



وزاراتِ وفاقی تعلیم و پیشہ ورانہ تربیت
حکومت پاکستان

National Curriculum Council

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)





General Questions

What is a curriculum? What does curriculum reform mean?

Many people confuse the terms curriculum, syllabus, textbooks, and standards. A “curriculum” has four essential parts: **standards, textbooks, teaching, and assessments**. These components need to undergo reform together due to their interconnected nature. They are like four wheels of a vehicle. If any one component is ignored, the curriculum reform is incomplete.

For example, without reform in teaching practices, the best of standards and textbooks may be insufficient. Similarly, unless assessments are concept-based, students will continue to learn through rote memorization. However, with a holistic approach keeping all four components in focus, curriculum reforms can have a strong, positive impact on student learning outcomes in schools.

What does the term “Core Curriculum” mean?

Core means **what every student must know and be able to do**. Core Curriculum refers to a minimum standards curriculum; meaning a baseline under which no student shall fall. This would apply to all students from the public, private and deeni madaris streams.

Can schools teach over and above a Core Curriculum?

Yes, a Core Curriculum is a minimum standard – a floor beneath which no child will be allowed to fall. **It is not a ceiling beyond which no child will be permitted to learn**. A Core Curriculum allows for additional content in textbooks and schools.

Additional content can be a subject outside of the Core Curriculum. For example, if a school wants to teach Sindhi, Theater, or Fehm-ul-Quran/additional religious content as a separate subject, they can teach that subject as additional content. There is no naming restriction on additional subjects as long as the school is meeting the Core Curriculum requirement overall.

Additional content can be within the textbook of a subject of the Core Curriculum. For example, if the Core standard for Mathematics mandates teaching addition and subtraction in Grade 1, but a school wants to teach multiplication (a standard from Grade 2) in Grade 1, the school can do so as additional content.

Do other countries have a Core Curriculum?

The concept of Core standards exists in multiple countries with quality education systems, such as Thailand – Basic Core Curriculum; Finland - National Core Curriculum for Basic Education; the United States – The Common Core; Hong Kong - National Curriculum Framework; New Zealand – National Essential Learning Areas; Australia – Australian Curriculum; and the Netherlands – Core Objectives.

What are the benefits of a Core Curriculum with minimum standards, compared with maximum standards?

Through the Core Curriculum, a state aims to provide flexibility for additional content to provinces and federating units based on their context-specific needs. For the Pakistani context, this essentially implies that all students (madrasa, public, private) will attain a minimum standard of proficiency in the Core Curriculum, in line with international standards. Additionally, they will have room for specific needs and preferences based on their societal, regional, religious, and cultural contexts.

Pakistan's Core Curriculum entails that every child – at a minimum – must study six components: Urdu, English, Math Science, Pakistaniat/ Citizenship, and Religious Education (based on the religion of the child, i.e., for Muslim students through Islamiyat, and for religious minorities through Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Baha'i, Kalasha, or Zoroastrianism as per the religion of the child). Schools may choose to teach anything above and beyond the core. For example, madaris may teach Hifz-e-Quran and other schools may add French or Chinese. Any additional content is allowed above the Core, as long as it does not promote hate speech or narratives that are anti-state or anti-religion.



National Curriculum of Pakistan (2022-23)

Why was there a need for a Core Curriculum in Pakistan?

The disparity in the quality of education delivery is an unfortunate reality in Pakistan. The gap in progress and opportunities available for students between the public sector, private sector, and Deeni Madaris is immense. Out-of-school Children (OOSC) are another significant challenge. Currently, 25 million children are out of school which is approximately half of Pakistan's school going children. Therefore, **to fulfill the responsibility of Article 25A of the Constitution, requiring quality education for all children**, it was essential to provide equitable educational opportunities enriched by social, cultural, regional, and religious diversity of the country.

The National Education Policy (2009) mandates the upgradation of minimum standards of education in Pakistan with TIMSS international benchmarks. After the 18th Amendment (2010), a Joint Declaration by the Prime Minister and all provincial education ministers, signed in 2011, stated that National Education Policy 2009 shall continue to be a jointly owned national document.

How does the National Curriculum of Pakistan (NCP) discourage rote learning and support conceptual learning?

Internationally, curriculum reform comprises four components which include standards, textbooks, teacher training and assessments which are highly intertwined. Therefore, a shift from rote learning to concept-based learning essentially requires reform in assessments as well as content delivery (textbooks and teaching). The ongoing efforts are targeting this issue **by aligning the assessment framework with Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) as opposed to the old testing system based on conventional textbooks**. The Model Textbooks address this issue by encouraging critical thinking skills and higher-order thinking.

What has changed in the National Curriculum of Pakistan (2022-23) as compared with the National Curriculum (2006)?

- Standards, benchmarks, and outcomes for all subjects have been added, which were mostly missing in the 2006 document.
- In 2006, the subject of Islamiyat was integrated with General Knowledge up to Grade 2 and started as a separate subject from grade 3 onwards. In the spirit of Article 22(1) of the Constitution, Islamiyat is a separate subject from Grade 1 onwards for Muslim students only.
- In 2006, students from minority religions were not taught their own faiths, but rather a general subject called Ethics. Now, “Religious Education” has been introduced in lieu of Ethics for seven minority religions – an initiative highly appreciated across all provinces. In line with Article 22 of the Constitution, children of religious minorities will not be forced to study a religion other than their own.
- Content of Mathematics and Science has been aligned with the TIMSS content framework, aligning Pakistan’s education system with international benchmarks.
- Use of ICT is integrated with the curriculum through concept-based learning.
- Curriculum 2006 was implemented primarily in government schools. However, current curriculum reform is being implemented in all three systems of education in Pakistan (public, private, deeni madaris).

Who was involved in making the National Curriculum of Pakistan?

Leading curriculum experts from public, private and non-government sectors have been engaged in the curricular reform exercise along with representatives from various textbook boards, assessment departments, teacher training departments, deeni madaris, public and private publishers, private schools and private school associations.

Furthermore, there was **widespread stakeholder engagement through nationwide policy dialogues**, a dedicated website for ready access to the ongoing development of standards, along with a feedback portal for recording and responding to suggestions from all stakeholders.

Will the updated curriculum be implemented only in public schools?

The updated curriculum will be implemented **across the board in all schools of Pakistan**, including public and private schools and Deeni Madaris, provided provincial autonomy is respected and all provincial legal processes are adhered to.

How is the new curriculum inclusive of minorities?

Previously, non-Muslim students were offered Ethics in place of Islamiyat from Grade 3 onwards. Now, there is a new subject umbrella called Religious Education, introduced from Grade 1. **It includes seven minority faiths, namely Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Kalash, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism.**

Will the new curriculum increase radicalization in society by teaching religious extremism?

In the wake of the Army Public School (APS) terrorist attack in 2014, the state of Pakistan made an unequivocal commitment to rid our society of the ills of extremism. Curriculum reform to ensure inclusion and peace education was an important aspect of this initiative. Accordingly, the updated Islamiyat curriculum is endorsed by representatives of all religious sects within Pakistan. They have unanimously signed off on **a curriculum that promotes inclusion, tolerance, and peace.** For example, a required part of the Islamiyat curriculum is ensuring that students understand the difference between Jihad and dehshat-gardi (terrorism). Under the Paigham-e-Pakistan initiative, several madaris and stakeholders are being engaged to ensure pluralism and acceptance in society.

What impact will the curricular reforms have on O/A Levels streams of education?

The NCC aspires to bring the education imparted in public schools and madaris at par with high-quality schools currently available only to an elite class. Thus, assessment reforms through the ongoing project will impact the **Matriculation and FA/ FSc streams primarily to introduce similar concept-based assessments in the public sector and deeni madaris.** The government may provide additional options for international examinations, such as PISA, TIMSS, AKU-EB, and IB. The O/A level streams of education, as long as they ensure quality education as per the Core Curriculum like all other streams, can continue without significant impact.

Will a new curriculum fix all the problems of our education system?

An updated curriculum is not the solution to all problems. It is **the first step** in the direction of improving the education system, and it will take some years before the damage can be fixed. It is also important to note that developing the standards is only one dimension of how the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT) is planning on improving Pakistani education. Other dimensions include teacher professional development and assessments.



Constitutional Concerns

After the 18th Amendment, what is the mandate of the National Curriculum Council and the Federal Government in national education reforms?

The Right to Education for all children of Pakistan are guaranteed in Article 25A of the Constitution, which states: “The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law.”

Moreover, Entry 13, Part II, Fourth Schedule, Federal Legislative List, allows the federal government to work closely with provinces in a coordination role to ensure inter-provincial harmony and alignment on matters of national interest. Specifically, it allows the federal government space for working with provinces on “Inter-provincial matters and coordination.”

Given the 18th Amendment, the federal government’s role in **ensuring that all federating units work as a collective for Article 25A of the Constitution** becomes essential. A High Court judgment by Justice Jawad Hasan upheld this role of the federal government as constitutional and imperative. Moreover, Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry declared that the federal government cannot absolve itself from the responsibility of providing quality education under Article 25A of the Constitution of Pakistan.

Provinces have complete autonomy regarding all matters related to education including governance, policy and curriculum. However, the Constitution does not forbid provinces from coming together and working towards a common Core Curriculum for the benefit of all children of Pakistan. Thus, after the 18th Amendment, the formation of the National Curriculum Council (NCC) was approved unanimously by all provinces in an Inter-Provincial Education Ministers Conference (IPEMC), held at Muzaffarabad AJ&K, on Oct 14, 2014.



Improvements to the Curriculum

How does the National Curriculum Council work with the provinces?

The objective of the National Curriculum Council (NCC) Secretariat was to develop an updated curriculum that ensures minimum national standards / Core Curriculum in all subjects. The NCC, therefore, serves as an **advisory and consultative body** to steer and guide the development of curriculum in close collaboration with all federating units. It was the collective vision of all provincial education ministries that the NCC operates as the central coordinating body to develop a cohesive national curriculum strategy between all provinces. The intention of the Ministry (MoFEPT) was to fill this gap through the National Curriculum Framework of 2017. The NCC comprises 58 members with representation from all provinces and madaris.

The NCC mandate includes the Terms of Reference (TORs) as: Making a National Curriculum Framework and developing minimum standards of quality education for all school children of Pakistan. However, Core Curriculum developed and approved by provinces through the NCC must go through provincial legal processes in order to be implemented. Provinces are fully autonomous to edit, add, or remove content from the Core Curriculum as per their provincial needs.

A secondary role of the NCC is to provide **capacity building support** to provinces by invitation. For example, in 2021 and 2022, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa requested the NCC to develop and share all Model Textbooks for implementation in KP public schools. This resulted in savings of several crores in the provincial budget. Punjab has requested the NCC to develop textbooks for Religious Minorities. Sindh has partnered with the NCC for a large-scale Teacher Professional Development program. The NCC works with provinces in providing support where it can be helpful to the contextual needs of the province.

The ongoing curriculum reform faced a lot of criticism in 2021. What improvements have been made in response to those challenges?

A curriculum is a living document and is constantly updated. The NCC has been open and responsive to feedback from the field for the same purpose. Here are some examples of how the government has updated its strategy to keep all stakeholders on board and engaged:

One-Textbook Policy:

The initial intent of the government (in 2021) was to propose a single textbook. However, education practitioners and researchers advised the Federal Ministry to revisit this approach. Thus, based on stakeholder feedback, and given the restricted mandate of the NCC, the Federal Education Ministry adjusted towards **a minimum-standards approach, which allows for unity on core standards and diversity in textbooks**. This approach will also assist in adapting teaching methodologies to a range of educational settings, supporting accelerated learning, multi-grade classrooms, out-of-school children, and other diverse educational contexts of Pakistan.

NOC Challenges:

In Year 1, publishers faced many difficulties in issuing on-time NOCs. One major reason was that the 18th Amendment had devolved NOC processes to provincial textbook boards, but no inter-provincial coordination mechanism had been put in place even though more than 10 years had passed since education decentralization. The greatest impact of this lack of inter and intra-provincial capacity building was on students, who did not receive their textbooks on time and the same textbook began to vary across provinces. NCC has since taken this aspect of the reform exercise as an important area of support to provincial governments. Working in a coordinator role between federating units, the NCC is helping build the capacity of provincial education departments for a more streamlined NOC granting mechanism in upcoming years.

Private Sector Grievances:

The project has evolved to ensure the provision of minimum standards as opposed to a maximum ceiling on learning. Previously, the private sector had felt alienated and private publishers suffered losses due to remnants of the initial uniform textbook idea. The NCC team made diligent efforts to engage the private sector towards positive changes in the project and brought them in as **allies in the education reform efforts** in Year 2. The response was highly enthusiastic and useful for the government.

Quality of Textbooks (bias, typos, etc.):

Model Textbooks from Year 1 of the reform exercise were a significant improvement over what was in place in public schools prior to the new curriculum. The improvement was not only in the quality of standards but also in ensuring that there was no hate curriculum or bias against religion, gender, or ethnicity. Some issues of quality, such as typos, were correctly identified. There were some selective readings of Model Textbooks in the media which created confusion around whether the textbooks were truly inclusive. Independent analysts who looked at Model Textbooks in their entirety, however, dismissed concerns of discrimination and bias in textbooks.

Nonetheless, all feedback from the field and critics was carefully collected and examined. Model Textbooks for Grades ECE-8 as per the National Curriculum of Pakistan 2022-23 have been developed and are in use while the development of the textbooks for grades 9 to 12 is underway.

Is there room for improvement in the curriculum?

Yes, a curriculum is a living document which means that it must evolve and adapt to the needs of society.

How can I participate in developing and improving the curriculum?

Your participation and input are valuable to the NCC team. If you need to provide any feedback, please contact the NCC secretariat at +92-51-9265579 or official@ncc.gov.pk



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