

Unveiling Cultural Narratives: A Qualitative Inquiry into Cultural Representation in Language Education under Pakistan's Single National Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research delves into the cultural narratives encapsulated in language education under Pakistan's Single National Curriculum (SNC). The study scrutinizes the integration and portrayal of cultural representation within the SNC by employing a methodological framework comprising document analysis and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders such as curriculum developers, educators, and policy experts. It particularly focuses on the implications of these representations for students' cultural awareness and identity formation. The findings unveil a pronounced emphasis on national narratives within the curriculum, which tends to eclipse the multifaceted local cultural identities and constrains exposure to broader global cultural perspectives. This predominant focus on national narratives significantly influences students' perceptions and understanding of their cultural heritage, potentially leading to a constricted perception of Pakistani culture. The research highlights an essential need for a more equitable and inclusive integration of cultural narratives within the curriculum, accentuating the significance of harmonizing local and global cultural elements in educational content. Based on these insights, the study proposes several recommendations, including enhancing teacher training programs, involving diverse stakeholders in the curriculum development process, and a continuous and rigorous evaluation of how cultural narratives are represented and conveyed within the curriculum.

Keywords: Single National Curriculum, Cultural Narratives, Language Education, Cultural Diversity, Identity Formation

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Pakistan's linguistic landscape is remarkably diverse, mirroring its rich cultural fabric. This diversity, characterized by many languages spoken across different provinces, is integral to the nation's identity. Each province in Pakistan has its linguistic profile steeped in unique cultural practices and traditions. Rahman (2002) discusses this linguistic diversity, emphasizing how it shapes various aspects of life in Pakistan, including education.

The significance of this linguistic and cultural diversity in Pakistan extends beyond communication; it reflects its people's multifaceted identities and histories. As Rahman (2002) points out, the languages spoken across Pakistan's provinces are more than just mediums of everyday interaction. Still, they are carriers of cultural heritage, encapsulating their speakers' traditions, stories, and values. This makes

understanding the varied linguistic landscape essential to comprehend the complexities of cultural representation in educational environments fully.

Therefore, Pakistan's educational policies and practices must be attuned to this cultural and linguistic diversity. Mansoor (2005) highlights the challenge of balancing the need for a cohesive national educational framework with respecting and integrating the diverse cultural narratives across the provinces. The diversity of Pakistan's linguistic landscape also significantly impacts language education, influencing the choice of languages taught, the selection of literature, and the integration of cultural content into language curricula, further shaping students' cultural understanding and identity formation. In this context, examining cultural representation in Pakistan's educational system, especially under the Single National Curriculum (SNC), becomes a critical endeavor. It explores how the curriculum addresses Pakistan's diverse cultural and linguistic realities and the implications for students' cultural awareness and identity formation.

Overview of the Single National Curriculum (SNC)

In Pakistan, a significant educational reform that aims to standardize the educational experience across the country is the Single National Curriculum (SNC). The government launched this program to guarantee consistent educational attainment across socioeconomic and regional origins, which is at the center of its educational policy. The scope and ramifications of this reform are examined by Numan (2023) in his master's thesis, "The Single National Curriculum: A Path to Centralized Educational Reforms in Pakistan." He emphasizes the National Curriculum Committee's (NCC) involvement in bringing standards from province to province and implementing the SNC gradually, in line with observations made by the World Education Services and Naqvi (2021). (2020).

Fostering equity in society is the main objective of the SNC, as stated by Numan (2023) and backed by research from the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (2021). Equitable educational opportunities for all children are sought to create national cohesion and integration. The project also aims to close the educational gap between Pakistan's mainstream and private educational institutions and madrasahs. Pakistan Today's talks on this topic went into deeper detail (2020).

However, the implementation of the SNC is challenging. Numan (2023) critically analyzes the hurdles in the uniform application of the SNC across diverse educational settings in Pakistan. He highlights the need for a curriculum adaptable to local contexts while being sensitive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the country. The success of this ambitious project depends not only on the content of the curriculum but also on the training of educators and the provision of adequate resources across the country. The SNC represents a landmark shift in Pakistan's educational landscape, aiming to unify and uplift the educational standards nationwide. While its goals align with global educational standards and aspirations for quality and equitable education, Numan (2023) emphasizes that effective implementation will require a concerted effort from various stakeholders in the education sector. The journey of the SNC from policy to practice involves navigating complex challenges, but it holds the potential to transform Pakistan's educational system significantly.

Language Education and Cultural Representation

Language education in Pakistan is deeply intertwined with cultural representation. This intersection is crucial because language textbooks and teaching materials serve as tools for linguistic development and as mediums through which cultural narratives are conveyed and perceived. Arshad et al. (2020) and Amir (2019) have highlighted that English textbooks in Pakistan are imbued with cultural references that significantly shape learners' understanding of local and global cultures. This dual emphasis is essential for teaching cultural awareness and knowledge and helping with language learning.

The global significance of English lends a nuanced depth to Pakistan's educational system's portrayal of culture. Since English is the universal language, it frequently contains Western cultural components that, in educational settings, may take precedence over local cultural narratives. According to Amir (2019), this may result in a Western-centric viewpoint in language instruction, which might marginalize regional cultures and viewpoints. Concerns over how Pakistani culture is portrayed in language instruction and how it affects pupils' sense of cultural identity are brought up by this discrepancy.

Cultural Diversity in Pakistan's Educational Landscape

The educational scene in Pakistan is marked by a notable degree of cultural variety. Every province has distinct cultural traits and a distinct language identity. According to Ashraf et al. (2021), this diversity is frequently represented in educational methods and resources, calling for a careful balancing act between fostering national unity and honoring local cultural identities.

Much discussion surrounds the inclusion of regional cultural elements in Pakistani English textbooks. Shah et al. (2017) have investigated this matter and observed that although these textbooks incorporate elements of the local culture, the degree and mode of this incorporation influence students' comprehension of the culture and the development of their identities. Making sure that these resources appropriately and faithfully capture the complex fabric of Pakistani culture, with all of its varied regional and linguistic backgrounds, is the problem.

Previous Studies on Curriculum Design and Cultural Representation

According to research on curriculum design in Pakistan, language instruction and cultural representation have a complicated relationship. Research has indicated that the task of incorporating varied cultural narratives into curricula and textbooks while adhering to national educational objectives is frequently encountered. According to Arshad et al. (2020), careful consideration is given to balancing local and global cultural content when including it in English language training materials.

These conversations have picked up steam since Pakistan implemented the Single National Curriculum (SNC). Although the SNC intends to standardize curriculum across the nation, discussions over its potential effects on how Pakistan's many cultural narratives are portrayed have been triggered by this endeavor. Naqvi (2021) highlights that detractors contend that the SNC could result in a standardization of educational material, thus undermining the rich cultural diversity that distinguishes Pakistan's educational landscape. Furthermore, creating a curriculum that respects and integrates regional cultures while promoting a cohesive national identity is a difficulty, as the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (2021) discusses.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The technique used in the qualitative study "Unveiling Cultural Narratives: A Qualitative Inquiry into Cultural Representation in Language Education under Pakistan's Single National Curriculum (SNC)" is outlined in this part. It details the study design, data collection techniques (such as semi-structured interviews and document analysis), and data analysis methodology.

Similarly, the study uses a qualitative approach, well-known for successfully examining difficult topics like cultural representation in language instruction. The work of Creswell and Poth (2018), who support qualitative methodologies to provide profound insights into participants' experiences and viewpoints, is the foundation for this methodological decision. Examining how cultural narratives are incorporated into language instruction and how they affect students' comprehension of their own and other cultures is a particularly good use of this design.

DATA COLLECTION

Document Analysis: Analyzing documents is a crucial component in gathering data. The Single National Curriculum guidelines, language textbooks used in Pakistani schools, and policy documents about language education in Pakistan will all be thoroughly examined in this process. As Bowen (2009) described, document analysis enables the examination of the cultural aspects shown in educational resources and their content, offering insights into the intended and real cultural narratives that are portrayed.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Semi-structured interviews are carried out with significant players in the education domain, such as curriculum designers, educators, and specialists in education policy. These interviews aim to collect rich, qualitative data on these stakeholders' experiences and opinions about using cultural narratives in language instruction under the SNC. The semi-structured method adheres to Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick's (2008) principles by balancing pre-planned questions and interviewees' freedom to share their opinions and experiences.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis, characterized by flexibility in recognizing, interpreting, and reporting themes within data, serves as a guide for data analysis. This methodology adheres to the structure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which includes organizing the dataset, providing a thorough description, and interpreting the research question. Initial concept noting, pattern recognition and careful reading and rereading of the gathered data are the first steps in the process. The dataset is rigorously coded, and codes are compiled into possible themes. After that, these themes are examined and improved to ensure they appropriately convey the meanings of the data. The last phase consists of giving themes names and definitions, thoroughly investigating them, and connecting them to the research questions and body of previous work.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This extensive section examines cultural narratives in language instruction under Pakistan's Single National Curriculum (SNC) and their effects on students' identity and cultural awareness development. It does this by presenting the results of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. These results are broken down into several important categories for in-depth study.

Cultural Narratives in Language Education under the SNC

Emphasis on National Unity Over Local Diversity

The document analysis revealed a significant focus on national history, heroes, and events in the SNC language textbooks. Curriculum developers and teachers, during interviews, acknowledged this as a strategic move to foster national unity. However, there were concerns about the marginalization of local languages and cultures, which appear underrepresented in the curriculum. This finding aligns with the research by Amir (2019), who noted a similar trend in language textbooks prioritizing national narratives over local diversity.

Representation of Global Cultures

The representation of global cultures in the curriculum is found to be limited and often stereotypical. Language teachers, in particular, pointed out that while there are occasional mentions of global cultures, these are superficial and need more depth for a comprehensive understanding of global diversity. This is

consistent with Arshad et al. (2020) observation that a dominant national focus on educational materials often overshadows global cultural perspectives.

Traditional Values and Contemporary Relevance

During interviews, teachers and policy professionals have differing opinions about the curriculum's emphasis on traditional Pakistani values and customs. While some applauded the emphasis on protecting cultural heritage, others expressed doubts about its applicability in a world that is changing quickly and becoming more interconnected. This is consistent with research by Shah et al. (2017), which emphasized the difficulties in striking a balance between historical cultural representation and modern society dynamics.

Implications for Students' Cultural Awareness and Identity Formation

National Identity vs. Local Identity Conflicts

While strongly connected to national narratives, students also indicated feeling cut off from their local cultural identities during their interviews. This points to a possible identity formation conflict where the focus on a single national identity may overshadow Pakistan's rich tapestry of local identities. This result is consistent with the analysis of Ashraf et al. (2021), who examined how national-centric curricula affected regional cultural identities.

Awareness of Global Cultural Dynamics

One important conclusion is that students' exposure to global cultural dynamics is restricted, which may hinder their capacity to understand and value variety across borders. This was especially noticeable compared to the curriculum's focus on national narratives. As the study shows, these restrictions can greatly impact students' global competency (Arshad et al., 2020).

Adaptation of Cultural Narratives in Pedagogy

Teachers described different strategies for incorporating cultural narratives into their lessons. Some aggressively worked to integrate viewpoints from both local and global contexts, while others strictly followed the curriculum's national focus. This discrepancy suggests differences in how cultural narratives are taught and comprehended in classrooms; Naqvi's research emphasizes this issue (2021).

Role of Language in Cultural Understanding

The study highlights the pivotal role of language education in shaping students' cultural understanding. However, the current approach under the SNC appears to narrow students' cultural perspectives, heavily emphasizing national narratives while insufficiently addressing the diverse cultural realities of Pakistan. This finding aligns with the concerns the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (2021) raised regarding the impact of language education on cultural representation and understanding.

DISCUSSION

This section offers an in-depth discussion of the findings from the study "Unveiling Cultural Narratives: A Qualitative Inquiry into Cultural Representation in Language Education under Pakistan's Single National Curriculum (SNC)." It interprets these findings, compares them with existing literature, and delineates their policy and practical implications.

Interpretation of Findings

Balancing National Unity with Cultural Diversity

The study underscores a significant tension within the SNC between promoting national unity and acknowledging Pakistan's diverse cultural tapestry. While focusing on national narratives aims to foster a unified identity, it inadvertently risks marginalizing the diverse local cultures. This could lead to a homogenized perspective of Pakistani culture, potentially diminishing the country's rich mosaic of unique cultural identities.

Global Cultural Perspectives and Student Preparedness

The curriculum's limited inclusion of global cultural perspectives is a critical concern. In an increasingly interconnected world, understanding and appreciating global diversity is essential. The SNC's current orientation may curtail students' development of global competencies, which are vital in today's global environment.

Comparison with Existing Literature

National vs. Local Cultural Narratives

The study's findings align with existing literature that often indicates a preference for national narratives in national curricula over local or regional ones. Ashraf et al. (2021) discuss this trend, noting that while such prioritization aims to construct a cohesive national identity, it can inadvertently overlook the rich cultural diversity inherent within a nation.

Globalization and Language Education

The SNC's limited representation of global cultures echoes concerns in the literature regarding the role of English as a global language in language education. Amir (2019) points out that an English-centric approach may foster a Western-centric cultural view, potentially overshadowing local and regional cultural narratives.

Policy and Practical Implications

Curriculum Development

The findings recommend a more balanced approach to curriculum creation. Legislators and curriculum developers should consider including various regional cultural aspects in addition to national stories. A curriculum that highlights the diversity of Pakistani culture and unifies it would benefit from such an approach.

Teacher Training and Pedagogical Practices

The study highlights the critical role of teachers in mediating cultural narratives. It suggests the need for focused teacher preparation courses that give instructors the tools to include various cultural viewpoints in their lessons. Teachers must complete this course to traverse the intricacies of cultural representation in language teaching successfully.

Global Cultural Literacy

Educational policy should strongly emphasize incorporating global cultural perspectives into the curriculum, given the growing significance of global literacy. This will give kids the skills and information they need to

communicate with people from different cultures, better preparing them to face the challenges of a globalized world.

Research and Continuous Evaluation

It is essential to conduct ongoing research and SNC evaluation. Subsequent investigations should assess how the curriculum affects students' cultural comprehension and identity development. These observations can help the curriculum be continuously improved to continue to be applicable and successfully reach its learning goals.

CONCLUSION

Important new information about the integration and representation of cultural narratives in language education has been revealed by this study, "Unveiling Cultural Narratives: A Qualitative Investigation into Cultural Representation in Language Education under Pakistan's Single National Curriculum (SNC)." The main conclusions significantly emphasize national narratives in the SNC, frequently at the detriment of regional and international cultural viewpoints. This methodology bears consequences for students' cultural consciousness and identity construction, possibly resulting in a standardized comprehension of Pakistani culture and restricting global cultural literacy.

Subsequent investigations ought to investigate how these curriculum decisions affect students' opinions of their own and different cultures. Research endeavors could investigate pupils' viewpoints from varied cultural origins to ascertain their correlation with the syllabus. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could evaluate the long-term effects of these curriculum narratives on students' cultural identities.

It is advised that a greater variety of cultural narratives, including both local and global viewpoints, be actively incorporated into the curriculum-building process regarding policy practice. Collaboratively designing curricula that involve educators, cultural experts, and community members could help achieve this. Additionally, teacher preparation programs must be improved so that teachers have the abilities and know-how to incorporate a wider variety of cultural narratives into their lessons. In conclusion, continuous assessment and modification of the curriculum are necessary to guarantee its continued relevance and efficacy in a world that is changing quickly.

"Education, in its truest form, is a mirror reflecting the diverse tapestry of a nation's culture and identity; it not only teaches us about the world but also about the rich mosaic of our own heritage." – Muhammad Numan

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