

Social Implications of Pakistan's Single National Curriculum: Fostering Social Cohesion or Conflict?



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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the policy of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) in Pakistan from a sociological perspective, analyzing whether the policy is a tool to promote social cohesion or unintentionally serves to sustain existing social rifts within society. The SNC was introduced in 2020 and is a drastic change to the historically fragmented Pakistani educational environment that scholars have described as an educational apartheid perpetuating ideology- and socioeconomic class-based segregation (Jihad & Jinan, 2026). It is based on recent empirical evidence, policy analysis, and theory in sociology of education to suggest that the top-down, assimilationist strategy of SNC, which is typified by instrumentalization of religion and standardization of curriculum, is of little use and even counterproductive. It has been indicated that the policy promotes ethno-nationalist opposition, increased sectarianism, gender discrimination, and constitutional doubt over federal-provincial power after the 18th Amendment (Jihad & Jinan, 2026; Asghar, 2026). The research findings suggest a different integrative model that would fit the pluralistic identities of Pakistan and tackle the structural inequalities that continue to perpetuate educational disparity.

Key Words

Single National Curriculum, Pakistan, Social Cohesion, Educational Policy, Identity Politics, Religious Minorities, Federalism

Introduction

Education has a paradoxical status in modern societies; it is both a channel of social reproduction and a possible source of transformational change. These two roles are the most significant point of tension within the context of Pakistan, where the implementation of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) in 2020 has become the subject of hot debate among policymakers, educators, and civil society actors (Ali, 2024). On its face, the goals established in the policy, as securing equity in education, promoting national unity, and eradicating disparities related to classes, seem noble. However, the efficacious application and academic content of the SNC have brought forth

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issues of the fact that it might actually cause the social cohesion it claims to improve to be diminished (Louden & Frank, 2025).

It is imperative to note that the history of Pakistan's education provides a critical context for understanding the importance of the SNC. Since gaining independence in 1947, the nation has had several parallel education systems: elite private schools on overseas (e.g., Cambridge and Edexcel) curricula, provincial state schools with localized curricula, and religious seminaries (madrasas) with no more than nominal state control. Scholars have described this fragmented landscape as having been educational apartheid, which, in terms of class, ethnicity, and ideology, strengthens social divisions (Karadag, 2025). The students of the privileged background obtain internationally oriented education with a focus on critical thinking, whereas those of the disadvantaged communities attend under-resourced public schools, where the emphasis is on rote learning and teaching religious values (Showell, 2025).

The SNC was the answer to this divisiveness, which was supposed to standardize education in all school types and end the situation where every child receives equal access to education despite their background (Ministry of Federal Education, 2020, as cited in Shehbaz et al., 2025). However, five years following its introduction, there is still a social consequence of the policy that is subject to controversy. Does standardization facilitate integration, or is it actually what critical theorists call coercive assimilation, which is imposing the dominant norms of culture on the various communities (Jihad & Jinan, 2026)? This paper answers this question through a synthesis of the recent empirical studies, policy studies, and sociological theory (Radtke, 2025).

The analysis will be in five sections. After this introduction, Section 2 examines the Pakistani policy in education and the contextual background of the introduction of the SNC. Section 3 constructs a theoretical framework that is based on social identity theory, critical curriculum studies, and federalism scholarship. Section 4 discusses the empirical data about the practice of the SNC and its social implications, and it is structured in a thematic manner, which focuses on religious minorities, ethnic diversity, gender representation, and constitutional federalism. Section 5 addresses the policy and practice implications of these findings with a suggestion of an alternative integrative model. Section 6 also concludes with a recommendation on how future research and policy development should be done.

Historical Context: Education and Identity in Pakistan

The Colonial Legacy and Post-Independence Educational Development

The Pakistani educational system shows a long-term residual of colonial rule. The British rulers created separate schools to educate the representatives of various social classes: elite schools that were used by the descendants of the members of the princely and noble families, vernacular schools that served the general population, and religious seminaries that worked on their own (Jihad & Jinan, 2026). This hierarchical structure was also a form of colonial rule; it produced an obedient native elite and suppressed access to education among the general population.

This fragmented administration was passed to post-independence governments, who failed to bring about any significant changes. Educational policies like the 1947 Pakistan Educational Conference, through the National Education Policy, 2009, expressed the determination to educate everyone and integrate them into a nation, but continued to uphold institutional rifts. Though the 1973 Constitution made education a provincial domain, the federal government still managed to have an indirect power in education by implementing curriculum development and textbook approval systems (Asghar, 2026).

The Fragmented Educational Landscape

At the beginning of the 2000s, the educational system in Pakistan had become solidified into three streams. Elite private schools, constituting about 1 percent of the number, were the first, and they followed British or American

curricula with children of the upper classes. These schools charged high school fees, had better-qualified teachers, and focused on teaching English-mediated and skills of critical thinking. The graduates of these institutions usually sought higher education in foreign countries or at the most selective universities in Pakistan, and so the elite status was replicated in another generation (Ali et al, 2025).

The second stream included those of the government schools, which were about 70 per cent of the institutions and included the poor in terms of urban and rural areas. Such schools were characterized by chronic underfunding, low quality of teachers, and politicized management. Their schoolwork focused more on memorization of rote and religious education without much focus on critical thinking or analytical abilities. The quality of textbooks differed greatly in the provinces, and the results of learning were still at a very low level (Durrani & Halai, 2018; Qazi & Javid, 2021).

The third stream was religious seminaries or madrasas, which were estimated to have 10,000 to 30,000 institutions. These schools gave free education, lodging, and boarding to about 2 million students who were mostly poor students. They were nearly obsessed with the religious teaching and paid very little attention to worldly things. Most of the madrasas were not political; however, there were instances when some were linked to sectarian violence and radicalization (Chromatic & United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2025).

This three-part order had foreseeable social effects. Students studying in various streams had radically different educational experiences, and they were not able to have inter-group contacts and understanding. The graduates of elite private schools gained access to professional and managerial jobs, the graduates of government schools competed for low positions in the job market of low positions, and madrasa graduates had limited economic opportunities. Class stratification, ethnicity, and sectarianism were strengthened and recreated through educational stratification (Agarwal, 2025).

The Single National Curriculum Initiative

The School National Curriculum (SNC) arose out of the 2018 electoral pledge of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI) party, which promised to impose a uniform curriculum in the country to end the form of education based on classes. By taking the executive power, the Ministry of Federal Education developed the SNC framework and put it into operation by promulgating it in 2020. The policy was first limited to grades 1 to 5, and in the successive years, the higher grades were rolled out progressively (Boeri, 2025).

Research Objectives

1. Ensuring equal educational opportunities for all children regardless of socioeconomic background.
2. promoting national cohesion by providing shared educational content.
3. improving educational quality through standardized learning outcomes; and
4. facilitating student mobility between schools and regions.

Research Questions

To guide this investigation, this article addresses the following research questions, derived directly from the study's core objectives:

1. What empirical evidence supports the claim that the Single National Curriculum functions as an instrument for fostering social cohesion, and what evidence indicates it exacerbates existing societal divisions?
2. How do the SNC's top-down, assimilationist approach and the instrumentalization of religion within its curriculum impact religious minorities, ethnic diversity, and gender representation?
3. In what ways has the SNC's implementation raised constitutional questions regarding federal-provincial authority following the 18th Amendment?

4. What factors explain the SNC's ineffectiveness in achieving its stated objectives of educational equity and national unity?
5. What would an alternative integrative model that accommodates Pakistan's pluralistic identities while addressing structural educational inequalities look like?

This policy required all schools, private as well as madrasas, to implement the SNC but allowed the private schools to supplement the curriculum with other material (Shehbaz et al., 2025). Early response to the SNC was an expression of the deep-rooted political and social divides in Pakistan. The proponents praised the policy as an important move towards educational equity since a differentiated curriculum was historically a source of class privilege. Opponents, in their turn, expressed worries regarding federal intrusion into provincial power and the Islamic bias of the curriculum, the place of linguistic and cultural pluralism (Hussain, 2021). In spite of these reservations, the implementation of the policy took place, and provincial governments created textbooks in accordance with the SNC standards.

Research Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature, where the systematic literature review incorporates critical policy analysis to examine the social consequences of the Single National Curriculum (SNC). As per Jihad and Jinan (2026), a systematic review has been conducted according to PRISMA guidelines, and databases (JSTOR, Scopus, Google Scholar) have been searched to retrieve the literature published from 2018 to 2026. The original search produced 847 records; further screening was done on 78 sources that met the set inclusion criteria (Jihad & Jinan, 2026). The policy analysis part reviewed SNC framework documents, provincial curriculum guidelines, and textbook contents, including the analysis of 145 textbooks and 389 images as discussed by Bhatti (2025). Additional secondary analyses were also included, such as a study by Khan (2025) of thirty teachers, a study by Shehbaz et al. (2025) of twenty-five school principals using the Fullan Model of Educational Change, and a corpus-based critical discourse analysis of English textbooks in grades 1-2 by Dad and Zafar (2025). Reflexive thematic analysis (Jihad & Jinan, 2026) and critical discourse analysis (Dad & Zafar, 2025) were used as data analysis tools along with the social identity theory, critical curriculum studies (Durrani & Halai, 2018; Qazi & Javid, 2021), and theory of constitutional federalism (Asghar, 2026). Triangulation of various data sources increased the validity, but shortcomings were also observed, such as the use of published research and the uneven distribution of available studies across regions (Jihad & Jinan, 2026).

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory and Educational Policy

The initial theory of social identity, which was the creation of Tajfel and Turner, provides crucial analytical models used in explaining the influence of education on intergroup relations. The theory holds that when people join social groups, they bring a part of their self-concept with them, thus they tend to obtain positive differentiation within their in-groups as opposed to out-groups. This is affected by education systems in that it consists of who gets a positive representation, what histories are put in the foreground, and which cultures are made to be normative (Jihad & Jinan, 2026).

Social identity theory can be used in the case of Pakistan to understand how the curricula reflect the conceptions of self and others in students. The textbooks depicting Pakistan as a country of South Asian Muslims mainly give preference to the religious identity of Pakistan over the ethnic and linguistic groups and regional attachments. On the other hand, the continuity of the Indus Valley Civilization is highlighted by the celebration of the Indus Valley Civilization as belonging to Pakistani heritage. Nevertheless, the failure to acknowledge the role

of non-Muslims in Pakistani culture discriminates against the minority groups. These representational options have a direct effect on the categorisation of self and others by students, which may strengthen or weaken intergroup distinctions (Saqib et al., 2023).

The recent literature building on the social identity theory highlights the value of what is referred to as identity safety in a multicultural settlement. Identity-safe spaces provide some reassurance to the members of any group that their identities are welcome and honored, reducing defensive responses to such diversity and establishing positive intergroup contact. Those educational institutions, which do not offer such safety either by neglecting minority groups, stereotyping them, or enforcing the learning of the majority religion, run the risk of alienating students belonging to marginalised groups and destroying social cohesion (Jihad & Jinan, 2026).

Assimilation versus Integration in Educational Policy

An essential difference between policy multicultural education ideally sets the boundaries between assimilationist and integrative approaches. Assimilationist policies force the minority groups to assimilate into the dominant groups regarding culture and identity, allegedly in the name of promoting national unity or social cohesion. On the contrary, integrative policies strive to reconcile a sense of a common national identity and cultural diversity, thus giving way to minority practices in a common context (Jihad & Jinan, 2026).

The SNC has characteristics of assimilationism that are clear. It requires standardization in the content of all schools, with little room to allow regional or cultural differences. Pakistanis are predominantly depicted as a monolithic population that is deeply religious and has little to no coverage of other non-Muslim minority groups or secular culture (Dad & Zafar, 2025; Bhatti, 2025). More so, the policy will compel all students, even religious minorities, to learn Islamiyat (Islamic studies) as a prerequisite to pass examinations, which also creates constitutional issues on religious liberty (Asghar, 2026). Based on comparative research of split societies, assimilationist strategies often backfire. The studies of Northern Ireland's integrated education movement show that shared schooling is not a sufficient factor to ensure social cohesion; instead, the role of curriculum and pedagogy is as determinative as institutional structure (Jihad & Jinan, 2026). On the same note, studies in ethnically mixed schools in Turkey confirm that perspective-taking intervention to enable students to understand the experience of others leads to higher social cohesion compared to exposure to diversity (Jihad & Jinan, 2026). These results indicate that the focus on standardization of the SNC might fail to capture more basic research inquiry of what students come to learn about themselves and others (Khurshid & Nawaz, 2025).

Constitutional Federalism and Educational Governance

The 18th Constitutional Amendment of 2010 in Pakistan has fundamentally changed the way education is governed in the country by decentralizing this subject to the provincial governments. The amendment repealed the concurrent list of legislation, handing over the 47 subjects, which included education, to the provincial authority. This devolution was an agreement that centralized control had not enhanced better educational results and that provincial governments were in better positions to meet the needs of the localities (Asghar, 2026).

With the introduction of the SNC, there are important constitutional questions that are brought up over this devolution. Critics argue that the federal government has no power to dictate how people should be educated in a standardized manner since the 18th Amendment made education a provincial matter. Its proponents argue that the federal government still plays the role of standardizing national standards and guaranteeing constitutional rights, one of which is the right to education outlined in Article 25A (Asghar, 2026).

This tension of the constitution echoes with more general discussion on the control of education in federal governments. Central development of the curriculum can foster national unity and uniform quality, but it can lead to a lack of respect for regional diversity and provincial independence. Decentralized solutions can address local

requirements more effectively but can cause disintegration and imbalance. Tension walking requires a meticulous approach to the constitutional values and the education results (Sheikh et al., 2025).

Empirical Evidence: The SNC's Social Consequences

Religious Minorities and Exclusionary Narratives

One of the main issues that has been reported in the literature relates to how religious minorities are treated in the Supplementary National Curriculum (SNC). The systematic patterns of exclusion and marginalization were identified in a lengthy study of 145 textbooks published by all provincial boards conducted by the Centre of Social Justice (CSJ) (Bhatti, 2025). Analysis of CSJ shows that textbooks used in all provinces have a significant amount of material that favors the majority religion, thus forcing students of minor religions to attend educational courses that are based on these materials to pass exams (Bonet & Chatila, 2025).

The percentage of chapters devoted to Islam specifically differs widely according to the province: 39.6% in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa textbooks, 39.4 in Punjab, 29.8 in National Book Foundation, 25.9 in Balochistan, and 18.7 in Sindh (Bhatti, 2025). Though Ethics in theory could be chosen by students as a substitute for Islamiyat, the application of the said substitutes is inconsistent, and several minority students still study Islamiyat because of a dearth of feasible options or institutional coercion (Paudel, 2025).

The evaluation of 389 pictures of places of worship demonstrated the existence of dramatic differences: the place of worship occurred 258 times (66 percent), the tomb 113 times (29 percent), and church and temple occurred only seven and four times, respectively. There were no pictures of religious places of the Baha'i, Kalasha, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian groups at all (Bhatti, 2025). This visual landscape conveys some implicit hierarchies, which reveal that there are religious traditions that are legitimate elements of Pakistani identity, and those that are foreign or marginal.

In addition to the exclusion, some curricula include what scholars call hate content aimed at minority religious groups, and this has been expressed in negative portrayals, unidimensional views, moral judgment, and stereotypes of religious identities (Bhatti, 2025). It was found that most of such content was in Pakistan Studies textbooks (15), then History textbooks (4). Although the analysis has shown that there is a slight decrease in the explicit hate speech in comparison to the earlier versions, there are still problematic representations (Madriaza et al., 2025).

Corpus-based critical discourse analysis of English-language grade 12-2 textbooks in the Punjab curriculum supports these observations (Dad & Zafar, 2025). The analysis identified four major ideological themes, which were nationalism, religious beliefs, gender roles, and the construction of family. Textbooks continually recreated a unitary Pakistani identity based on Islamic piety, and little reflection of pluralistic or progressive options. The authors state that textbook language is used as an ideological tool of state discourse instead of an instrument to engage in critical thinking about diversity (Dad & Zafar, 2025, p. 12).

Ethnic Diversity and Provincial Resistance

The ethnic diversity of Pakistan, covering Punjabi, Pashtun, Sindhi, Baloch, and Muhajir populations, each with its own unique language and cultural traditions, as well as its own historical accounts, introduces certain difficulties to the development of homogeneous curriculum policies. The use of the Standardisation of National Curriculum (SNC) has raised opposition among provincial governments and ethnic activists who consider it to be the expression of the Punjabi domination via other systems (Jihad & Jinan, 2026).

The systematic literature review, which analyzed the educational assimilation strategies in Pakistan, made it clear that the top-down approach used by the SNC was not effective as it aggravated ethno-nationalist opposition, increased sectarianism, and gender bias (Jihad & Jinan, 2026, p. 1). It was found that coercive assimilation does

not lead to the growth of genuine social cohesion, and the alternative approach to the plurality of identities suggested in the study is integrative (Jihad & Jinan, 2026, p. 18).

A historical examination of the curriculum of Pakistan highlights the idea that the issue of ethnic representation is not new. The Sindhi nationalists have been complaining of marginalisation of Sindhi language and culture in national curricula, whereas the Pashtun activists have been calling for the recognition of Pashtun history and contributions. The focus of the SNC on Urdu-medium education and Islam as a state identity also threatens to increase these tensions by pushing regional languages and secular cultures still further to the periphery (Hussain, 2021).

Ethnic resistance has constitutional aspects that should be examined. After the effecting of the Eighteenth Amendment, provincial governments have constitutional powers on education, but since the effecting of the SNC, there has been little provincial consultation in the implementation of the SNC. Balochistan and Sindh have expressed concerns about the effect of the policy on regional languages and cultures, but due to political reasons, the opposition has been suppressed. This federal coordination and provincial devolution conflict is yet to be resolved (Asghar, 2026).

Gender Representation and Patriarchal Norms

The presence of gender in the science curriculum of the second level of education reflects and possibly reinforces the social idea of patriarchy that limits the opportunities and ambitions of women. Determined studies indicate systematic tendencies of gender prejudice on various grounds (Bhatti, 2025; Dad and Zafar, 2025).

To begin with, girls and women are largely presented in the textbooks in traditional religious clothes, which further advances the hijab as the standard female attire. It is a representation that is spread through all age brackets and workplaces, including pre-school-going kids and working ladies. The use of hijab imagery starting in grade 1 is used to highlight the opinions of writers and critics about the modes of gender and dress at the susceptible learning levels (Bhatti, 2025). The lack of variety of dress images threatens to exclude the people who do not fit the major discourse, thus furthering the stereotyping and underestimating cultural and fashion diversity (Zhao 2025).

Second, the use of the textbooks is characterized by high levels of dependence on the traditional gender stereotypes and depicts women and girls in the social paradigms they have to be. Young girls are often shown helping their mothers around the house, doing indoor work, or taking part in a limited number of sports like badminton. To the contrary, adult women are either featured as housewives who manage household duties or as professionals in the occupation that has traditionally been considered feminine (Bhatti, 2025). Such depiction reinforces gender biases, undermines women's potential, and denies students a range of role models (Sulla et al., 2025).

Third, a comparison of the proportions of the representation of gender in Punjabi Curriculum English textbooks shows that there are systematic imbalances (Dad & Zafar, 2025). Male characters are more frequent, they have more varied roles to play, and more detailed characterization. As women come into view, they are normally stipulated by family affiliations as opposed to personal success (De la Torre-Sierra & Guichot, 2025).

These representational trends are thus consequential in the sense that the curricula shape the students' beliefs about gender possibilities. The empirical studies on gender socialization reveal that children are influenced by the educational content in terms of their aspirations, self-concepts, and expectations concerning their ways of appropriate roles (Durrani & Halai, 2018; Qazi & Javid, 2021). Offering circumscribed accounts of gender, SNC

textbooks might undermine more than broaden the horizons of the students, hence continuing the practice of gender inequality between generations (Gannon et al., 2025).

Implementation Challenges and Educational Quality

In addition to the sheer content factors, the SNC is faced with sharp implementation issues that affect its possible sociocultural effects. Practical research on the experience of the teachers has shown many obstacles to successful implementation (Shehbaz et al., 2025; Khan, 2025).

The analysis of elementary school principals in Punjab revealed that despite the overall support of the potential advantages of the SNC expressed by the administrators, the introduction of the new system faced significant challenges (Shehbaz et al., 2025). Using the Model of Educational Change by Fullan as the analytical tool, the study outlined the shortcomings in the vision creation, the development of personnel, the monitoring system, and the availability of resources. According to school principals, there was a lack of preparedness to roll out the new curricular requisites, and limited availability of the requisite materials (Okyere, 2025).

A dedicated investigation of the challenges of the teachers of the primary-grade level revealed the lack of adequate professional training, access to technological tools, and pedagogical skills to be the main barriers (Khan, 2025, p. 1). The teachers were observed to be in shortage of essential instructional materials like textbooks, workbooks, and instructional aids. The issue of classroom management complications also added to the implementation, and the disruption of social structures and institutional hierarchies contributed to the hindrance of productive adoption, as well (Khan, 2025, p. 8).

These implementation issues have a high social cohesion implication. Any policies implemented in a bad manner would most likely create frustration and cynicism among the teaching fraternity and in society at large, and hence, undermine the trust in the educational institutions. The teachers who cannot provide new curricula successfully can start applying rote instruction methods that do not involve pupils in different points of view and develop critical thinking. In addition, inequities in terms of well-provided and under-provided schools could be increased, instead of alleviated, by resource constraints (Khurshid & Nawaz, 2025).

A recent study to examine the fit between standardised national competencies (SNC) and eighth-grade science tests of the Punjab Examination Commission showed disturbing trends (Khurshid & Nawaz, 2025). Even though the assessments met standards of categorical concurrence, including coverage of the subject matter that was intended, they were not adequate in balanced representation and scope of knowledge. Specifically, 84 per cent of the assessment items only probed the lowest level or depth of knowledge, and there were no items that probed the highest level. Such a bias toward rote memorisation, at the expense of assessing higher-order analytical ability, compromises the very purpose of the SNC, which is to develop analytical competence, and can be used to further consider passive learning strategies inconsistent with lifelong social integration (Shehbaz et al., 2025).

Constitutional and Legal Dimensions

The constitutionality of the State National Curriculum (SNC) is a controversial matter. One of the recent legal studies is an examination of whether the federal government has constitutional power to prescribe a uniform curriculum after education was devolved to the provinces under the eighteenth amendment (Asghar, 2026, p. 1). The paper uses doctrinal law approaches to examine the constitutional texts, such as Article 25A (right to education) and Articles 141-144 (federal-provincial relations) (Asghar, 2026).

The review shows high levels of constitutional ambiguity. Though education is included in the provincial list, the federal government still has control over the coordination and standards in some jurisdictions. The constitutional status of the SNC has not been conclusively determined by the Council of Common Interests, which

was formed in an attempt to solve the federal-provincial issues. Such ambiguity causes legal uncertainty that can make implementation complicated and cause intergovernmental conflict (Asghar, 2026).

Besides federalism issues, the SNC has the issue of the human-rights questions under Article 22(1) of the Constitution, which forbids the educational facility from forcing pupils to attend religious education that is not of their religion. This provision is arguably breached by the fact that all students are required to study Islamiat to pass examinations, although this is not always the case, and there are not many legal challenges (Asghar, 2026). The Supreme Court's 2014 order in SMC No. 1 of 2014 directed the government to develop curricula fostering religious and social tolerance at both school and college levels. Assessment of SNC compliance with this directive yields mixed conclusions. While some content promotes interfaith harmony, the overall framework's emphasis on Islamic identity and limited minority representation suggests incomplete implementation of the Court's vision (Chromatic & UNODC, 2025).

Discussion: Toward an Integrative Model

The Limitations of Coercive Assimilation

The above-discussed evidence shows that the assimilationist approach of the SNC faces some inherent restrictions as a method of developing social cohesion. Making all students conform to the same identity system leads to opposition by marginalized groups and does not provide safety to minorities in the form of identity and can, in fact, instigate greater division through defensive responses (Jihad & Jinan, 2026).

The experience in Pakistani SNC is similar to the results in other divided societies. Empirical studies of the integrated education movement in Northern Ireland show that shared schooling is not a sure way to achieve social cohesion, but instead, the content of the school curriculum and the pedagogical approach are the determinant factor (Jihad & Jinan, 2026). Compared analysis of ethnically mixed schools in Turkey shows that perspective-taking interventions that foster an appreciation of the experience of others produce more cohesion than exposure to diversity (Jihad & Jinan, 2026). The above comparative observations indicate that the standardization focus of the SNC overlooks the deeper issue of what students come to learn of themselves and others (Ghani 2025).

Special attention should be paid to the conclusion of the systematic literature review: coercive assimilation cannot contribute to the provision of genuine social cohesion. Hence, it is necessary to introduce a paradigm shift to an integrative model that should be in the realm of plurality of identities and one that should deconstruct the colonial legacies to attain a stable and inclusive civilization (Jihad & Jinan, 2026). This evaluation highlights the necessity of an overhaul, but not minor modifications in the current policy.

Principles for an Integrative Alternative

A more integrative curriculum policy would strike a balance between shared national identity and respect for diversity in a common platform, to which the regional, linguistic, and religious diversity would be effectively accommodated. There are several principles that are proposed by comparative study and the circumstances in Pakistan (Akram et al., 2025).

First, there is the identification of plural identities. Instead of perpetuating a monolithic Pakistani identity, the curricula ought to reflect the reality of Pakistani citizens, which consists of several identities: ethnic, linguistic, religious, and regional. The students may get to know of the various cultural practices in Pakistan, such as the contribution that each of the communities has made to the country's growth. This awareness would offer identity security to minority groups and improve the knowledge of majority students about their community (Jihad & Jinan, 2026).

Second, adherence to the constitutional principles and safeguarding of religious freedom. This full application of Article 22(1) would ensure that students of minority religious confessions do not have to study the primary religion. To meet this goal, it is important that better quality Ethics alternative curricula be developed to substitute Islamiat, better-qualified teachers to deliver minority religious education, and institutional support to the students who choose to take alternative curricula should be provided (Asghar, 2026).

Third, the need to balance the provincial sovereignty and national coordination. Rather than being a federal rule dictating standard curricular content, an integrative approach would respect provincial constitutional prerogatives and have in place provisions to provide national coordination. Local authorities were allowed to come up with curricular structures that reflected the local linguistic and cultural aspects as long as they met predetermined standards on common content. This would be a kind of a platform on which the Council of Common Interests would deliberate and reconcile this equilibrium (Asghar, 2026).

Fourth, equality between genders and the representation of diversity. Girls and women should be presented in many different ways in educational curricula without stereotypical images and forced religious style. To implement this need, it is necessary to change the guidelines of textbook development, ensure that gender sensitivity is approached in the training of authors and reviewers, and ensure that the female body is represented in the instructional materials of a wide range of socio-cultural backgrounds (Durrani & Halai, 2018; Qazi & Javid, 2021).

Fifth, critical thinking and quality of pedagogy. Along with the curricular change, genuine reform also requires a metamorphosis of pedagogy. Students should be given a chance to analytically question a wide range of viewpoints, argue out controversial issues, and develop skills of analyzing complex social and political questions. This necessity requires teacher training, designing teaching materials, and reorganizing assessment activities to surpass simple memorization (Khurshid et al., 2025; Khurshid & Nawaz, 2025).

Implementation Considerations

The fifth dimension of educational reform is associated with the development of critical thinking and the improvement of the quality of pedagogy. As part of the curricular changes, the real change will require a total reorganization of the pedagogical practices. Students should be given space to participate in analytical interrogation of various views, express themselves on controversial issues, and learn skills on how to deconstruct complex socio-political challenges. To fulfil this imperative, it is essential to focus on teacher professional development, the systematic development of instructional materials, and the reorganization of the assessment forms to overcome rote retention (Khurshid et al., 2025; Khurshid & Nawaz, 2025).

Conclusion

The paper has explored the Single National Curriculum (SNC) of Pakistan using the prism of sociology, questioning whether the SNC is a policy tool of social cohesion or a conflict-generating tool. The evidence discussed suggests that the assimilationist form of orientation of the SNC, where top-down standardisation, the Islamic orientation, and lack of diversity accommodation are present, has turned out to be pretty ineffective and even counter-productive.

The homogenous content expectations of the policy, which were enforced without a justifiable consultation with the provinces, create ethno-nationalist backlash and raise constitutional concerns about federal power after the 18th Amendment (Jihad & Jinan, 2026; Asghar, 2026). The systematic marginalisation of religious minorities in the textbooks, lack of gender representation, and focus on a monolithic Pakistani identity do not give a sense of identity safety to the marginalised groups (Bhatti, 2025; Dad & Zafar, 2025). In addition, the issues related to the implementation, such as the lack of teacher training, the shortage of resources, and the assessment framework that

focuses on memorising information, are the barriers to the possible success of the policy (Khan, 2025; Khurshid & Nawaz, 2025; Shehbaz et al., 2025). These results are not limited to Pakistan. They also feed into general theoretical discussions about the place of education in stratified societies, which seem to imply that assimilationist schooling programs tend not to achieve their proclaimed goals.

The integrative option suggested in the present paper is the balancing of shared identity and respect for diversity, constitutional federalism, and attention to the quality of the implementation. offers a model that will be applicable to other situations with similar issues. Some of the questions that require answers in future studies are not answered. Longitudinal studies, which follow SNC implementation at the provincial level, would shed light on the variability in outcomes, as well as determining factors of success and failure. A comparative analysis pitting Pakistan against other countries that have implemented uniform curriculum policies (e.g., Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia) would provide information on context-related factors that influence policy impacts. Mechanisms between curriculum and identity formation would be clarified by qualitative research investigating the experiences of students with different backgrounds studying SNC content.

The educational situation in Pakistan is not bad, but it can be sorted out. The nation has intellectual capabilities, such as academics, teachers, and civil-society groups that would be able to work out more inclusive strategies. The realisation of this potential requires the political will and more investment, as well as a long-term concern regarding the complex interconnections between education and identity and social cohesion. The future is not just about the quality of education but also about the nature of the Pakistani society as a whole.

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