15, No. 2). <https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/2072>

Orlikowski, W. J., & Barley, S. R. (2001). Technology and institutions: What can research on information technology and research on organizations learn from each other?. *MIS quarterly*, 145-165. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3250927>

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2017). *Census 2017: Population by Religion*.

<https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//tables/POPULATION%20BY%20RELIGION.pdf>

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, (2017) .*Census 2017: Tehsil level population summary*.

https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2017/punjab_tehsil.pdf

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (n.d) . *Final Results of Census 2017*.

<https://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/final-results-census-2017-0>

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2019) . *Household Integrated Economic Survey 2018-2019*.

<https://www.pbs.gov.pk/publication/household-integrated-economic-survey-hies-2018-19>

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2020). *Pakistan Living Standards Measurement Survey (2019-*

2020). http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//pslm/publications/pslm_district_2019_20/PSLM_2019_20_District_Level.pdf \

Pakistan Institute of Education (2021). *Pakistan Education Statistics*.

<http://library.aepam.edu.pk/Books/Pakistan%20Education%20Statistics%202017-18.pdf>

Pakistan Institute of International Affairs (1976). Documents. *Pakistan Horizon*, 29(1), 125–186.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41393321>

- Parveen, R. (2018). Curriculum policy enactment and spaces of change: a Bordieuan field analysis. *University of Queensland eSpace*. <https://core.ac.uk/reader/189928040>
- Parveen, S. (2008). An evaluative study of primary education in the light of policies and plans in Pakistan (1947-2006). *Journal of College Teaching & Learning (TLC)*, 5(7).
<https://clutejournals.com/index.php/TLC/article/view/1243>
- Pasha, H. A., Hasan, M. A., Ghaus, A., & Rasheed, A. (1995). Is the social action programme in Pakistan financially sustainable?. *The Pakistan development review*, 34(4), 629-647.
- Peet, R. (2003). *Unholy trinity: the IMF, World Bank and WTO*. Zed Books Ltd.
- Peshkin, A. (1963). The Shaping of Secondary Education in Pakistan. *History of Education Quarterly*, 3(1), 4–18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/367266>
- Petrov-Yoo, A. (2019). *Explaining America's Proxy War in Afghanistan: US Relations with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia 1979–1989*. Clark University.
- Pohlmann, M., Bär, S., & Valarini, E. (2014). The analysis of collective mindsets: introducing a new method of institutional analysis in comparative research. *Revista de sociologia e politica*, 22, 7-25.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270896257_The_analysis_of_collective_mindsets_Introducing_a_New_Method_of_Institutional_Analysis_in_Comparative_Research
- Polksi, M. M., & Ostrom, E. (1999). An institutional framework for policy analysis and design. 1999. *World Economics Review*, 80, 171-178.
<https://ostromworkshop.indiana.edu/pdf/teaching/iad-for-policy-applications.pdf>

- Punjab Monitoring and Implementation Unit, (2021). *Annual School Census Report 2020-2021*.
https://www.pesrp.edu.pk/downloads/school_census/2020_21/School_Census_Report_20_21.pdf
- Rahman, T. (2000). *The Teaching of Urdu in British India*. Center for South Asia, University of Wisconsin–Madison.
- Rahman, T. (1997). The medium of instruction controversy in Pakistan. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 18(2), 145-154.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240535804_The_Medium_of_Instruction_Controversy_in_Pakistan
- Rahman, T. (2005). Passports to privilege: The English-medium schools in Pakistan. *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, 1(1), 24-44.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264869450_Passports_to_privilege_The_English-medium_schools_in_Pakistan
- Rahman, T. (2020), Pakistani English, in Bolton, K. Werner, B. Kirkpatrick, A. (eds), *The handbook of Asian Englishes*, (pp. 279-296). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Rana, M. A. (2020). Decentralization Experience in Pakistan: The 18th Constitutional Amendment. *Asian Journal of Management Cases*, 17(1), 61-84.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0972820119892720>
- Razzaque, A.(2021, April 27). Textbooks for whom? *The News*.
<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/826432-textbooks-for-whom>
- Rigby, J. G., Woulfin, S. L., & März, V. (2016). Understanding how structure and agency influence education policy implementation and organizational change. *American Journal of Education*, 122(3), 295-302

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298723995_Understanding_How_Structure_and_Agency_Influence_Education_Policy_Implementation_and_Organizational_Change

Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2009). *Globalizing education policy*. Routledge.

Saigol, R. (2005). Enemies within and enemies without: The besieged self in Pakistani textbooks. *Futures*, 37(9), 1005-1035.

https://www.academia.edu/47164425/Enemies_within_and_enemies_without_The_besieged_self_in_Pakistani_textbooks

Salik, M. A. N. (2016). Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. *Strategic Studies*, 36(3), 113-135. <https://issi.org.pk/post-2015-sustainable-development-agenda-a-significant-opportunity-for-pakistan/>

Sayeed, K. B. (1963). Religion and nation building in Pakistan. *The Middle East Journal*, 279-291. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4323609>

School Education Department, Punjab Government (n.d). *Autonomous Bodies*. <https://schools.punjab.gov.pk/autonomousbodies>

School Education Department, Punjab Government (2023). *School Information System*. Retrieved August 26, 2023. <https://sis.punjab.gov.pk/dashboard>

Shah, A. (2008). Pakistan after Musharraf: Praetorianism and terrorism. *Journal of Democracy*, 19(4), 16-25. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/252221/pdf>

Shah, A. (2012). The 18th constitutional amendment: glue or solvent for nation building and citizenship in Pakistan? *The Lahore Journal of Economics*, 17, 387. <http://lahoreschoolofeconomics.edu.pk/EconomicsJournal/Journals/Volume%2017/Issue%20SP/16%20Shah%2018th%20Con>

Shaikh, Z.A. (2020, October 15). The SNC as the Way Forward. *The News*.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/729427-the-snc-as-the-way-forward>

Siddiqua, A. (2013). Pakistan military ethnic balance in the Armed Forces and problems of Federalism. *Manekshaw Paper No*, 39, 149-162.

https://www.claws.in/static/MP39_Pakistan-Military-Ethnic-Balance-in-the-Armed-Forces-and-Problems-of-Federalism.pdf

Siddiqua, M., & Amin, H. (2010). Evaluating Public Policy within a Framework: The Case of Madrassa Reforms in General Zia Era. *Policy*, 30(30), 345-362.

https://www.academia.edu/download/61711693/1_Vol_20_Issue_2_03_eng_Maryam_Siddiqua_Husnul_Amin_18-15-18_4420200107-104547-c7smr0.pdf

Siddiqui, S. (2010). 18th amendment and education. *Retrieved January 4*, 2013.

Simpson, A. (Ed.). (2007). *Language and national identity in Asia*. Oxford University Press, USA.

South Asia Terrorism Portal, (2023). *Datasheet – Pakistan*. <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/pakistan>

Staff Reporter, (2022, July 22). Education ministry renames Single National Curriculum. *Dawn News*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1700899>

Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. Guilford press.

Sulehria., F. (2020, October 2). When Bhutto nationalized missionary schools. *The Friday Times*. <https://thefridaytimes.com/02-Oct-2020/when-bhutto-nationalized-missionary-schools>

Sumner, W. G. (2019). *Folkways: A study of the sociological importance of usages, manners, customs, mores, and morals*. Good Press (1907).

- Taylor, S., Rizvi, F., Lingard, B., & Henry, M. (1997). *Education Policy and the politics of change*. London: Routledge.
- The Punjab Compulsory Teaching of the Holy Quran Act (2018). Act XVII of 2018, Government of the Punjab. <http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/2709.html>
- The Muttehida Ulema Board Punjab Act (2022). Act XL of 2022, Government of the Punjab. http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/2864.html#_ftn
- Torwali, Z. (2020, November 5th). In Pakistan, a single national curriculum equals indoctrination and assimilation. *Gandhara* <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/in-pakistan-a-single-national-curriculum-equals-indoctrination-and-assimilation/30931872.html>
- UNICEF and Global Partnership For Education (2022). *2022 MICS-EAGLE Pakistan (Punjab) Education Fact Sheets*. https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022Pakistan_Factsheet_2022p11.28.22-1.pdf
- United Nations Statistics Division, *UN Stats | Millennium Indicators Pakistan*. Millennium Development Goals Indicators (2015), <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2015/Snapshots/PAK.pdf>
- Vavrus, F. (2005). Adjusting inequality: education and structural adjustment policies. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75, 2.
- Vavrus, F., & Bartlett, L. (2006). Comparatively knowing: Making a case for the vertical case study. *Current issues in comparative education*, 8(2).
- Viennet, R., & Pont, B. (2017). Education policy implementation: a literature review and proposed framework. *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 162. OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/fc467a64-en>.

- Wedel, J. R., Shore, C., Feldman, G., & Lathrop, S. (2005). Toward an anthropology of public policy. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 600(1), 30-51.
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0002716205276734?casa_token=0kT_oXhi308AAAAA:vH5xGUAQJvT34GSfk5z_j1rjz0wLgWCtyrxBReWo19OnATC_ObRozk_J_YNEK4UOaRfZkWsFLkg
- Welch, A. R. (1985). The functionalist tradition and comparative education. *Comparative Education*, 21(1), 5-19. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3099084>
- Wolf, S. O (2023). SADF Research Report 9: Imran khan, the military, and the future of Pakistan. <https://www.sadf.eu/sadf-research-report-9-imran-khan-the-military-and-the-future-of-pakistan/>
- World Bank. (2012). *World development report 2012: Gender equality and development*. The World Bank.
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/492221468136792185/pdf/646650WDR0201200Box364543B00PUBLIC0.pdf>
- World Bank. (2023). Government Expenditure on Education, total (% of GDP)- Pakistan. *UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)*. Accessed September 19, 2023.
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?locations=PK>
- World Economic Forum. (2023). *Global Gender Gap Report 2023*.
<https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>
- Yin, R. K. (2008). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Yin, R. K. (2015). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. Guilford publications.

Zahoor, M. A. (2011). A critical appraisal of the economic reforms under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto:

An assessment. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, 32(1), 144-45.

http://www.nihcr.edu.pk/latest_english_journal/8.pdf

Zajda, J. I., & Geo-JaJa, M. A. (2010). *The politics of education reforms* (Vol. 9).

Dordrecht: Springer.

<http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/48970/1/13..pdf>