Reflections on Children Educational Labour

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Abstract

In a school, there are multiplicity of courses and learning activities that a school child is going to undertake under a particular curriculum. Subject based curriculum is dominant throughout the world. Generally, a school curriculum contains courses like Languages, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies etc. along with their notebooks and/or workbooks. Besides, students carry out their homework mostly of every subject on daily basis. In addition, in a school assembly, students have to learn prayers, Quranic verses, parts of body, mathematical tables etc. Besides schools, many children go to madrassah (religious school) after school hours. The amount of these activities revealed that students have to tackle excessive academic activities and could be rightly termed as 'educational labour.' The investigation is directed to examine the issue of educational labour. It was addressed through qualitative-phenomenological approach. The purposively selected participants were principals and teachers of public and private schools along with six PhD Education scholars. Interviews were employed for collecting respondents' views. The data were analyzed through establishing codes and themes. The upshots of the inquiry affirmed that students are facing with enormous educational load in the forms of diverse subjects, enormous content, diverse academic practices, homework and frequent classroom tests along with other non-formal trainings. The respondents recommended that there may be reduction, integration or innovation of courses. Likewise, students may maintain either workbooks or notebooks. In addition, there should be no or short and important homework and adequate physical activities.

Keywords: *Curriculum, Educational Labour, Subject Based Curriculum, overloaded curriculum, Integrated Curriculum*

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1. Introduction

The ultimate purpose of education is the transmission of social, moral and philosophical values to preserve local culture and sustain contemporary society. In order to fulfill various national, social, religious demands and pertinent individual growth, different course subjects are offered right from elementary levels. In schools, learners are expected to learn various courses and carry out certain academic assignments. Expansion of knowledge and technology, emergence of subjects and new demands from education have increased the amount of course subjects, content and academic activities. It has suffocated the curriculum with learning practices and subject matter and hence turned it overloaded. Yusoff, Rahim and Yaacob (2010) contends that classes, reading, writing, home assignments, reports, projects and/or empirical tasks and assessments may be termed as academic workload.

In the Pakistani context, curriculum is a subject oriented nearly at all levels. In a subject oriented curriculum, the course activities are distributed into various courses and subjects (Ornstein & Levine, 2008). The learners have to study and learn at least seven subjects every day along with maintaining notebooks and/or workbooks, accomplishing homework and other academic activities. Notebooks are diaries for note taking and solving exercises of students while workbooks and exercise books are proposed and provided by Government to public students. Workbook is not a substitute of notebook. This educational labour also consumes much of students' time and they have little time for physical and recreational purposes.

The aforementioned conversations indicate that learners suffer from enormous educational load. In these multiplicity learning tasks, the students suffer physically, mentally and psychologically. Their individuality and childhood is ignored for the sake of syllabus. It was also assumed that this work load may affect students' academic growth. This investigation is directed to highlight the issue of educational labour in detail. It is also intended to provide certain criteria for reducing the amount of educational labour.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To highlight the issue of educational labour of students
2. To give an overview of the academic activities that a child is going to undertake
3. To provide measures for reducing the amount of educational labour

1.2 Significance of the Study

The investigation will highlight the issue of enormous academic load on the students. It will highlight the physical, psychological and academic impacts

of overloaded work outs on the learners. The outcome will facilitate the curriculum planners and teachers. This can also provide worthy suggestion for teachers to tackle the issue of academic overburden. Likewise, curriculum designer and text book developer may also seek guidance from the outcomes of this investigation. They may provide balance in the academic task. Further, the findings may also assist learners by considering and/or reducing the amount epistemological tasks**.**

2. Literature Review

Overload reveals an imbalance between load and capability i.e. lacking a balance among activities to trigger a curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2010). Workload may be interpreted as the quantity of work allotted to an individual to be accomplished in a stipulated time. In this connection, excessive amount of academic activities could be declared as academic workload (Yusoff et al., 2010). A great number of subjects and diverse learning practices have turned the course overburdened for the learners as well for the teachers.

These days, the overloaded academic practices have become a critical issue as it has multifarious impacts on the learners and learning. The APPA (Australian Primary Principals Association, 2014) has thoroughly analyzed the issue of overcrowded curriculum. Two issue of overload were identified i.e. number of subjects and amount of content. It was declared that on the average nearly 11 subjects are taught at elementary levels across different countries. Besides, the subject matter of the most of the course is voluminous.

Overload is a multinational issue. The issue of overload curriculum is also prevalent among many European, Asian and African counties including advance as well as developing countries like Wale, Netherland, England, China, Japan, Australia, Tanzania, Angola and Zimbabwe etc. (Ndjabili, 2004 as cited in Majoni, 2017). UNESCO (2003) contends that in many Asian countries like China, Vietnam and Indonesia, the curriculum contains enormous content details. Similarly, the breath of content details in Indonesia lead to memorization.

Provision of education in Pakistan is the obligation of provinces. However, for national solidarity, the federal ministry is held responsible for developing and revising curriculum. The ministry of education episodically reviews and improves curricula from early schooling to grade-12. It is then implemented through provincial textbook boards by means of textbooks (Mahmood, 2010). The worth of textbook cannot be overlooked as they are vital sources of learning activities (Tanner, 1988). They are essential for learning as

well as teaching. Tools for assessment are also developed from the textbooks. Hence, textbooks are key elements of to the curricula in Pakistan.

The prevailing system of education in Pakistan is highly dependent on subject and textbooks. The whole learning activities are directed to learn text material of different subjects (Chishti, Tahirkheli, Raja & Khan, 2011). Students have to study from 7 – 14 textbooks with each over 100 pages in an academic year, for instance, there are 15 and ten course books for class 5^{th} and 10^{th} respectively for the session 2018 – 2019 (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbook Board, 2018).

Critics of the education system of Pakistan, oppose the curricula for its inability to promote the needed skills and competencies. Mueen (1992) viewed that the prevailing system is dominantly bookish. It leads to high rate of memorization and slight comprehension. There is need of drastic changes to improve the curriculum so as to meet global demands. Murty (1981) described that one of the root cause to innovate curriculum is to remove the unnecessary cognitive burdens. To conclude, heavy reliance on textbooks and greater number of course books, vast content and other learning assignments have turned the curricula overburdened and it should be addressed.

The overburdened learning environment has certain adverse effects. It has three fold impacts i.e. academic, psychological and physical. Overload in studies is associated with practicing intricacy, pressure, apprehension, atrophying resources, wishing to withdraw, defective study approaches and deficient learning capacities (Karjalainen, Alha & Jutila, 2006). Extreme load of academic work results in poor study approaches branded as docile, unenthusiastic and non-contemplative lead to cramming and mere reproduction of irrelevant information (Chambers, 1992; Biggs, 1993; Ramsden, 2003). Workload also leads to ineffective study habits like surface learning (Karjalainen et al., 2006).

Time is a vital element of learning and its relation with learning is worthwhile as well as complicated. The required time to learning and the available time in the form of curricula and amount and level of complexity of subject matter result in workload. As a result, tough schedule leads to ineffective instruction, sense of burden and trivial learning (Karjalainen et al., 2006). Workload is convoluted terms which involve worries about time as well as quality of work, other academic or practical activities, attributes and stimulation (Chambers, 1992; Kember, 2004).

The academic labour also affects learner psychologically. Excessive academic workloads results in feelings of anger, frustration and worry which then create stress if it continued for a longer duration. Above 80% students feel stress

due to academic work load (Rahim et al., 2016). Kausar (2010) explored an affirmative association between realized stress and study load. The research literature identified that excessive homework results in pressure, problems of physical fitness and an overall imbalance. 75% have reported of feeling stressed due to excessive homework. Students survive in feelings of apprehension, tension or bewilderedness (Princeton Review, 2018).

The curriculum suffocated with subjects has increased the weight of school bags. It has been admitted that school children carry weighty school bags. The heavy bags have been declared as a source of torture for students. The heavy weight of school bags may cause back problems or musculoskeletal syndrome (Research Gate, 2018). The doctors hold that heavy weight of school bags may cause certain backbone problems (Samo, 2018, September, 21st). Even the high court in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has ordered school officials and textbook board authorities to tackle the problem of hefty school bags (Khan, 2018).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This investigation was planned to go for deeper understanding of the phenomenon, therefore, it was undertaken under the qualitative-phenomenological design.

3.2 Population and Sample

The study was conducted in the school context, considering both public and private institutes. The data were collected from school teachers as well as from Ph. D scholars in the subject of education. The teachers were selected on the basis of their real experiences of the phenomenon. Similarly, the scholars have ample recognition of the relevant theories and practices. Eight principals and eight teachers were taken with equal ratio both from public and private schools. In addition, six PhD education scholars were also interviewed. The technique of purposive sampling was adapted for choosing respondents.

3.3 Instrumentation

The data were gathered through interviews. The researchers designed two open ended interviews for data collection from teachers and scholars of education sequentially. The interviews were designed in the local language i.e. Pashto along with its English versions. The facet validity of the interviews were established by two experts; one was language expert holding master degrees in Pashto and English. The other expert was a Ph. D in Education.

3.4 Data Collection

The data were collected sequentially. Initially, the researchers collected data from the teachers and analyzed it. The outcomes provided basis for the

interview from the scholars of Education. Keeping in view the research ethics and to keep confidential the identity of the respondents, the researchers used pseudonyms for respondents in the analysis.

4. Data Analysis & Interpretation

The inductive -deductive approach was adapted for thematic analysis of the data. Inductive approach was adapted to derive themes and deductive approach was employed to cluster additional information around themes. From the extensive and iterative analysis, the researchers identified codes and then derived themes from the codes. The researchers identified the following main themes:

4.1 Overloaded Curriculum

Overloaded curriculum is a situation in which learners have to carry diverse and extensive academic tasks relatively in a shorter time. The analysis of data showed overburden of learning tasks in two forms i.e. inside school and after school hours. Mr. Amjed, principal of public institute, narrated,

"…… the overall curricular activities put enormous overload on the learners. Learners are also busy in academic assignments after school hours."

4.2 Inside School Practices

In a school environment, students have to perform various learning tasks say reading, writing and performing. Usually, students have to learn from seven to ten course subjects of different nature. In addition, they have to maintain their workbooks as well as note books. Besides, they are expected to be ready for classroom tests. Khamid, a private school teacher, explained,

"..... it is not possible to teach all subjects effectively in a day time"

Similarly, Ahmed, a teacher of public school, elaborated,

"…… teachers have to keep students in race with syllabus requirements. There should be either maintenance of notebooks or workbooks"

Besides, the number of courses, the learners are confronted with enormous number of lessons and lengthy exercises. Teachers utilize much of their time in teaching these courses. They have very little time to focus on students' inclusive growth. Similarly, although school assembly is considered to be a form of co-curricular activities. Yet, it also involves certain learning tasks like grasping of verses from Quran, mathematical tables and parts of body etc. Nadeem, a private school teacher, commented,

"……. A language class, particularly, English involve many tasks like vocabulary building, grammar and tenses, composition, stories and applications which results in increased academic load"

Same is the problem with Mathematics, Akram from public school provided,

"…… teaching of mathematics and solving exercises through students require much time than allotted. Some complex concepts consume more time than anticipated. It could be implied that learners have to swallow a food for two days in one time."

Excessive number of subjects and academic activities also create problem for Principals. The principals faces problems in distribution of work and responsibilities to teachers. A principal of a private school Mr. Faisal viewed,

"……. in the beginning of the academic years, principals are confronted with the challenges of proper distribution of work and responsibilities among teachers. It is almost impossible to provide free periods for all teachers in a day time."

4.3 Outside School Activities

The students have to perform certain learning assignments after schools hours. Students are provided with homework on daily bases almost in all subjects. Similarly, students have to make preparation for classroom tests both in oral and written forms. Further, many students attend madrassah for learning Al-Quran and other theological courses. In the words of a public school teacher Mr. Ibrahim,

"…… After school hours, majority of the learners attend madrassah or attend any non-formal technical trainings, or participate with their parents in domestic errands."

About homework, a private school teacher Mr. Naveed commented,

"…… It is a formality that students are provided with a bundle of homework, which mostly involve written tasks having no active mind involvement."

Majority of the private school students attend private tuitions in the evening. In the words of Mr. Naeem, a private school teachers,

"…… almost, over 80% of private school learners attend tuition classes either in their homes or in tuition centers which suffocate them with learning tasks. Undoubtedly, students have lost their childhood in these learning practices."

About classroom tests, Mr. Amjed, principal in a public school, narrated,

"….. Students are also provided with classroom tests to be rote memorized at homes"

4.4 Lack of Physical and Recreational Activities

For ensuring all round development of learners, certain physical practices are carried in the schools in the form of co-curricular activities. Unfortunately, in

schools few physical activities are carried. As a result, the students remain physically inactive. Principal of public school, Mr. Asad stated,

"….. In our schools, there are no games, not sports and no co-curricular activities. Most of the schools are without proper grounds."

The scholars of education proposed that physical activities are vital to students' health and learning. Therefore, it should not be ignored. Scholar Mr. Umar opined,

"….. There should be comprehensive programs of physical and recreations practices in schools"

For reducing educational labour, the respondents provided the number of subjects may be diminished, reduction of course content, integrated curricula and avoiding repetitions of concept.

4.5 Overload Results in Poor Study Habits

Study habits denote students' typical approaches to learning. Excessive study load and lack of time, lead the learners to adapt certain unhealthy learning practices like skimming, rote learning and selective study and unfair means. A scholar Mr. Ali reflected,

"….. Excessive academic tasks compel students for short cuts like cramming, selective learning and cheating."

When students are unable to manage their study load, they adapt malpractices or give off studies. In the words of scholar Mr. Waqar,

"……. when students are unable to cope with academic loads then they either practice unfair means or quit."

4.6 Pressure and Anxiety

Excessive academic burden result in physical and psychological problems. These issues are also addressed by the literature. These findings are in conformity with literature outcomes. Hayat, a scholar of Education, explained,

"….. Excessive academic tasks develop tension, anxiety, pressure among learnings and as a result they become less motivated."

Similarly, Administrator of a private institute, Mr. Jehangir commented,

"…… it is a physical and mental labour for the students to carry huge bags and assimilating massive subject material. The whole academic scenario is tensed."

4.7 Reducing subjects

It was suggested to reduce the number of courses, specially, at early levels. There as a general consensus that at elementary levels only core subjects should be taught. Scholar Bashir suggested,

"……. the number of courses may be reduced and emphasis should be laid on core courses, particularly at elementary levels."

Mr. Adnan, principal of a private school, proposed,

"……. students may maintain either notebooks or workbooks"

4.8 Integrated Curricula

In integrated curricula, two or more subject streams are taught under on course. The one course enjoys the attribute of both. Scholar Mr. Hayat proposed,

"…… the notions of Science may be integrated with English. The exercises may involve questions from Science as well as English grammar etc. students may be capable of writing on local flora and fauna instead of thirsty crow. Likewise, Pakistan Studies may be integrated with Islamic studies"

4.9 Avoiding Repetitions

In the local curriculum, there is dilemma of recurring topics across levels and subjects. For instance, a lesson on "Independence Movement" is included into three to four subjects with little variations. Scholar Mr. Waleed reported,

"….. Repetitive subject matter may be excluded e.g. a lesson on Quaid-e-Azam may be in one of Urdu, Pashto, English or Pakistan Studies, not in all."

4.10 Reducing Content

Diversity and width in subject matter and relevant lengthy exercises results in increasing study load. The respondents viewed that unnecessary content load may be removed from the curriculum. In the word of scholar Mr. Asif,

"……. the width and depth of the subject matter may be reconsidered in learners' academic levels. Teachers of particular levels should be a part of the process of curriculum development and textbook designing."

Likewise, scholar, Mr. Karim opined,

"….. The complexity of English and Mathematics may be considered in terms of students' potentials. The lengthy exercise may be reduced"

4.11 Time Management

Teachers may strive their best to develop a comprehensive study plans and guide their learners accordingly for time utilization strategies. Scholar Mr. Bashir stated,

"……. Teachers may devise plans for best utilization of time and instruct their how to manage a balance between time and learning tasks."

5. Conclusions

The findings of research showed that students are confronted with enormous educational labour and they suffer physically, academically and psychologically. It was noted that the workload is not only in the inside school activities but also outside the school. Inside the school is curricula, which are dominated with at least seven to ten subjects along with their note books as well as workbooks. It was declared that books are also suffocated with extensive

content and lengthy exercises. In addition, in a school assembly besides few physical workouts there are grasping of verses from Quran, mathematical tables and parts of body etc. Moreover, there is dearth of physical and recreational practices in schools. Outside school activities include preparation for classroom tests, homework and attending classes in madrassah.

The respondents suggested that the number of courses may be reduced, particularly, at elementary levels. The idea of reducing courses and focusing on core subjects was also provided. Likewise, for reducing educational labour, some courses may be merged in the form of integrated courses, for example, merging English and Science into one. The course content may also be integrated by reducing their scope and avoiding unnecessary repetitions, for instance, lesson on Quaid-e-Azam may be in one of English, Urdu, Pakistan Studies or local languages. Similarly, the content and amount of exercises may also be reduced. In addition, students may maintain either workbooks or notebooks, not both. Further, it is a general trend particularly in private schools that learners are provided with homework of almost of all subjects. The respondents proposed that there should be no or short and important homework. An adequate amount of recreational and physical activities may also be provided to the learners.

The respondents also provided that due to overburden curricula, students have developed unhealthy study habits like rote learning, selective study and cheating. Hence, to avoid these intricacies a balanced study load may be put on the learners.

6. Discussion

The results of analysis implied that students suffer from enormous educational load in school hours and after school hours. The new education policy of Pakistan has also considered overburden curriculum as one of vital issues for education (Ministry of Education, 2017). Literature provided that the volume of curriculum is the main reason of high workload as it contains many subjects (APPA, 2014; Pepper, 2008) and it should be condensed. The outcome of this investigation has suggested reduction of courses in order to minimize the curriculum load. It is supported by Majoni (2017) who viewed that the number of courses may be abridged to lift the academic encumber. Similarly, to resolve the issue of over burden curricula, APPA (2014) recommended that some subjects may be incorporated in later stages of schooling. Further, the breadth and width of themes in the subject matter may be shortened.

The amount and complexity of curricular load should be balanced. Adequate workload is mandatory for painstaking study and conceptualizing themes because it facilitates students to focus on and keep pace with requisites of

syllabus (Chamber, 1992). Curricula overloaded with subject matter could not be taught with overall equal emphasis on all areas and it results in inapt study load (Weerakoon, 2003). For maintaining this balance, this investigation has advocated integrated curricula. Integrated curriculum involves merging textbooks, themes and flexibility in activities (Lake, 1994). It addresses practical issues and problems of mutual interest (Vars, 1993). The respondents suggested that there should be no unnecessary repetitions of topics across subjects. It is backed by Pepper (2008) by arguing that overload is also caused due to duplication and/or overlay and repetition of subjects matter.

The amount of time specified in a curriculum for a particular course is of prime significance. Pepper (2008) viewed that time deficiency also hinders the coverage of course, resulting in overload. This study proposed that strategies may be adopted to manage time, content and learning practices to teach a particular course. Likewise, Lam, McNaught, Lee and Chan (2012) viewed that curriculum load is varying at different stages of an academic session. There may be a balance distribution of workload throughout the session instead of heavy load at the end of semester. It may be done through assessment practices of shorter intervals.

The literature indicates that when students' sense themselves being overloaded with studies then they may adopt superficial approaches to fulfill their learning tasks (Wilson, Lissio, & Ramsden, 1997; Lockwood, 1999). This assumption is also in line with the respondents' confirmation that extensive educational labour leads students to develop inadequate study approaches like cramming, selective study and cheating.

The outcomes also suggested that expert teachers and researchers of the particular levels may be given participation in the process of curriculum development. It is supported by APPA (2014) who documented that teachers of the particular level may be involved in the curriculum development process. Also, research experts on curricula for the particular level may be engaged in developing process. Ministry of Education (2017) has also documented that lack of teacher's participation in curriculum development is a major issue.

7. Recommendations

The findings of the study reflected that overcrowded curriculum has physical, academic and psychological effects on the learners. The researchers recommended that

1. The number of subjects and/or amount of course content and lengthy exercises may be reduced. Similarly, unnecessary repetitions of themes may be avoided.

2. The magnitude and frequency of home work may be reconsidered and there may be no or essential homework only.
3. Teachers of particular levels of education may be provided opportunities to participate in curriculum designing.
4. A practical solution to the issue of workload is the introduction of integrated curriculum at various educational stages.
5. Teachers may adopt themselves and guide their learners to effectively manage learning practices and time.
6. Further, researchers are opined to conduct a comprehensive and widespread investigations on the issue of minimizing students' educational labour. The researchers may also investigate the impact of educational labour on the social and psychological developments of learners.

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