

## **A Comparative Study of Elementary Level Urdu Curriculum in terms of Socio-cultural and Environmental Perspectives of Education for Sustainable Development**

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This study, based on a thematic analysis, was undertaken by the author as a comparison of the content of two textbooks of Urdu (national language of Pakistan) teaching at the terminal grade (grade-8) elementary level. The overall curriculum of Urdu at grade-8 of both public and private schools consists of the content of textbooks. The first text selected for this purpose, was designed and published by a private company and is taught in private schools of Pakistan; the second selected text was designed and published by the Textbook Board (an agency regulated by government of Pakistan) and is taught in public schools. The rationale for selecting the Urdu textbooks was based on different concepts being easily comprehended in the national language; the terminal grade of elementary level was selected for study purposes because students at this stage are sufficiently mature to comprehend the perspectives of sustainable development and apply them in their daily life. The content of Urdu was analyzed thematically and discussed in terms of two main themes of Education for Sustainable Development as socio-cultural and environmental perspectives acknowledged in Agenda 21 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. The comparative analysis revealed that the Urdu textbook published by a private company was better aligned with the goals of education for sustainable development related to environmental and socio-cultural perspectives. However, one important component related to the environmental perspective of Pakistan is the awareness raising campaign for prevention of dengue mosquito which was effectively incorporated in the textbook published by Textbook Board. This component was found missing in the private textbook.

**Keywords:** Comparative analysis, socio-cultural and environmental perspectives of sustainable development.

Sustainable development is a concept that is borrowed from both the natural and social sciences. It is defined as “the optimal level of interaction between three systems the biological, the economic and the social - a level which is achieved through a dynamic and adaptive process of trade-offs” (Barbier, 1989 as cited in Redclift, 1991, p.36). In this way, sustainable development, is said to be about “meeting human needs, or maintaining economic growth or conserving natural capital, or about all three, (Redclift, 1991, p.37).

The sustainable development movement started in the 1970s with a view that “production and consumption patterns as evidenced in the industrialized societies could not be sustained in terms of the planet’s resources” (UNESCO, 2006, p.10). In order to achieve the goals of sustainable development, UNESCO has declared the decade 2005-2014 as “the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (Spiropoulou, Antonakaki, Kontaxaki, & Bouras, 2007, p. 444).

Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) has been advocated as a long term and sustainable route to reach the UNESCO’s Decade for Sustainable Development goals. The fundamental idea of the DESD is a place where every person has the chance to gain an advantage from education by learning knowledge, societal values, and lifestyles that is necessary for a more established future and for a constructive societal revolution (UNESCO, 2006). As the UNESCO’s Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), ends this year, most countries, especially the developing economies, are only

beginning to start their journey towards a sustainable future. The DESD goal is slowly taking roots in the policies of most countries that signed Agenda 21 to commit to promoting sustainability through a variety of means, including education (UNESCO, 2006).

Education for sustainable development (ESD) conserves and preserves the abilities of local communities to manage their resources for themselves and for their future generations. ESD, through formal and non-formal means, plays a pivotal role in the sustainable development of a community and its region. Despite all international commitments, research has shown that "Education for sustainable development as an educational approach still faces a lack of connection to real-life socioeconomic and environmental problems" (Iyengar, & Bajaj, 2011, p.453).

#### **Education for Sustainable Development in Pakistan**

Responding to the urgency of sustainable development, Pakistan, a developing economy at the thresholds of socio-economic and political reforms, forged active partnerships with UNESCO and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and other developmental sector organizations to achieve the goals of DESD through cooperation regarding developmental and environmental issues.

In September, 2005, Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Education has launched Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in collaboration with UNESCO and IUCNP. Through this platform, civil society representatives, educators and communicators sit together and a tool kit titled Taleem Barai Payedar Taraqqi: Tarbiyat Kaaron aur Asatiza Keliay Rahnuma Tarbiyati Mawad (Education for Sustainable Development: A Training Guide for Teachers and Trainers) was also launched during this meeting.

The district government of Badin District, Sindh, developed the Badin District Education Plan in 2005, which is the first ever-complete regional plan in Pakistan that promotes perspectives of sustainable development through education and integrates ESD concerns across all levels of education from primary to tertiary/higher education. After this initiative, a large group of stakeholders formulated ways of incorporating ESD and education for disaster management in national curriculum and indicated future initiatives during this decade, mainly because of earthquake, 2005. Rather, environmental components such as air, water, land, et cetera are not in a satisfactory condition in Pakistan and "their condition continues to deteriorate with time" (Ramey, 2009, p.1).

Considering the above scenario, the researcher thought it appropriate to undertake a critical analysis of elementary level textbooks. This was particularly important in light of striving to reach the major goals regarding the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 (DESD) which has applicability for a developing country like Pakistan. Therefore, the present study was designed to analyze the context of textbooks of Urdu curricula teaching in public and private schools of Pakistan with respect to major goals of ESD.

#### **Method**

The study employed a qualitative methodological approach and comparatively analyzed the content of two types of Urdu Textbooks used at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in Pakistan. While working within a "naturalistic paradigm" the researcher used "directed approach" of qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1277). Moreover, the trustworthiness of content analysis is also ensured. In some specific circumstances, content analysis can also interpret certain type of text quantitatively. Qualitative researchers report themes that emerge as a result of analysis. The main purpose of a research study should be easily understandable for natural readers. So readers' input should be taken into consideration during coding process. (Ahuvia, (2001)

In using the directed approach method, "analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1277). One challenge of this type of analysis is failing to develop a complete understanding of the context, thus failing to identify key categories. This can result in findings that do not accurately represent the data, (Hsieh, Shannon, 2005, p.1280).

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ELEMENTARY LEVEL URDU CURRICULUM

The analysis, through which a comparison was made, was comprised of the content of two textbooks pertaining to the grade 8 level Urdu (national language of Pakistan). The overall curriculum of Urdu teaching at grade-8 both in private and public schools was comprised of the content of textbooks as previously described. The first textbook selected for study purpose was designed and published by a private company and is used in private schools of Pakistan whilst the second textbook designed and published by the Textbook Board (an agency regulated by government of Pakistan) was used in public schools. The content of Urdu was discussed in terms of socio-cultural and environmental perspectives that were identified in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation or Agenda 21 as significant concerns and challenges that need to be addressed to achieve sustainability. (Yalçinkaya, 2013). The socio-cultural perspective of ESD is comprised of aspects such as human rights, peace and human security, gender equality, cultural diversity and intercultural understanding, health, HIV/AIDS and governance. In contrast to this, environmental perspectives are comprised of aspects such as *natural resources (agriculture, water, biodiversity and energy etc)*, *mitigation and disaster prevention, climate change, rural development and sustainable urbanization*. These perspectives are also affirmed in UNESCO's Framework for the United Nations Decade of ESD. The rationale for selecting an Urdu textbook was that students easily understand the concepts in their national language. The grade eight level, the final grade of elementary school was selected for study purposes because at this stage students are sufficiently mature to comprehend the perspectives of sustainable development and apply them in their daily life.

At this stage, as stated previously, the researcher analyzed both types of Urdu textbooks separately and then a comparison was undertaken in order to evaluate which textbook was better aligned with socio-economic and environmental perspectives of ESD. The researcher analyzed the content with respect to all above-mentioned aspects of both perspectives of ESD and found the extent of ESD representation in the content. It is anticipated that, the findings of this study would be helpful to pinpoint issues related to sustainable development teaching at elementary grade level to develop effective strategies to handle this problem effectively in the education system of a developing country like Pakistan.

### Results and Discussion

The content analysis was undertaken in relation to the major goals of the DESD. 2005-2014. this analysis revealed that concepts in both textbooks were mostly related to ESD. In this regard, the main ideas alerted students to issues such as environmental pollution, catastrophe, environment, natural environment – all concerned with ESD. Most of these perspectives are identified in the Agenda 21 or Johannesburg Plan of Implementation as significant issues to be included in the curriculum to achieve sustainability. The perspectives includes, human rights, peace and human security, gender equality, cultural diversity and intercultural understanding, health, HIV/AIDS and governance are related to socio-economic perspectives of ESD, whereas, natural resources (agriculture, water, biodiversity and energy etc), mitigation and disaster prevention, climate change, rural development sustainable urbanization are related to environmental perspectives.

#### Urdu textbook published by a private agency

The content of Urdu textbooks published by a private agency in terms of human rights, revealed that the content of the chapters of the textbooks were aligned with socio-economic and environmental perspectives of ESD, but was considered inadequate.

In terms of socio-cultural perspective of ESD, the content analysis of Urdu textbook published by the private agency revealed that the chapters titled "*Ehtram-e-Insaniat*<sup>1</sup>", "*Dalerana Faisla*" and "*Umeed ki kiran*" were particularly related to human rights. Falk (2004) was of the opinion that "Every reliable human rights indicator suggests progress in the direction of self-determination and democratization in all parts of the world, which means more participation by individuals in their own destiny and more restraint on the part of government." (p.19) Similarly, the moral values, peace and human security, were intended to be taught with the realistic examples of the noble personalities. Conteh-Morgan (2005) argued in this regard that "the rapid pace of globalization and/or westernization is seriously eroding the respect by youth for their elders and the traditional hierarchy of authority that are necessary for maintaining the hegemony of indigenous approaches to peace building." (p. 81). The present analysis revealed that the peace and

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<sup>1</sup> These titles are translated in English for readers' convenience in Appendix A.

human security perspective of ESD was adequately discussed regarding content. Similarly, the content analysis showed that "*Shehri Difah*", "*Dalerana Faisla*", "*Kargal ka Janbaz Sipahi*" and "*Girl Guide*" were particularly related to peace and human security. The perspective of gender equality was not discussed in the textbook. The content analysis showed that the substance in "*Pakistan ki Tehzaab-o-tamadan*" and "*Safar-e-shamal*" was directly linked to cultural diversity and intercultural understanding. The subject of health was not discussed in any way. However, through a poem "*Milawat naama*" students were introduced to the concept of cleanliness and caring in terms of health issues. Similarly, there was not any information regarding HIV/AIDS. It was also noted that the ESD perspective of governance was also not given any space in the content of the Urdu text book published by the private agency.

In terms of environmental perspective of ESD the private agency text, it was revealed that some chapters were aligned with the ESD perspective in relation to natural resources (agriculture, water, biodiversity and energy, et cetera). The analysis revealed that "*hawa*", "*hayatyati amal*", "*mazahir-e-fitrat*" and the poem "*milawat naama*" were intended to educate the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students about the community people and their relation to their environment. With respect to the perspective of mitigation and disaster prevention, "*mazahir-e-fitrat*" the information found in the content of these chapters was about this ESD perspective. Despite the fact that research argued "climate change is an inevitable and urgent global challenge with long-term implications for the sustainable development of all countries" (Matthew & Hammill, p.1117), in the studied textbook of Urdu, no information about *climate change* perspectives was found.

It was also revealed in the agency text that some of the content of the chapters were aligned with the ESD perspective of rural development. The analysis revealed that "*zara-e-mawaslat aur sarkein*", and "*railway taraqi ki rah per*" were about the teachings of rural development. Similarly, the content of the chapters "*zara-e-mawaslat aur sarkein*", and "*railway taraqi ki rah per*" were found relevant with the perspective of sustainable urbanization. In a nutshell, the Urdu textbook published by private company was better aligned with the goals of education for sustainable development related to environmental and socio-cultural perspectives as a large part of the text book was found addressing these perspectives.

#### **Urdu textbook published by the textbook board (an agency regulated by Government of Pakistan)**

In analyzing the content of the Urdu textbook published by the Textbook Board (an agency regulated by Government of Pakistan) related to human rights' perspective of ESD, it was realized that the content included in the chapters titled "*moalam-e-ikhlaq*", "*mautmar-e-alam-e-Islami*", "*quaid-e-azam aur itehad-e-milli*", "*bhai chara*", "*misali talibilam*" and a poem "*utho ahle-watan k dost bano*" was particularly related to human rights. Similarly, the analysis showed that moral values aimed to be taught with practical examples of lives of noble personalities like the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The content analysis of the textbook showed that "*Azadi ka Matwala*", "*Maulana Muhammad Ali Johar*", "*Roshan Sitara*", "*Sheheri Diffah*", "*Scouting*" and "*mautmar-e-alam-e-Islami*" were about peace and human security. The analysis revealed that this perspective of ESD was also adequately discussed in the content of the Urdu textbook as a large proportion of the curricula was comprised of this perspective. The perspective gender equality was addressed in "*moalam-e-ikhlaq*" however, the representation of this perspective was inadequate. Similarly, the analysis revealed that the content of "*mautmar-e-alam-e-Islami*", "*Kishwer-e-haseen shad bad*" had learning domains directly linked to intercultural understanding and cultural diversity. In the content of Urdu textbook, there was only one poem "*Aloodgi Aloodgi*" that had acquisition about a health subject. Moreover, the analysis revealed that the perspective of HIV/AIDS was not given adequate consideration in the content. Finally, it was noted that in the content of Urdu textbook, there was no information about governance.

While analyzing the content in terms of environmental perspectives, no information was found about natural resources (water, energy, agriculture, biodiversity), disaster prevention and mitigation climate change, rural development and sustainable urbanization perspectives. However, one important component related to environmental perspectives in Pakistan, was that an awareness raising campaign for prevention of dengue mosquito was included at the start of the book published by the textbook board. In a nutshell, it can be concluded that the textbook published by the textbook board was not completely aligned with the socio-economic and environmental perspectives of sustainable development.

### **Comparison of the content analyses of both types of Urdu textbook**

The findings of the content analysis of Urdu textbooks provide important dimensions regarding the Urdu curriculum that explain two important sustainable development perspectives which are socio-economic and environmental. It can be inferred from the above analyses that the authors of the textbooks of both publishing agencies in Pakistan are addressing important perspectives of ESD. The comparative analysis reveals that Urdu textbook published by private agency is better aligned with the goals of sustainable development in terms of socio-cultural and environmental perspectives, however one important component related to the environmental perspective in Pakistan is the awareness raising campaign for prevention of dengue mosquito which is included by the textbook board. This component is missing in the private textbook.

It is clear from the content analyses that environmental aspects are not given appropriate weighting in the content. The researcher finds that some domains of ESD such as HIV/AIDS, gender equality, and climate change are not mentioned in the content of both types of textbooks. It is also noted that environmental aspect of ESD is not found in the content of Urdu text book published by the Textbook Board. Commentaries about disasters' awareness and natural sources are very few in a private agency text.

Overall, it is concluded that content of Urdu textbooks should be improved in terms of socio-cultural and environmental perspectives of ESD. This study recommends that curricula developers, policy planners and teachers should incorporate the multidisciplinary features of ESD in the curricula of Urdu at the elementary level. Schools in any society are established for educating and training of young citizens in order to provide awareness regarding their rights and responsibilities and preparing them for living a better life in a society.

Furthermore, schools should develop students' literacy skills that are very necessary in performing their duties effectively in the society. ESD serves the personal interest of the individuals of the society, as well as collective interest of the society, because every society also have a collective interest in promotion of democracy, cultural values and traditions that can be boost up through better learning of children.

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