**[Kidding with SNC](https://www.dawn.com/news/1631551/kidding-with-snc)**

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A GREAT deal of controversy surrounds the Single National Curriculum (SNC), a project highly [espoused by the PTI government](https://www.dawn.com/news/1630913/single-curriculum-to-eliminate-class-based-education-system-ministry) and proudly owned by the prime minister himself. The government plans to implement the SNC in all public and private schools as well as madressahs across the country.

Shafqat Mehmood, the federal minister for education, as well as a number of other government officials are waxing lyrical about the supposed fruits the whole nation will reap following its implementation.

The reality on the ground, however, presents a very different picture. A number of points are screaming for attention when it comes to implementing the SNC.

The chief aim behind the SNC is to ensure that “all children have a fair and equal opportunity to receive high-quality education”.

It is no doubt a noble objective, provided the promise of “high-quality education” for all children actually translates into upgrading the overall academic infrastructure in schools, especially those in the public sector. Doing this would involve, among other things, delivering a world-class curriculum, professional development and training of teachers, modern classroom and campus facilities, and a conducive environment which encourages inquiring minds and free debate.

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Surely, this would be asking for the moon in a country like ours. So instead, what we get is a mere curriculum document peddled to the nation as the panacea for all of its educational woes. It is not hard to see why the government is so keen to equate high standards with the SNC alone. Most other steps to improve standards of education in the public sector would involve doing something about the measly education budget, not to mention a long-term commitment to rescue a state school system in tatters.

Indeed, if it was really about raising standards for all, the government would actually do something about making the public sector schooling more competitive, which would give the private sector a run for its money. To the contrary, the generally high-performing private sector is being put under pressure to downgrade its standards in the name of a uniform curriculum. In other words, instead of improving its own game, the government is asking the private sector to shift the goalposts.

Then there’s the issue of textbook production in line with the SNC. Normally, this would not be a problem if the usual definitions applied. National curriculum, by definition, is aimed at providing general guidelines, standards and framework of concepts and themes to be studied, while accommodating a variety of approaches to develop and deliver content in schools.

But the province of Punjab takes the cake here for its unique interpretations, diving in to suppress all attempts at quality textbook development. It’s worth bearing in mind that Punjab took the lead to formally adopt the SNC soon after it was approved by the federal government. Sindh has not come on board yet, which leaves one wondering about the ‘national’ part of the curriculum.

In a bid to be more loyal than the king, the Punjab Curriculum & Textbook Board (PCTB) took it upon itself to be the ultimate [arbiter and judge of all textbooks](https://www.dawn.com/news/1558629) to be published in the province. On the other hand, the ‘model’ textbooks produced by PCTB provide a rather scandalous model in terms of content quality and pedagogical approach. Moreover, it appears that the PCTB regards a good dollop of religion and patriotism, even in language subjects such as Urdu and English, an important benchmark to judge the textbook quality.

Off the record, a number of high-ranking officials overseeing the development of SNC and textbooks agree that it’s a messy situation. However, their lack of concern at this half-baked experiment is also obvious.

In a meeting at the PTCB office, a top-level official smiled at a group of academics representing various school systems and told them not to be overly concerned at the haphazard nature of plans concerning SNC and textbooks. “In time, everyone will adjust and the brouhaha will stop,” he said, laughing.

**Read:** [*Dissecting the single national curriculum*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1572130)

Right now the greatest [concern](https://www.dawn.com/news/1630605/reservations-about-snc) for all serious educationists is that some of the most clueless government functionaries might hold the power to damage the future of education in this country.

As things stand now, no textbook can be published or prescribed for any public or private school without an NOC from the PCTB. Not only are the private publishers expected to conform to the shoddy standards used in the model textbooks, there is a lengthy three-tiered review system in place to get the NOC. To date, no NOCs have been issued by PCTB.

No wonder a great deal of uncertainty persists for all private schools in the province. They are still trying to figure out which books can or cannot go on the book lists for the next academic session due to commence in August.

The SNC has already [come into effect](https://www.dawn.com/news/1603964) for classes Pre I — Grade 5. Any experienced educationist will attest that this is not how you implement large-scale changes for so many grade levels simultaneously. Ideally, you start with the first level (Pre I in this case) and add the next class each successive year to keep the learning process progressing organically.

It is no coincidence that the PTI government has committed to implementing the SNC for all levels up to Class XII by March 2023, the year it is expected to complete its five-year term. Clearly, this is a political timeline more than anything else. It would take about 12 years to accomplish this the proper way.

Taking the gradual and evolutionary route would not be politically convenient. After all, much of politics is about scoring points in the short term. But the education of millions of children is too important a matter to be trifled with. It’s high time some concrete steps were taken to fix the crises facing education in Pakistan.

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