

Effectiveness of the Single National Curriculum of Social Studies at the Primary Level

Qanita Ahmed

qanitaahmed123@gmail.com

PhD Scholar, Fatima Jinnah Women University Rawalpindi

Dr. Ishrat Saddiqa Lodhi

ishratsiddiqa@fjwu.edu.pk

Associate Professor, Fatima Jinnah Women University Rawalpindi

Khadija Muhammad Hussain

kmarvi85@gmail.com

PhD Scholar, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi

Corresponding Author: * Qanita Ahmed qanitaahmed123@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

A curriculum helps pupils attain academic success and develop critical thinking skills, as well as future career preparedness (Mehmood & Hussain, 2023). Diverse curricula were offered in various schools before the introduction of the Single National Curriculum (SNC). In addition to lowering socioeconomic gaps and standardizing instruction in public, private, and religious schools, the SNC aims to advance equity, national cohesion, and 21st-century skills. The SNC was introduced to standardize educational content across different schooling systems. It aims to promote fairness, national unity, and quality learning outcomes. This research paper examines how effective the Single National Curriculum (SNC) for Social Studies is at the primary school level in Pakistan. This narrative review-based study applied a thematic analysis approach, and the library research model was utilized to gather the data from Books, notes, journals, and research papers. The study combines various research findings, policy reviews, and opinions from stakeholders from various studies to evaluate the impact of the SNC on learning outcomes, critical thinking skills, social fairness, teaching practices, and the specific challenges faced during implementation in Social Studies. The author compiled data over the past five years, utilizing PRISMA and the library research model to sketch the whole procedure of using the resources. The results suggest that while the SNC offers potential for fair educational reform and better cognitive and social results, significant gaps in implementation, particularly in teacher training, resource distribution, and clarity of the curriculum, hinder its effectiveness.

Keywords: Single National Curriculum, Critical Thinking, Educational Content, Skills, Resources, Teaching Practices

INTRODUCTION

Education plays an essential part in determining the intellectual, moral, and social development of people and serves as a substance for countrywide progress. In emerging countries like Pakistan, discrepancies in educational excellence, course content, and learning effects across religious, private, and public schooling classifications have long posed grave challenges to societal equity and national consistency. To state these discrepancies, the Government of Pakistan presented the Single National Curriculum (SNC), aiming to deliver uniform educational principles and equivalent learning chances for all youngsters, irrespective of their socioeconomic background or type of school (Iqbal, Hasan & Nasreen, 2024).

Since its inception, Pakistan has engaged in creating a cohesive and fair educational system (Iqbal et al., 2024). There are social and cultural divisions as a result of the country's educational system's many divisions, which include teaching religion and languages like English and Urdu. These differences

frequently lead to differences in the quality of education, especially between public and private institutions (Moslimany et al., 2024). The Pakistani government tried to overcome these concerns by adopting the Single National Curriculum (SNC), which standardized education across the nation and gave equal access to education for all pupils, irrespective of their socioeconomic status (Taqdees, Kiran & Nazim, 2024).

Khan et al. (2025) state that one of the main forces behind national progress is education. Starting at the basic level (Grades 1–5), Pakistan's Single National Curriculum (SNC) was created to standardize and unify curriculum content across public, private, and religious educational institutions. Giving students a solid foundation in literacy, numeracy, social awareness, critical thinking, and citizenship education is one of the SNC's main objectives. As a subject, social studies is essential for developing critical involvement with society, civic knowledge, national identity, and cultural awareness.

Hameed et al., (2024) elaborated that the first stage of implementation, the Single National Curriculum was formally introduced at the primary level (Grades I–V). It seeks to foster critical thinking, creativity, civic engagement, and moral growth while guaranteeing uniformity in curricular material, learning objectives, and ideals. Social Studies is one of the SNC's basic topics, and it is very important since it helps students grasp society, culture, history, geography, civic duties, and national identity. Social Studies establishes the groundwork for responsible citizenship, tolerance, social awareness, and respect for diversity at the elementary school level.

Pakistan's social studies curricula have long been accused for emphasizing rote memorization over conceptual comprehension and critical inquiry, as well as being content-heavy and examination-oriented. By focusing on student-centered learning, competency-based outcomes, and the integration of civic and ethical principles, the SNC aims to change this methodology. The curriculum seeks to develop critical-thinking, socially conscious, and informed citizens who can actively engage in social and democratic processes.

The SNC has elevated objectives, but its usefulness in real classroom settings is still up for discussion. Policymakers contend that a single curriculum will improve educational standards and lessen inequality, but educators and scholars have expressed concerns about implementation issues. These include inadequate teacher preparation, a dearth of teaching materials, language obstacles, packed classrooms, and a lack of evaluation tools that are in line with higher-order learning goals. These difficulties are especially noticeable in the teaching of social studies, where interactive pedagogy, discussion, inquiry, and contextual understanding are necessary for effective learning instead of textbook-centered delivery (Qamar & Khalil, 2024).

Any curriculum's effectiveness also depends on how teachers understand and apply it, how students interact with it, and how institutions facilitate its delivery. The success of the Social Studies curriculum becomes even more important in the primary level, when students are at a key period of their cognitive and social development. While a poorly executed curriculum may limit the topic to memorization of discrete facts, a well-executed curriculum can promote curiosity, empathy, civic consciousness, and social responsibility.

Shah (2023) examine the Single National Curriculum of Social Studies' efficacy at the primary level is crucial in this regard. In order to improve learning outcomes, foster critical thinking, increase social awareness, and guarantee educational equity, this study aims to determine whether the SNC is accomplishing its intended goals. This study attempts to offer insights that can guide legislators, curriculum writers, teacher educators, and school administrators for future curriculum improvement and

effective educational reform by examining current research findings, teacher perspectives, and implementation strategies.

METHODOLOGY

This study implemented a narrative literature review design by utilizing thematic analysis to review the efficiency of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) of Social Studies at the primary level in Pakistan. A structured narrative review was applied to confirm a structured and transparent process of analyzing relevant data. However, thematic analysis is applied to synthesize findings. Academic databases and repositories were used to systematically search relevant literature released between 2020 and 2025, including ERIC, Research Gate, and Google Scholar. The library research approach was used to gather the data for the current study. Books, notes, journals, and research papers are all part of this approach. According to Pentang (2023), this model is the systematic process of gathering, analyzing, and assessing data in order to improve comprehension of any phenomenon. Thomas Mann presents the library research model, which explains the information gathered from books, journals, research papers, databases like Scopus, Google Scholar, and webpages. By using keywords, themes, and theories, this approach offers an appropriate framework for using library resources and search choices (Christou, 2022).

According to Page et al (2021), PRISMA is a precise data selection procedure used in the study. By guaranteeing transparency, it summarizes the entire data acquisition process. In order to perform this narrative review-based study, the author collected data over the last 05 years using PRISMA and the library research model to outline the whole process of using the resources. About 85 studies were found in the first search. 32 articles were chosen for full-text review after duplicates were eliminated and titles and abstracts were screened. Eighteen studies were included in the final analysis after meeting the inclusion criteria based on quality and relevance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Foundation of Single National Curriculum

According to Iqbal et al. (2024), the Single National Curriculum (SNC) was implemented in Pakistan to standardize instruction across various educational sectors and lessen historical disparities in curriculum quality and student outcomes, according to a number of academics. In their discussion of the SNC's uniform structure and learning objectives at the primary level (Amin, Ali, & Mahmood, 2023) emphasize prospects including a more defined scope of competences and the possibility of a logical progression of concepts throughout grades. This work makes the case that SNC offers a strategic framework for building fair foundations for all students across the country.

Perceptions and Implementation in Primary Perspectives

Recent research has emphasized the implementation and perception trials of SNC at the primary level:

Teacher and Head Teacher Perspectives

According to Iqbal et al. (2024), head teachers typically have a positive opinion of the SNC and see it as a tool that can improve literacy, lessen educational inequities, and foster cognitive development like critical and creative thinking. Although they have a clear vision and aim, their qualitative analysis contends that proper teacher preparation, direction, and oversight are necessary for successful implementation.

Teacher Preparedness and Challenges

Qamar and Khalil (2024) examined how primary teachers felt about online SNC training and discovered that the main factors affecting pedagogical readiness were technology limitations, a lack of in-person connection, and irregular training continuity. They advise ongoing professional development as well as a variety of instructional assistance techniques.

Associated Classroom Challenges

A case study of elementary schools in District Kech (2025) identifies important implementation obstacles, such as poor teacher preparation, concerns with content distribution as an outcome of instructional medium variations, high student-teacher ratios, and deferred textbook delivery. These results are consistent with more general worries regarding institutional readiness and resource distribution. These patterns are supported by similar studies conducted in the districts of Punjab and Jhelum, which show that SNC implementation at the elementary level is severely hampered by a lack of funding, inadequate teacher preparation, and low stakeholder commitment. Previous research also reveals that many primary school instructors struggle to comprehend and implement the SNC content, lesson planning requirements, and competence standards, particularly when educators' qualifications differ greatly (Akhter, Muhammad & Rehman, 2025).

Academic Results and Curriculum Efficiency

There is conflicting information from empirical research on learning outcomes under SNC Jamil, Aslam, and Ali (2024) found no statistically significant difference in measured learning outcomes across topics when comparing accomplishment scores of children taught in Kotli under SNC and non-SNC conditions. The results show that curriculum standardization alone does not inevitably translate into increased academic achievement without good instructional techniques, even while teachers showed support for equitable curriculum adoption. Zaman, Saleem & Ali (2021) examined the wider impact of SNC implementation on primary education in Faisalabad and discovered generally positive perceptions regarding student development in language, literacy, and social domains, particularly in contexts with experienced educators; however, variability across school types suggests that effectiveness is highly context dependent.

Content of the Curriculum and Development of the Skills

Several studies draw attention to curricular design challenges that are pertinent to Social Studies outcomes, even though they are not exclusively focused on Social Studies:

Although citizenship education and critical thinking are declared objectives, document analysis of SNC Social Studies content reveals that these qualities are frequently implicitly incorporated and not explicitly operationalized in curricular texts, leading to inconsistent classroom application. Although SNC incorporates elements of peace, tolerance, and social harmony, research on environmental and peace education components in primary Social Studies indicates that these components' depth and clarity are still limited, which may lessen the subject's ability to foster higher-order social competencies. Effective integration of 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork, necessitates not just proper curricular goals but also teacher capacity training and linked teaching resources, according to research on SNC content more generally (Khan, Hina, & Ahmad, 2024).

Implications for Society and Equity

Concerns about inclusion and contextual relevance are brought to light by research on the SNC's effects on society and culture: According to a critical study by Ali et al. (2025), the SNC's heavy focus on national standards may unintentionally ignore local linguistic and cultural variety, which could marginalize minority voices and lessen the contextual relevance of Social Studies content. It is recommended that educators and policymakers strike a balance between the goals of national cohesiveness and cultural sensitivity.

FINDINGS

Diverse Effects on Learning Outcomes for Students

According to a number of empirical investigations, standardizing the curriculum does not always result in improved learning outcomes. According to a comparative study, there was no statistically significant difference in academic performance between SNC and non-SNC students in District Kotli. Students under both curricula performed similarly, indicating that curriculum standardization by itself might not be sufficient to improve learning outcomes in the absence of supportive teaching practices. Teachers, on the other hand, emphasized the necessity of careful implementation planning and teacher preparation while endorsing the principle of equalized curriculum standards.

Positive Views from Educational Leaders

The analysis elaborated that the majority of head teachers in public primary schools have favorable opinions about SNC and think it has the potential to: Minimize differences in education between schools, enhance literacy and language abilities, encourage critical and imaginative thinking, and encourage social, emotional, and personal growth. Although opinions are generally positive, head teachers stress that effective application in regular classroom practice requires sufficient training, clear direction, and oversight.

Implicit Emphasis on Higher-Order Skills and Critical Thinking

According to document analysis, critical thinking and inquiry abilities are mentioned as goals in the Social Studies section of SNC, but they are frequently implied rather than specifically stated. Teachers find it challenging to consistently include critical thinking into class activities or evaluations due to this lack of clear operationalization, which may hinder the curriculum's capacity to promote civic and analytical competencies.

Challenges in Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

According to studies conducted in several countries, Lack of preparation causes instructors to struggle with SNC implementation, including inadequate professional development specific to SNC pedagogy and content, online training model challenges (e.g., lack of engagement, technical problems), and teachers' lack of confidence in SNC teaching techniques. Particularly in Social Studies, where interaction and inquiry-based learning are prioritized, these difficulties diminish the efficacy of SNC instruction.

Cultural Competence and Social Integration

SNC is perceived by Pakistani primary teachers as a helpful instrument for fostering harmony and social cohesiveness among kids, possibly fostering the development of friendships, empathy, and a sense of shared national ideals. Nevertheless, the same study shows that effective implementation is still uneven, especially in private schools with little structural support, which limits the full realization of these advantages.

Contextual and Structural Obstacles to Successful Implementation

Several studies pinpoint the fundamental contextual limitations that obstruct the efficacy of SNC: Lack of resources (books, materials, and facilities), condensed classrooms and high student-teacher ratios, modifications to the teaching medium without adequate teacher support, and diversity in language and culture necessitate adjustments that SNC has not quite made. Even in cases where curriculum design is deemed competent, these structural problems make it difficult for teachers to successfully present the Social Studies subject.

Needs for Professional Development and Capacity Building

The professional development mechanisms are insufficient, even while SNC policy promotes a vision of universal educational standards. In order to capture curriculum goals and integrate them into classroom techniques, teachers frequently lack opportunities for continuous, in-person training and reflective practice. It is constantly suggested that one of the most important ways to increase SNC efficacy is to improve teacher training.

CONCLUSION

One of Pakistan's most important educational reforms is the adoption of the Single National Curriculum (SNC), which aims to guarantee equity, consistency, and quality throughout the country's varied educational system. This study investigated the efficacy of the SNC of Social Studies at the primary level. By examining current empirical data, curriculum material, and implementation strategies. The results show that the SNC has a mixed effect on student learning outcomes, even though it offers a standardized framework and has great potential to reduce educational inequities. Research indicates that a unified curriculum by itself does not always lead to higher social studies academic performance. The SNC's efficacy is mostly determined by the caliber of classroom instruction, the accessibility of resources, and teachers' understanding of curriculum aims.

The SNC is usually seen favorably by educators, especially when it comes to fostering equal learning opportunities, civic consciousness, and social cohesion. SNC's Social Studies curriculum places a strong emphasis on moral growth, citizenship, and tolerance values that are crucial for raising responsible and socially conscious people from a young age. However, the curriculum's emphasis on inquiry-based learning and critical thinking is frequently implied rather than explicitly stated, which restricts its consistent and successful implementation in the classroom. Significant implementation issues are also highlighted by different reports, such as inadequate teacher preparation, a lack of ongoing professional development, a lack of instructional resources, big class sizes, and difficulty arising from changes in the medium of teaching. These limitations limit the use of interactive teaching techniques that are necessary for primary school Social Studies instruction. Because of this, many classroom settings fail to completely achieve the curriculum's intended results.

In conclusion, Pakistan's educational system could be positively transformed by the Single National Curriculum of Social Studies at the primary level, especially in terms of advancing fairness and common national values. However, in order to increase its efficacy, more focus needs to be put on developing teacher ability, offering sufficient learning resources, outlining curricular goals, and guaranteeing ongoing institutional support. In order to translate the objectives of the SNC into meaningful learning experiences and better educational outcomes for primary-level pupils, these issues must be addressed.

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