PERCEPTIONS OF PRIVATE COLLEGE TEACHERS OF KARACHI ABOUT THE CURRICULUM PRESCRIBED BY SINDH BUREAU OF CURRICULUM (BOC)

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Abstract: Curriculum at the college level is prescribed at provincial level to ensure a standardized education throughout. A prescribed curriculum aligns educational standards and maintains them to ensure teaching standards. In Pakistan the curriculum for intermediate students at both private and government colleges is designed and proposed by Sindh Bureau of Curriculum. The curriculum designing process by Sindh Bureau doesn't recognize teachers' role in the curriculum development process. There are several problems that teachers face when implementing this curriculum in colleges. Teachers of private colleges face a lot of problems in implementing this curriculum. This study aims to explore these issues in teaching a prescribed curriculum. A qualitative paradigm is adopted to probe into teachers' perceptions on a standardized curriculum. Five private college teachers were interviewed to determine these issues which highlighted disconnection with real life, lack of resources and teaching challenges related to the Intermediate curriculum. Findings from this study implies that the missing role of teachers' involvement in curriculum development process needs to be recognized and an updated curriculum is required to meet educational needs of college students in Pakistan.

Key words: Prescribed curriculum, curriculum, English language teaching, teachers, college students

1. Introduction

Background of Sindh Bureau of Curriculum

The Bureau of curriculum and Extension Wing Sindh is located at Jamshoro. It comprises of several in-service and pre-service training institutes. This is responsible for curriculum development, extension services and teachers’ training institutes. Its aim is to develop a knowledge based society. Their vision is “to create a conductive learning environment for students through development of research based curriculum and develop skilled human resources (teachers) by providing need based teacher education and training in order to improve the quality of education in the province.

Higher Secondary Education

The higher secondary education is the “Intermediate Stage”. It is considered a part of college education. Students in this stage study grades XI and XII. Curriculum for all the fields of study is prescribed by the Sindh Bureau of Curriculum along with textbooks.

Prescribed Curriculum

A prescribed curriculum can be defined as having a predetermined content and is tightly controlled. All major decisions on goals, content, skills, learning outcomes, materials and learning activities are
made before developing it. This is given as a prescription to the instruction and participants leaving them with few or no choice.

**Perceptions on a Prescribed Curriculum**

Some educators believe that by prescribing a curriculum to teachers educational institutions will be able to maintain teaching standards. A prescribed curriculum also helps align information from one college to the other preparing students equally for the standardized test as prescribed by Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. It is also helpful as only one type of textbook is taught in all the colleges. Authorizing teachers to make curricular decisions creates confusion over centralizing and decentralizing.

Goodson (1989) on a prescribed curriculum states “This view of curriculum develops from a belief that we can dispassionately define the main ingredients of the course of study and then proceed to teach the various segments and sequences in systematic turn.” Some educationists limit a teacher’s role within the classroom with a focus on instructional practices. This is done in order to standardize education across borders and maintain a single stream of educational outcomes.

However, modern educationists believe that teachers need to play an important role in curriculum development. Teachers are required to get involved in the curriculum development process with curriculum specialists to organize content. Therefore teachers will help curriculum developers align content with student needs. Lampert (1988) emphasizes on the need for teacher involvement in developing a curriculum. Modern educationists believe that authorizing teachers to make curricular decisions creates confusing over centralizing and decentralizing decisions. Teachers should be trusted to make decisions based on individual needs of students. This viewpoint arises from the belief that teachers know best what the curriculum should look like as they directly work with students.

According to Ben-Peretz (1980) “Teacher participation in the curriculum planning process is considered essential, whether it be in the definition of problems or the presentations of concrete solutions in the form of program of studies.”

Priestley, et al. (2012) refer to a research done by Osborne et al. (1997) that when curriculum and policy are prescriptive they arouse negative agency like resistance and conspiracy. It is believed that when the curriculum policy is imposed on the teachers they not only hinder its effective delivery but also resist it in all aspects of teaching. He also highlights the controversy regarding an individual teacher’s translation of the prescribed curriculum over ‘oblivion’ and ‘autonomy’. Results of various researches on a prescribed curriculum have shown that teachers tend to develop a strong resistance on scripted instructions and they likewise develop a habit of altering the curriculum according to students’ needs.

Thus whether a college curriculum should be prescribed or enactive is still under debate that needs to be understood by carefully analyzing the perceptions of college teachers and their opinions on the prescribed curriculum.

**2. Literature Review**

Modern educationists believe that teacher involvement in curriculum development is essentially important and necessary as they are the direct implementers of the curriculum. The need for teacher involvement aroused concerns after several complaints by teachers on a prescribed curriculum. In a research by Stolk, Jong, and Pilot (2011) it was found that teachers were having problems motivating students to learn chemistry concepts predefined in the curriculum and so they wanted changes in the lesson unit. It was determined that when teachers adapted the prescribed curriculum it didn’t reflect goals of curriculum experts. For these concerns educators and researchers over the years stress the need for teacher involvement in curriculum design. Schlee, Libler, and Shriner (2010) emphasizes on the need for a curriculum to be subject-centered and student-centered simultaneously integrating innovative strategies in the curriculum.

For years researchers have been working to find out the effectiveness of an emergent curriculum over a prescribed curriculum. Some educationists still advocate for the prescribed curriculum for several benefits that it brings. According to Obara and Sloan (2009), textbooks were standardized to foster
conceptual approach. He explains that standardized materials are not only comprehensive and coherent but they also ensure student motivation and engagement. Educationists holding this view believe that a good quality standard of education is maintained when the curriculum and curriculum resources are standardized when it is developed by experts and prescribed to teachers.

Observations by Reyr, Reys, Barnes, Beem and Papick (1997) served to develop the view that curriculum materials promote teacher development and when teachers work with the prescribed curriculum they experience professional growth. A research study by Remilliard (2005) stated that curriculum is regulated to raise standards of low income communities. Educationists with a view point of a mandated curriculum advocates the merits of a prescribed curriculum in regulating education standards across the country. They believe that the teachers can successfully adapt and adopt the mandated curriculum according to student needs and requirements.

On the other hand some educationists stress on the need for teacher participation in the curriculum development. This is so because the teachers are the direct implementers and observers of the curriculum. As they are in constant contact with the students they are well about their needs and requirements. According to Hughes (1973) when teachers participate in the curriculum development process, it serves to fill the gap between curriculum materials and actual teaching and learning process. The results of his study indicated that teachers lacked expertise that has affected learning negatively. It also proposed that curriculum materials should be appropriate to the context. As teachers are the direct implementers of the curriculum they need to be included in curriculum development so that they become aware of the intentions of the curriculum. It also serves to establish a link between curriculum goals and curriculum materials by effective contributions by teachers who are part of the curriculum development process.

Choppin (2011) conducted a study to determine how curriculum resources created an impact on curriculum materials. Through a research done on three teachers he found that one of them followed instructions from curriculum materials and the result was that they couldn’t understand what they had learned from curriculum materials. Another teacher adapted tasks according to students’ thinking and to engage them. This teacher claimed that her adaptations had to be aligned with the curriculum designers’ intentions. The third participant teacher claimed that she only adapted tasks a little as she believed materials of the prescribed curriculum were according to her goals. This research suggested that teachers need to be aware of curriculum resources and rational in order to adopt curriculum in their teaching. The results of this study showed that when teachers are not aware of the curriculum interventions they fail to deliver in the classrooms. The main challenge they face is aligning the needs of students with the curriculum objectives.

The findings of the research by Ogawa, Sandholtz, and Scribner (2003) showed that standard based curriculum caused district standards to fall and narrowed the curriculum along with instructional strategies. The teachers are unable to implement the curriculum successfully as they fail to alter teaching strategies according to curriculum objectives. This is caused by lack of curriculum knowledge and materials that is imposed on teachers. According to Remillard and Bryans (2004) revealed that teachers used the curriculum material according to their own perceptions ignoring their alignment with the goals curriculum material. Teachers face challenges when adapting the curriculum materials in their instructional strategies as these are new to teachers and not according to their perceived believes of the curriculum. Teachers find it difficult to align their instructional strategies with that of the prescribed curriculum. In a research by Doherty and Travers (1984) it was found that teachers wanted the liberty to chose and know what is to be taught in classrooms. It is essential that the
curriculum experiences given to the students must be in relation to real life context. Establishing the role of interdisciplinary connections between the curriculum and real life of students has been emphasized in (Blueprints For Reforms, 1997).

In a study conducted by Kirkgöz (2008) it was determined that there were gaps between curriculum objectives and teachers’ innovative strategies. This was an effect of hindrances caused by the limited understanding of the curriculum among teachers, their previous beliefs, inappropriate instructional support and lack of resources. According to Prophet (1995) there was no effect on teaching and learning of the curriculum intervention because the teachers rejected it. When new ideas were imposed on teachers they were reluctant to accept them. Stara (2012) states that analysis of limitations of a prescribed curriculum will help in determining why desired results are achieved despite having innovative measures in the curricula.

In Pakistan the curriculum is prescribed to respond to the structure of educational institutes’ system (Hussain, Sarwar, Bashir, & Shah, 2013). Mahmood (2010) states textbooks for teachers are the primary curriculum and source of lessons. Textbooks are standardized to ensure a single quality of education throughout the country in all private and public colleges. By conducting content analysis of science textbooks he also found the absence of material to address objective no. 3 of the national curriculum of Pakistan. This means that the curriculum material isn’t completely covered in textbooks which is being used as the main curriculum resource in classrooms. As not only the curriculum but also textbooks being the sole curriculum resource available to teachers are designed by externals. The teachers find it very difficult to relate the content of curriculum materials to student needs and adapt them in their instructional strategies. Thus teaching becomes a challenge for many for the above explained reasons.

According to the findings of a research by Kausar and Akhtar (2012) college teachers believed the English curriculum of the Intermediate to be ineffective for English language learning. Teachers felt that the current system was unsuccessful in catering to problems and difficulties faced by college teachers. She stated that as the curriculum planners failed to understand the objectives, educational policies couldn’t be adopted effectively in Pakistan. Memon (1999) emphasized on the urgent need for teachers and curriculum planners to work collaboratively in the process of curriculum development. Teachers felt that the English curriculum failed to develop language skills and did not engage students in learning.

According to Akhtar (2012) most of the curriculum planners in Pakistan are bureaucrats and educationists having no first-hand experience with classroom teaching. Furthermore teachers have no significant representation in curriculum development process. As teachers are not involved in the curriculum development process it is very difficult for them to accept new ideas proposed by the curriculum developers. Thus teachers are not aware of the intentions laid in the curriculum that is prescribed to them and so they can implement it in their teaching effectively.

Several researchers have agreed that curriculum in Pakistan is developed without consulting the stakeholders (Mirza, 2004; Ahsan & Kausar 2012). Even the teachers are not involved in content selection. It is very important for the teacher to be aware of the spirit of the curriculum and have a developed sense of ownership. This can only be done when teachers are involved in the curriculum development process as they are aware of the actualities in the classrooms. Teachers should crucially be involved in the curriculum development process as teaching is not providing one size fits all curriculum to student.

Due to lack of teacher involvement in the curriculum development process, curriculum objectives and resources teachers face many challenges in implementing the prescribed curriculum at college level. In order to find out the challenges faced by teachers of private colleges in Pakistan, questions related to teaching challenges, resource challenges and effectiveness of the prescribed curriculum of the Intermediates were explored in this research. These will serve to highlight the perceptions of private college teachers of Pakistan on the prescribed curriculum and help to develop an understanding of the urgent need of teacher involvement on a greater scale in the curriculum development process in Pakistan.
3. Methodology

3.1. Paradigm

Qualitative research methods were applied on this research. This type of research reveals the target audience's behaviours and perceptions according to specific issues. It makes use of in depth studies of people giving descriptive results. Qualitative research is exploratory, it defines the problem and develops an approach to problem. It explores deep into issues as well as problems related to it.

As the purpose of this research is to determine teachers' views and opinions on a prescribed curriculum, qualitative research suits best to the nature of this research study. Qualitative design is used because it will provide condense descriptions of complex phenomena of this research tracking any unexpected events. It will not only highlight teachers' experiences but will also give voice to their views. It will help to examine important educational matters and curriculum issues in private colleges.

3.2. Design

Phenomenology approach is used for this research. It is concerned with studying experiences from an individual's perceptive. This approach identifies the phenomena by finding out how they are perceived by the participants in a situation. It emphasizes on the importance of personal experiences and its interpretation.

This approach is used to probe into people's motivation and opinions. They are effective in highlighting experiences of individuals from their own perspectives. This design was selected particularly for this research because it probes into vivid experiences of individuals. Such a design will help this research study to inquire deep into college teachers' experiences with the prescribed curriculum of the intermediates and to determine their opinions and feelings for this particular curriculum.

As the interviews are dynamic in nature and engages participants actively than in a structured survey this provided an opportunity to probe into the opinions that college teachers hold regarding the prescribed curriculum. It also provided an opportunity to observe, record and interpret nonverbal communications as participants' feedback.

3.3. Participants

The participants of this research were female teachers having different experience of teaching at the college level. They were aged between 27 and 45 years. Their experience of teaching at the intermediate level is between 2 to 7 years.

1) Ms. Haniya belongs to a renowned private college. She has been teaching Chemistry to Intermediate students since 7 years. She holds a master's degree in chemistry and is currently enrolled in M.Phil. Program at Karachi University.

2) Ms. Tauqeer is a physics lecturer at the same college with one and a half year of experience in college teaching. She is graduate in applied physics from University of Karachi. Previously she had been part of several professional development programs and have served as an O’Level coordinator at a private school.

3) Ms. Sara is a masters in Zoology, teaching the intermediates since 6 years at another college of Karachi. She holds her second masters in English Literature from University of Karachi. She has participated in several workshops at her college.

4) Ms. Romana is currently working as the civics lecturer since 8 years and she teaches the intermediates and bachelors. She holds a degree in. She has worked as a teacher trainer and have also been a part of the Sindh Textbook Board team to develop books for grades 1-5.

5) Ms. Safinaz works at a convent college as an Education teacher. She has done her Master in education and has 4 year experience of teaching the intermediates. She has attended several teachers training workshop and is aware of the curriculum development process.
3.4. Instrumentation

Random sampling method was used to ensure equal chance of participation of teachers. A semi structured interview guide was used and in depth interviews were conducted of individuals separately. These interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. The questions were designed along with probes to get an insight into teachers’ perceptions.

Q1 was asked to determine college teachers’ point of view regarding the content of the prescribed curriculum. Q2 focused on highlighting any challenges they faced with this particular curriculum. Q3 gave an insight into the availability and requirement of resources according to the intermediate curriculum. Q4 helped in determining different kinds of problems faced by college teachers with the prescribed curriculum. Q5 enabled a detailed description of teachers’ perceptions on their level of autonomy when they teach a curriculum prescribed by an external body. Q6 probed into views held by teachers regarding this curriculums’ effectiveness. Q7 finally focused on whether college teachers are willing to participate in the curriculum development process or not.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data collected through in depth interviews of the participants on the digital recorder will be transcribed. Common themes regarding the research phenomenon will be determined and this data obtained from the interviews will be analyzed manually.

3.6. Procedure

The teachers were given a consent letter which they signed to ensure confidentiality as participants for this research. To maintain their privacy pseudo names were used. A time slot was set for the interview within college timings to avoid any inconvenience.

The participants were asked questions from the interview guide and their interview was recorded as an audio. The participants described their phenomenon experience in the interview which was gathered as data. The participants were encouraged to describe their experiences in detail including thoughts, feelings and memories. While interviewing probes were used for clarification and examples were asked to obtain details of the phenomena. These interviews were then transcribed and returned to the participant teachers for their final approval. After receiving their final consent the transcripts were then interpreted to obtain the perceived meaning from the interview responses. Nvivo was used for data interpretation.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this research revealed that college teachers have similar perceptions regarding the prescribed curriculum. The three major themes identified in this study are:

1) No real life connection
2) Limited resources in classrooms
3) Teaching challenges

Thus, a detailed explanation of these themes obtained from the collected data is demonstrated as follows.

No real life connection

According to Contardi (2000) students are taught subjects in a way that they move from one discipline to another without any connection of the learned content with real life situations. All the teachers agreed on disconnected pieces of information in their subjects without establishing any connections with students’ experiences and thus losing purposefulness in the learning process.

According to Ms. Haniya the main problem with this curriculum is that the syllabus is too superficial. It is full of theories that area no it applicable in real life situations.
"We learn the theory separately we live the life separately. We are not connecting the theory with the real life problems that this not only makes it difficult for her students to understand complex concepts in chemistry."

Not only has that she also believed that her students are not being prepared for global challenges.

"How is this curriculum meeting our daily needs?"

This participant claimed that she feels that the physics practical are not connecting to the theories in the book. The theory related to physics is covered on a superficial level. The theory is entirely different from the practical, making it difficult for her to deliver concepts to students.

"Practical and theory of physics are not related."

Ms. Tauqeer wants practical related to the theoretical content available in the book. According to Hill (2005) when students learn in meaningful context their ability to build knowledge and understand scientific concepts are enhanced and is even more effective when this connects with other disciplines.

In Ms. Sara’s view the practical that the students need to perform as are not applicable in real life. Even though the content is condensed but it still doesn’t focus on essential knowledge required by the students of this century. She believes this curriculum is not preparing students for the global age.

"I always try to relate the textbook with the daily life activities.....textbook is enough but I think it should also teach something related to their surroundings." "From chapter 5 the theory and diagram I've seen is not relating."

Connections of the disciples with real life situations is highly necessary because when subject themes are combined students are able to develop meaningfulness in the subject matter. Such a material should drive learning instead of being a mere piece information.

The contents in the textbooks and the curriculum is giving them a lot of information but it is not in too depth and also it is not relating to their daily lives. How should education is given nowadays is not there. This is what Ms. Romana communicated in her interview.

"Information on education is there, topics are good it should develop skills of a teacher like an educator basically." "Everything is given superficially."

As mentioned in Hill’s (2005) studies have demonstrated that learning is effective when the contents of the curriculum are correlated as well as connected to real life experiences of the students.

For Ms. Safinaz the contents of the civics curriculum was just fine in the amount but she felt they were not actually learning anything. Students are getting enough knowledge but it is not being practiced. They are learning things only in books not applying in their life.

"The book tells about civil rights but how will they be good citizens without applying in their lives." The book is filled with civic knowledge but students can’t practice it holistically because of the nature of the curriculum.

When the content and disciplines are not connected and lack an established relationship with students experience s then such an information is not only connected making learning purposeful but also making relevance to student’s lives is lost.

**Limited resources**

Teachers’ views are somewhat the same over the availability of resources for teaching their respective disciplines. All of them agreed that there was a need of sufficient resources to deliver this curriculum. They find it difficult to explain complex concepts to students.

"Chemicals are hazard don't touch" as Ms. Haniya feels that students are not given a chance to experiment with different chemicals because these are perceived to be dangerous and a serious to the students’ safety. They are not only discouraged to work in labs but certain lab requirements are left I unavailable. She finds it difficult to explain different concepts as they require being demonstrated in the lab. On the other hand the classrooms are not equipped with multimedia where she can alternatively show the videos of these experiments.
Similarly this physics teacher believes the same. She feels that for every student’s chargers must be available instead of appliances as many topics require using charges in practical. Sharing her experiences she tells that to teach physics theory need a lot of resources like multimedia or small apparatus in each classroom related to daily life.

"I need resources I'm not satisfied with the rote learning. I want things. I want to show videos to them and they should make small devices at home.”

As stated in the study by Oliver and McLoughlin (1999) when learning resources are integrated into the course it results in effective learning. Similarly, Choppin (2011) in his research discuss the case of a teacher who developed learned adaptation using curriculum resources Ina way that enabled enhancement in sense making opportunities for students.

Ms. Sara agrees that did curriculum requires use of resources. She wants to use videos to explain concepts that cannot be taught verbally. "If I'm showing videos then the students can easily in understand you know instead of making graphs on the board. Commenting on the curriculum of zoology, she says "Everything is given superficially." "From chapter 5 the theory and the diagram I've seen is not relating." In order to build a connection between the two she needs resources like multimedia but these are not available except for the ones required in the lab. With the unavailability of resources she finds it difficult to teach complex concepts.

According to Ms. Romana even this subject requires resources even this does not have any practical. Everything is briefly explained in the text books but I want to share examples.

“But I don't have document of curriculum or I can't show them videos on different kinds of teaching. The topics are there in the textbooks but the skills are not developed.”

She believes that the absence of multimedia is playing a part in the delivery of this subject.

It is not only the believe of teachers but it is observable that the availability of appropriate resources not only motivates and engages learners but it also creates a platform for them to understand and practice complex and difficult to understand topics.

According to Drake and Sherin (2009) the way teachers adapt and modify curriculum resources reflects their vision of the curriculum. The availability of resources and teachers’ access to it ensures fulfilment of the curriculum vision.

Ms. Safinaz states that only text book are there but no civil rights documents for the students. There is no multimedia to show videos to students. TV needs to be made available so that they can ponder and debate over issues. Students are not taken to field trips.

Teachers have complained of student behavior and the basic reason is that they are taught using the lecture method. With an immensely diversified classroom I becomes difficult for both the teacher and the student to come up to expectations. Curriculum materials here play the vital role. As explained by Rebora (2011), diverse learners are easily and effectively catered by strengthening and improving quality of the programs and resources.

Teaching Challenges

According to research standard based teaching gives nothing but preparation for exam, for teachers there is less teaching and more exam preparations. When the instructional strategies are adapted, activities included to clear concepts and to fill the gaps between the curriculum and real life there is rejection by the students, parents and the college management. They don't want to be taught in this way as these activities will not come in the exams. So it becomes a challenge for the teacher to incorporate activities to enhance learning as well as catering to student needs and the intermediate board requirement. These are some of the viewpoints that Ms.Haniya highlighted.

Ms. Tauqeer on the other hand found that challenges were not in her delivery of the lessons but the fact that the metric curriculum is far too easy and when the students come to the intermediates they find it very tough to understand complex concepts and cope up with the intense syllabus.

"Their basic is weak actually."
According to Buckingham (2008) when a well prepared picture or diagram is shown with complex data sets the brain is able to easily grasp complex concepts and relationships.

Ms. Sara mentions two major challenges that she face with this curriculum. The first is that for practical concepts there are no pictorials which makes it really difficult for her to explain to the student. "For example, immune system in the body so when I'm explaining the topic students are not familiar with it. For that I have to take them into the scene because for such topics we don't have any pictorial representation. For that I have to build the ground, then I have to explain different systems and then I have to relate those with the immune system."

The other challenge that she face is that she has to relate the topics from the text books with the students’ context. For her it is a tough task, first creating example from students' surroundings then relating those with the topic and finally engaging them in activities done in class.

For Ms. Romana it is sometimes difficult to create examples according to real life context of students and requires a lot of hard work. Delivery in the classroom becomes a challenge when the students hinder participating in the class as this is not on which they will be tested on in the board exams. The only want to rote learn the content so that they can produce answers in their examinations. Creating meaningful lessons becomes a challenge because of lack of relatedness between the objectives of the prescribed curriculum and learning needs of college students.

Similarly Ms. Safinaz identifies some of the major challenges for her to be adapting instructional strategies to cope up with the curriculum standards but she believes it is a failure to motivate students as this lacks relevance in their daily lives.

“I have to design activities to relate text with students’ life experiences but students are not interested because they say it will not come in exams.” Without appropriate resources and field trips teaching civics becomes quite a challenge because it is not a theory subject action is involved in its study.

5. Conclusion

Thus, it can be concluded from this research that college teachers in private colleges of Pakistan face many problems and several challenges while delivering the Intermediate curriculum as prescribed by the Sindh Bureau of Curriculum. The purpose of this study was to explore issues and challenges connected with the prescribed curriculum as perceived by private college teachers, sharing their views and experiences. Since this research was limited to private colleges only a limited set of issues were highlighted. Where there is a massive population studying in government colleges, thus this phenomenon needs to be studied on a much wider scale meanwhile targeting a larger population both quantitatively and qualitatively to determine challenges and problems associated with such a curriculum not only faced by the majority teachers’ but also considering learning issues identified by the college students. The findings of this research will serve to aware national curriculum developers, Ministry of Education and Sindh Bureau of Curriculum about the problems that college teachers face with this prescribed curriculum. Furthermore, this might aid to promote curriculum reforms suggesting a need for change in the curriculum development process on Intermediate level in Pakistan.

References


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