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Curriculum Overload at College level: Probing its Repercussions on EFL Learners and Academics

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Abstract

English language is considered the core of success in Pakistani education system. The most important task of English teachers at college level in Pakistan is to develop competence and better understanding of English language in students. However, curriculum overload is the biggest hurdle in enhancing language proficiency because it keeps teachers and students under pressure. J.B McDonald elucidates curriculum as a fount of quality teaching and better learning experience for students by identifying an apt syllabus and assessing their learning outcomes. This paper looks into the causes and consequences of curriculum overload on English teachers at college level in particular and on students in general. This study helps in understanding the issue through teachers and students' point of view. Data were collected through questionnaires based on close and open-ended questions. These questionnaires were filled by the English teachers and students of public and private colleges of Faisalabad city. Macdonald's Model has been adapted to understand the role of curriculum in education. He takes curriculum as a social and cognitive system for proper planning and instruction in academia. This study recommends certain measures to overcome the overload of curriculum on teachers and students. It will open new vistas of research as less work has been done in this regard particularly at college level.

Keywords: Curriculum, overload, under pressure, teachers, students, college

Introduction

Curriculum is a set course of studies for students to pass a particular level of education. It is a back bone of education system. In our view "curriculum" is the cultural environment which has been purposefully selected as a set of possibilities for facilitating educative transactions". (Macdonald, Wolfson & Zaret, 1973, pg. 22). In fact, it is a planned educational curriculum of a country which decides its ideology and credo for its citizens that what type of people a country is

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looking for. Curriculum builds people's minds and thoughts; it forms their worldview. Curriculum planning needs great care and attention as it plays prime role in education. National curriculum encompasses all learning, learning of social values, norms, morals, learning of cultural and religious elements and skills to lead a life. In 20th century, traditional concept of curriculum was considered as a body of subjects or subject matter prepared by the teachers for students to learn. It was synonymous to the 'course of study' and 'syllabus'. However progressive thinkers are of the view that just a listing of school subjects, syllabi, course of study, and list of courses of specific discipline do not make curriculum. These can only be called curriculum if the written materials are actualized by the learner. Broadly speaking, curriculum is defined as the total learning experiences of the individual. Hence, it can be summarized that curriculum is taught in schools or in educational institutions in a set of subjects which deals with specific content and objectives and it also includes activities, guidance and interpersonal relationships. Curriculum can be defined as the whole plan designed by academic institution to achieve the aims of education.

A scrupulously planned curriculum is strength of education system, so educational departments always try to build up to date curriculum which can cope with international developments and enable its followers to face modern demands. However, sometimes the desire to meet the international demands creates problems as the sudden and adventitious changes overburdens its implementers. The fortuitous changes in curriculum keep the teachers and students under pressure. Sometimes too much representation of culture and society with modern achievements in curriculum at junior class level bewilder the students who are unable to understand the prescribed curriculum and overload the teachers who have to work hard to make it clear to the students.

The Macdonald Model promotes a "schooling based on a humanistic ethical commitment" (1973, pg3). In fact, it asks a question that "How can learning environments be structured to be rich in opportunities for exploring, nurturing of supportive relationships, and at the same time enhance an individual's efforts to transcend his experiences and create personal meanings?" (1973, pg14) This model stresses on self-grooming and social reconstruction through education. So, curriculum must be designed to enhance learning process, "it must have some pattern of organization; it must have some notion of desired relationships among and between persons and things; and it must have some idea of how to assess the

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status of its activities." (1973, pg1) Teaching and learning processes are personality systems in which both learner and teacher show their full involvement. Education is treble, it stimulates student' consciousness, provide appropriate resources and guide them in their desired areas of learning. Teacher plays a role of model here being an intellectual leader. Macdonald Model imagines teacher as an agile, responsible and considerate source to promote a culturally designed curriculum which supports and promotes pluralistic heritage.

A well-motivated and enthusiastic teacher can promote such vision. He ignites the spark in students and encourages them to form their worldview. Teacher is a major agent in learning environment for communicating flexible expectations to learners. However, Macdonald model does not make teacher a final authority of knowledge or decision maker instead teaching is also a continuing process of learning, a continuous process of expanding knowledge and a proceeding for renewing one's professional values, resources, skills and commitments.

Macdonald defines curriculum as a social and cognitive system for proper planning and instruction in academia. Curriculum should be a tool to reform education system for better change in students and teachers. This socializing goal depends on individual's intelligence which is groomed through education. So, it should be relevant to learner's lives. Teacher should be independent enough to provide them practical life skills and knowledge.

Pakistan is multicultural and multilingual society so representation of each culture in curriculum overburden teachers beside this curriculum has to include modern studies to cope with modern world so it makes students overwhelmed since primary age. "The curriculum overload is a subset of the teacher overload" (Libit, 1995). It is true as curriculum overload affect Pakistani teachers a lot. The burden on teachers take serious shape at college level where students come from different school systems. In school, teachers try to manage curriculum according to the school requirements as they get students of almost same back ground and manage curriculum and examination system themselves.

However, at college level students come from different academic backgrounds. Pakistani education system has multiple kinds such as government schools, private schools and schools of Cambridge system. Students of government and private schools mostly join each other at college level which creates a difference of understanding level between them ultimately forms work load for teachers and for

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them too. The significance of present study is to focus on curriculum overload on teachers of English at college level. English is taught as compulsory course in colleges so it is very important for students to pass it for getting their degree. Similarly, it is important for English teachers to teach up to par as all other subjects will be taught in English language at university level. There are number of reasons which constitute pressure for English teachers and affect their teaching and learning. Short academic session in colleges creates overload for teachers. They have to run through the syllabus rather than giving detail attention to each topic. The session starts from September to march including midterm examinations and co-curricular activities.

The compulsory English books at intermediate level includes a novel, plays, short stories, poetry, essays, and then grammar teaching baffle students and step-up work load for teachers. Students study one book of English at school level and suddenly find themselves confronting four books with huge grammar task. They get confused and teachers have to work hard to lessen their bewilderment. English is considered the most rebarbative subject.

Most of the students at college level fail in this subject. So, English teachers are considered the back bone of the college. The whole result of the college is based on their result. However, it depends on teachers' ability and sense of proper planning which relieve them from such issues. They try to control this situation by taking regular classes and by giving students special attention. This study highlights teachers' and students' views about curriculum encumbering at college level and provides guidance to overcome this problem.

Literature Review

Curriculum is the pillar of entire educational process which provides dynamic educational training. It changes according to the social and economic requirements. In fact, curriculum change reflects shifting trends in education, training and in the labor market (Cedefop, 2012). These changes become challenge to grapple for its implementers. Curriculum becomes an overload for a teacher which is an unintentional consequence of educational reform. Teachers feel overwhelmed both by the volume of documentation and the perceived pressure of external expectations. Teachers reported that they had insufficient time to fully implement subjects of curriculum or to address all of the objectives within each of these subjects (NCCA, 2005, p. 122). The report high lights a critical relationship between teachers and pupils as when it affects teachers it reflects on students as well. It seems as an

imbalance in subject status, or confusion concerning the real priorities, or simply the sheer depth and breadth of the totality of subjects, all this contribute to curriculum overload (NCCA, 2010). This study provides an overview of other countries facing the same problem of curriculum overload which includes England, France, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Norway, Ontario, Philippines, Scotland, Singapore, Spain, Sweden and Vietnam. Curriculum overload occurs due to the supernumerary of subjects who force students to leave school as they do not cope with surplus subjects and teacher's pressure. Kuswandini, D. (2008) interviews number of students for leaving school and most of them reply "When I hadn't finished understanding one subject, my teacher was already introducing a new one. It went on like that over and over again" (Kuswandini, 2008).

Walshe, J. (2010) investigates curriculum in Ireland at primary level which is organized into six separate areas made up of eleven subjects. These are English, Irish, history, geography, science, math, visual arts, drama, music, physical education, social, personal and health education. Children are missing out in primary schools because teachers don't have time to get through the whole curriculum and guide them properly. A Nobel laureate Sen, A (2009) suggests completing basic education at school in order to reduce burden on students. He called for an overhaul in children's curriculum in Bengal "right here right now". He says that first generation learners do not find any guidance at home so feel difficulty in studies. In this way they remain illiterate. Cuthbert Majoni (2017) examines curriculum overload on teachers in Zimbabwean primary schools. He writes teachers remain unsuccessful in accomplishing the academic tasks and lack time for individual attention which affects slow learners badly. Teachers have to compile records of everything which keep them busy at the expense of student's learning time. Siti Munawirah (2011) discusses Malaysian education system in her blog and shares a research of cabinet committee which identifies the issues and weaknesses caused by overloaded curriculum.

She highlights some issues for overloading such as repetition of lesson contents. Subject content is usually unrelated and too much for the required standard. Teacher and student remain conscious for finishing syllabus which keeps them strict to textbooks. The research defines teacher's role and responsibilities in school which are divided in two parts, curriculum management and non-academic management which keep them busy and overburdened. The co-curriculum activities and disruptions teachers confront in school like meetings, sports day, school events,

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holidays and seminars outside the school disturbs teaching time. It keeps teachers mentally and emotionally stressed. At the end she suggests to implement curriculum wisely to get better results from students. Raymond Ross (2008) writes that teachers have to work hard in order to make their students understand the content. The inconsistencies in curriculum creates problem with coherence in terms of skill level. This causes a huge workload for teachers. He further points out that teacher at upper primary stage consider curriculum guidelines as cause of overcrowding in syllabus. The intentions for change in curriculum are good but it creates burden for teachers and students both. Teachers cannot achieve all that in normal school time.

Olugbenga, Yakubu & Ali (2023) examines Curriculum overload in Nigerian Junior Secondary Schools. Their research addresses the problems like denial of rest and academic workload. They provide solutions by merging related courses and focusing on teaching more practical skills. The merging of right subjects will revolutionize the academic world. Teachers will become facilitators who can transform students into problem solvers.

In Pakistan teachers are facing problem of curriculum overload due to the ineffective education system. The lack of skillful planning and quick changes in syllabus in order to cover wide range of issues make the curriculum overloaded. Pakistani educational researchers are also working anxiously to provide proper guideline to the policy makers to cope with the issue of curriculum overload on teachers and students. However, less work is done in this respect as research atmosphere is still prospering in our education system.

Chughati and Perveen (2013) examine the difference of workload on public and private sectors schools. It finds out that private school teachers face more pressure. Hameed (2013) concludes that teachers face lot of difficulty and burden in implementing new and suddenly changed curriculum without guidance. Students also get confused in understanding the syllabus. Bhatti, Khurshid and Ahmad (2017) examines the Punjab textbooks of biology according to the prescribed curriculum. Shahida Parveen (2011) evaluates curriculum according to the education policies for primary level in Pakistan. However, these researches examine different aspects of curriculum and its implementation in education sector but none of these consider the situation of teacher and students while studying the prescribed curriculum.

The present study is focusing on curriculum overload in the subject of English at college level on teachers and students. This study is unique as it rereads MacDonald

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Model for understanding the function of curriculum in academia. It doesn't overburden teacher and students for grasping everything around them. It defines the levels of learning and gives importance to the desired areas of learning for students.

Methodology

The present study focuses on curriculum overload on English teachers and students at college level. It is an intermediate level (11 and 12 grade). It aims to seek out how curriculum overload hinders in the improvement of their competence and keep them under pressure. The context of the study is government and private colleges of Faisalabad city including both male and female colleges. Twenty-six teachers are selected randomly from these colleges as they are teaching same type of curriculum. Sixty students are selected randomly from these colleges including boys and girls. All the teachers and students have participated voluntarily in this research process. Their consent is taken before and the purpose of the research is also explained to them.

❖ Data Collection

Two separate questionnaires for teachers and students are used for collecting data. The questionnaire for teachers is consisted of seventeen Likert-scale statements on a five- point scale of agreement (strongly disagree to strongly agree) and five open ended questions which provide opportunity to the teachers to express their own views about the issue. The statements demand teachers to share their idea about curriculum overload as what overburdens them, how they manage pressure and overload. In open ended questions they are also asked to provide suggestions for managing it properly and how it affects students' critical ability and experiences of daily life.

The questionnaire for students is consisted of 21 questions, also on a five-point scale of agreement from (strongly disagree to strongly agree) and six open ended question to share their ideas about curriculum overload. They are asked what creates overload in syllabus for them and how they manage it, how it affects their learning abilities. In open ended questions they are asked to suggest for planning and managing curriculum.

❖ Data Analysis

The Likert scale data has been analyzed through SPSS, using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentage presented in tables. The open questions are descriptively analyzed by finding out the same themes and issues. Similar procedure has been adopted for analyzing students' questionnaires.

❖ Data Interpretation

• Teacher Questionnaire

The first section of the questionnaire presents seventeen statements which depict teachers' view about curriculum overload. All these statements are close ended. Teachers' responses to these statements are summarized in table 1.

Table 1: Teachers' views on curriculum overload (N=26)

Sr.no	Statements	Disagree	unsure	agree
1	There is curriculum overload in my institution	13	1	12
2	Curriculum overload is because I have to teach many books	10	3	13
3	I have to read many chapters	15	0	11
4	I feel burdened because of curriculum overload	13	2	11
5	My workload is too much	9	1	16
6	My workload affects my teaching	12	2	12
7	I get tired teaching whole day	10	1	15
8	I manage my curriculum easily	8	2	16
9	I have to do some office work as well	12	2	12
10	I take extra classes to cover the course	13	1	12
11	I teach the curriculum according to examination needs	5	0	21
12	I teach the course selectively	22	0	4
13	Curriculum overload hinders making classes interactive	10	3	13
14	Curriculum overload does not allow students to develop critical skills	5	0	21
15	Curriculum overload promotes cramming	5	0	21
16	Curriculum overload causes anxiety among the students	3	0	23

17	Teachers generally complain about curriculum overload	2	1	23

Table 1 shows mix views of teachers about curriculum overload in the institution, 12 teachers agree to the statement and 13 expressed disagreement however 61.5% teachers complain about too much workload which affects their teaching and tire them. 61.5% teachers said that they easily manage curriculum as they teach according to examination point of view. As 80.7% teachers agree to this statement. 88.4% teachers said that teachers generally complain about curriculum overload. 80.8% teachers are of the view that curriculum overload is a big hindrance in the development of critical skills among students so it promotes cramming. 88.4% teachers believe that it causes anxiety among students.

- **Open-ended questions – Teachers**

In the second section of the questionnaire teachers are asked to provide their views in writing on the following questions:

a) Does curriculum overload affect students' experiences of daily life?

Twenty-six teachers are asked this question and twenty-five among them respond as yes, only one of them say that it doesn't affect students' life. They are of the view that overloaded curriculum keeps them engrossed in grappling the syllabus and don't let them to experience other things of life of their age.

b) Does curriculum overload affect the teachers' experiences of daily life?

Teachers are asked same question with reference to teachers' life and response is almost same as most of the teachers are of the view that it affects their life. Curriculum overload affects their teaching and learning experiences as they don't get time to enhance their teaching ability and knowledge. It hampers their efficiency. However, five say that it doesn't affect them and they manage curriculum efficiently.

c) Do you think teachers should be a part of curriculum planning?

All twenty-six teachers agree to this statement that teachers implement curriculum and have direct link with students so they can better guide in curriculum planning

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and policy making. In fact, they can assist effectively in this matter because they are well aware of student's needs.

d) How curriculum overload can be properly managed?

Teachers have provided very effective and practical suggestions for improving curriculum. They say curriculum overload can be decreased by proper planning. It should be divided in terms and should be according to the level of the students. This problem can be solved through small number of students in classes as large classes' waste time in discipline maintenance and settlement, for this more teachers should be hired.

e) Does curriculum overload produce critical ability in the students?

All teachers agree that curriculum overload doesn't produce critical ability in the students. It encourages cramming and selective study.

❖ Students' Questionnaire

Students' questionnaire is also based on two sections. The first one has close ended statements queering students' views on curriculum overload. Students' response to these statements is summarized in table 2.

Table2: Students' views on curriculum overload (N=60)

Sr.#	Statements	disagree %	Unsure %	Agree %
1	There is curriculum overload in my institution	25	5	70
2	Curriculum overload is because I have to read many books	16.7	11.6	71.7
3	I have to learn grammar as well as text	20	8.3	71.7
4	I feel burdened because of too much study	23.3	8.3	68.4
5	I have to cram due to lengthy syllabus	25	15	60
6	Curriculum overload always keeps me in hurry	16.7	15	68.3
7	I get tired studying whole day	23.4	3.2	73.4
8	I manage my curriculum easily	46.8	15.0	38.2

9	Curriculum overload keeps me away from other college activities	23.3	13.3	63.4
10	I take couching classes to cover the course	23.4	11.6	65
11	I study the curriculum according to examination needs	36.7	6.6	56.7
12	I study the course selectively	35	5.0	60
13	It reduces my focus on reading	18.3	18.3	63.4
14	Curriculum overload does not allow students to develop critical skills	30	13.3	56.7
15	Curriculum overload promotes cramming	21.6	15	63.4
16	Curriculum overload causes anxiety among the students	16.6	10	73.4
17	Students generally complain about curriculum overload	20	6.6	73.4
18	It limits my time for practicing speaking in English	16.6	13.4	70
19	It always keeps me under stress	20	8.3	71.7
20	Does it stop you to prove your competence?	18.3	31.7	50
21	Does curriculum overload hinder your assessment ability?	11.6	20	68.4

Table2 shows that most of the students agree with the statement that they face curriculum overload in their institutions. 70% students favor this statement. Almost same percentage agreed to the view that they have to study lot of books which not only tire them but also keep them busy and in hurry. 65%students have to take couching classes in order to cope with the overburdened syllabus which retain them from other college activities as it promotes cramming and reduces their focus on reading. 73% are of the view that it causes anxiety in them, keep them under stress and it hinders their assessment ability. More than 50% students say that it is an obstacle in proving their competence, force them to study according to examination point of view. Only 38.2% say that they are able to manage their syllabus easily the rest face difficulty in management.

- **Open-ended questions - Students**

In the second section students are asked to answer the following open-ended questions in writing so that their own views about the issue can be analyzed.

a) Does curriculum overload affect experiences of daily life?

Sixty students are asked this question all say that curriculum overload affect their daily life a lot except two students who are of the view that they manage their studies easily beside other works. However, rest of them say that over loaded curriculum keeps them engrossed in itself and don't let them experience other healthy activities of life.

b) How do you manage with too much content?

All the students express different ways of managing content as some join academy and couching classes to complete the curriculum. Number of students does selective study according to examination point of view. Some students have to cram to cope with the content.

c) Do you think curriculum planning should be according to the students level/age?

All the students favor the idea of planning curriculum according to the age and level of students. Instead of teaching everything at single stage content should be divided into different level.

d) How curriculum overload can be properly managed?

Students have provided number of suggestions to manage the overloaded curriculum. They say syllabus should be shortened by omitting the unnecessary and repeated contents. Session should be divided in terms or semesters. The strength of teachers should be increased. Proper time table and modern facilities can also help to lessen the issue of overloaded curriculum.

e) Does curriculum overload produce critical ability in the students?

All the students express that curriculum overload doesn't produce critical ability in them. In fact, it develops lack of confidence in them.

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f) How does curriculum overload affect your learning skills?

Students are of the view that curriculum over load affects their learning skills a lot as it promotes cramming and lessen their understanding ability.

Discussion & Conclusion

The detailed analysis of both the questionnaires of teachers and students through frequency counts and percentage clearly shows that there is curriculum overload in the subject of English at college level. The abrupt and rapid remodeling in curriculum and desire to inculcate all knowledge at single level to the students keep teachers and students both under pressure. Too many books and lengthy syllabus develop burden on them. Curriculum overload influences teaching and learning ability of teachers. They remain unable to give proper attention to weak students and to explain content in detail. The whole day teaching and management duties at college tire them.

Similarly, students find difficulty to compete with prescribed curriculum. This encourages cramming and rote in them. Instead of understanding content they go for selective studies and extra couching classes as they feel college is not fulfilling their desire of learning. Teachers and students both agree that curriculum overload doesn't allow students to develop critical ability and causes lack of confidence in them. It is big hindrance for students to practice speaking English. So, both teachers and students complain for curriculum overload. This small-scale study will provide great help to the curriculum planners as it is presenting the direct views of teachers and students of both sectors public and private dealing with same type of syllabus. It provides a guide line to the future researchers as less work has been done in this area. This study has focused specifically on subject of English at college level. They can explore it in other subjects as well as at different levels of education such as primary, secondary, college and university level.

Recommendations

After conducting this study, the following recommendations have been formed:

- Curriculum should be designed according to the age and level of the students
- Unnecessary and repeated content should be excluded from the syllabus

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- More teachers and teaching facilities should be provided to the colleges
- Classes should be divided into sections
- Related subjects can be merged.

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