

Title of the submission:

Critical issues and solutions in creating a culture-based Pakistan Studies syllabus for the schools in the Northern Areas of Pakistan

Area of Submission: Curriculum, research and development

Key words: Curriculum, identity, learning motivation and culture

Name of the author: Khurshid Sana Khan

Survival and preservation of culture and cultural identity has been an important issue in the world today. Education in general and curriculum in particular are one of the channels of cultural survival and its transmission to the next generation. Therefore, selection of content of the curriculum gets prime importance as it could enable students to understand and interact with their surrounding local environment and also to develop any further intellectual thinking. It is evident from research that the socio-cultural background of the students and culturally relevant pedagogy could affect students' attitude towards learning.

The main aim of my research was to highlight the critical issues which could be encountered while making changes in the current textbook of Pakistan studies used at the grade nine in schools in the Northern Areas of Pakistan (NAs) to make it cultural-based and to shed light on the possible solutions of the issues. I found it important for my research to determine what aims or goals were directing the behaviour of learning in NAs' students, what was the associated significance of extrinsic and intrinsic motives of learning, to investigate the effect of cultural factors on these motives and to find the ways in which to create Pakistan Studies Syllabus with elements from local culture, history, and heritage of the NAs. The aim was achieved through conducting personal interviews and classes room observations and videos in two towns (Gilgit and Karimabad) of Northern Areas. Total 80 respondents (students, teachers, researchers and parents) were interviewed using specifically designed questionnaires. It was found through the analysis of the data that students had intrinsic and extrinsic motives for studying Pakistan Studies. Students were found extrinsically motivated to get success in examination and likeness from their peers and teachers. Likewise, students were also found intrinsically motivated to observe and learn about their surroundings thus, they liked to visit local old forts and festivals and reading about the war of independence of the NAs. They were also found noticing the absence of mountains and differences of buildings, dresses and language in cities. The majority of the respondents shared the view that though success in examination was important for them, they were unwilling to leave learning Pakistan Studies. In other words, for studying Pakistan Studies, students were willing to sacrifice their extrinsic motives such as saving time to learn computers to earn money or to do examination preparation to get good exams results. The reason given was that through Pakistan Studies students could learn about their surrounding environment in which they were more interested.

However, while investigating whether students were really satisfied with the present textbook or not, it was found that an overwhelming

majority of students shared the common view with their teachers, researchers and parents that the re-development or changes were needed in the book. Some of the most important needed changes mentioned were inclusion of the description of the NAs, removal of the out-dated information, and usage of neutral account of history. Students negated desire to parental likeness or pressure as being a motive for learning Pakistan Studies. However, they expressed their love for Pakistan and they commented that they liked to read Pakistan studies because they love Pakistan.

Now a question rises as to how important it was for the students to learn about their local environment. In the view of respondents, different environments make a country, therefore, understanding of ones local environment could bring people close by appreciating the feelings and culture of each other and this ultimately, could help the students to understand the broader context of national identity. It was interesting to note that if on one hand students expressed their love for Pakistan then on the other hand they mentioned reading about some national heroes like Mohammed Ali Jinnah and his historical fourteen points, Dr. Mohammed Iqbal and Muslim preachers of the sub-continent as 'boring' topics along with topics of minerals and Mughal rule in the Indian sub-continent. Since the students also expressed their love for Pakistan, therefore, the reason that could be suggested is that the link between the war of independence of Pakistan and religion preachers at Southern Pakistan and those at the NAs was missing as federally controlled syllabus, being used in the NAs, lacked local examples from the NAs. Therefore, it could be argued that learning about local culture and environment of the NAs through the textbooks could have formative influence on students because then they could find harmony between their textbooks and the surrounding environment.

It was also important for my study to investigate whether or not teachers were helping students to elicit their intrinsic and extrinsic motives through their presentations and interactions with students in classroom. It was found that if teachers could understand and foster students' motives behind learning Pakistan studies then they could promote their motivation towards learning because classroom videos highlighted that the students were motivated to participate in classroom if the description of the NAs was done in the class.

A brief study of applicability and practicality of integrated curriculum project in the NAs was also part of my study because geographically the NAs are part of central Asia and common organisation called the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) has been taking parallel educational initiatives in the NAs and in three central Asian republics: Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Developmental initiatives were started in the central Asian republics, looking at the success of the same types of projects in the neighbouring regions of the NAs of Pakistan. As the AKF has been involved in developing a culture-based curriculum for universities in the three above mentioned republics, while in the NAs it has also been working on the integrated curriculum project therefore, it was important for my project to investigate the practicality and applicability of integrated curriculum in the NAs which is focusing to incorporate local examples in the textbook. Data showed that a significant number of teachers and researchers were unaware about the

term "integrated curriculum" itself and its possible advantages and limitations.

Therefore, by looking at the findings where primary information on the integrated curriculum was significantly weak though the project has been started for last three years, and by looking at the scarcity of trained teachers and monetary resources in the NAs it may be indicated that the integrated curriculum might face pressure during its application in the NAs and this might also have some influence on the culture-based programme in the central Asia.

The last part of my research was to investigate the critical issues and possible solutions in developing culture-based textbook for Pakistan Studies. The first critical issue in redevelopment of the textbook, was the political sensitivity of the topic because after NAs annexation to Pakistan in 1948 by the will of the people, the legal status of the area remained unsolved and this area is called Federally Administered NAs (FANA) which does not belong to any province. The second issue could be the involvement of local political elements unhappy with the present status of the NAs and which sometimes raise the slogan of Baluristan. The areas that are included in it are Gilgit, Skardu, Ghanchi and adjoining areas. These political elements could be unhappy with educational handling of the issue.

The third issue could be to decide what should be the content of the textbook. This would be a difficult question to answer and it has been a topic of debate amongst the researchers. During my last research in the NAs, though respondents pointed out some elements of local culture, history and heritage of the NAs as needed changes in the textbooks, the issue would still need considerable thinking because experience in Sri Lanka has shown that biased and culturally provocative information in textbooks could make schools a basis of social conflict. The fourth issue that was also raised by respondents was the influence of bureaucracy on the content of the textbook to make it pro-Islamic or pro-government. In their view, changes in the textbook could only bring positive results when content of the textbook would be without the influence of bureaucracy.

An important point to focus on is that the actual problem might not be to bring changes in the textbook firstly because, the government itself has been considering changes in the textbook for the entire country and secondly, there are already other educational systems like the foreign schools and religious schools called Maderas operating, besides the government schools, with their own curricula. Therefore, the issue might lie in the form it is presented to the government in a non-political manner. Therefore, it could be said that the solution lies in the way the issue of local identity would be raised to the government in non-political way that following the example of other four provinces, if local identity is given to students through books, this could contribute to national unity. Educational initiatives taken by local and foreign organisations (for example, the AKF) in the NAs and in the neighbouring central Asian States as well as the changing world scenario of politics could be one of the main agents of change and solution providers for the issue of local identity as a reflection of national identity through the textbooks.

In conclusion it can be said that students of the Northern Areas of Pakistan were found highly motivated to study their surrounding environment and they were also found aware of the uniqueness of their environment and the manifestations of their culture, history and the heritage in it. Knowledge and realisation of this could help teachers to create a learning environment that could elicit the type of motivation important for students' learning. The finding of this research could have implications for comparative research between the Pakistani part of central Asia (i.e. the NAs) and that of the ex-Soviet part like Tajikistan, Kyrgystan and Kazakhstan on the effect of usage and non-usage of local culture, history, and heritage on learning motivation and understanding of students in classrooms.