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## Critical Thinking and Curriculum of English at Higher Secondary School Level in Pakistan

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### Abstract

*International competitiveness, new technologies and changing markets resulted in a paradigm shift in education that demanded to enrich students with higher-order thinking skills, especially critical thinking. National Curriculum Pakistan was developed and launched in 2006. The curriculum of English (2006) has been devised to provide opportunities for language development of learners to equip them with the competencies that help to better adapt to knowledge advancement and ever-changing local and global society. To investigate if the intended curriculum of English has the goals of higher-order thinking and the planned curriculum in the form of textbooks, is designed keeping in view the current demands of competitive competencies for what the National curriculum of English was planned, and to assess the teachers' perspectives and perception about critical thinking, the researcher conducted a qualitative study. In one of the districts of Punjab Pakistan, based upon the highest enrollment, four male and four female colleges from each of its four subdivisions were selected. One male and one female teacher from each college volunteered to participate in the study. The three-stage study aimed to analyze the intended and planned curriculum of English at higher secondary school level and then analyze the teacher's perception regarding critical thinking, and the actual classroom practices were observed to review the enacted curriculum.*

**Key Words:** 21st Century Skills, Critical Thinking, Curriculum of English, Critical Analysis, Professional Development

### Introduction

The education system of any country depends upon the curriculum to systematize and execute the educational process smoothly. The curriculum is a systematic process that includes teaching strategies, course content, learning experiences, learning outcomes, assessment system, the educational environment, the individual student's learning style, personal time table and program of work (Harden, R.M, 2001). Education reforms change an important part of curriculum changes (Sahlberg, 2006). As the curriculum is dynamic, that's why it is always open for its improvement, because innovations reflected in the education system are observable to the extent that they are a part of the curriculum (Gözütok, 2003; Kösterelioğlu & Özen, 2014; Yapıcı & Demirdelen, 2007). Teacher's and other agents concerned can impart education to approaching generations only through the curriculum.

During the National Curriculum reform in Pakistan, the curriculum of English was revised in 2006 to enhance the quality of learning opportunities and to meet the needs of learners, as well as the local and global job market. The present curriculum aimed to place emphasis on higher-order thinking rather than simply acquiring knowledge and to incorporate such activities that cater for progressive cognitive development from the low intellectual level of skill to the higher-order skill of critical thinking.

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For successful implementation of the English curriculum in the Pakistan education system from grade 1 to grade 12, textbooks were published by the Punjab textbook board. These books are the main source used for teaching and learning English. Therefore, the successful implementation of the intended curriculum depends on the planned curriculum, that is, the quality of textbooks. Whether the English textbooks published by the government textbooks boards in Pakistan are according to the intended curriculum proposed by the Ministry of Education and if the teachers are utilizing this planned curriculum in true spirit in their classroom practices that are enacted curriculum. Analysis of the intended and planned curriculum of English does not only help increase the effectiveness of textbooks but also pinpoint their strengths and weakness for what it has been designed for classroom instruction so far. Whereas analysis of enacted curriculum will help to plan teachers' professional development programs in accordance with the objectives stated in the intended curriculum of English.

## Review of Related Literature

The education system of any country is directly affected by global changes. Therefore it is needed to enrich students with thinking skills to counteract these changes that will help them to examine the information and to make decisions logically. To function effectively in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, specific skills and competencies needed to be developed. The central focus of these competencies and skills should include an element of productivity, content creation, collaboration, communication as well as personalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century ([Mc Loughin and Lee, 2008](#); [Redecker and Punie, 2013](#)). For twenty-first-century learning, critical thinking is considered fundamental ([Ananiadou and Claro, 2009](#)). [Wagner \(2010, p.4\)](#) pinpointed that seven survival skills are needed to prepare students for twenty-first-century life, work and citizenship.

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Collaboration and leadership
- Agility and adaptability
- Initiative and entrepreneurialism
- Effective oral and written communication
- Assessing and analyzing information
- Curiosity imagination

For providing quality education to young people and to develop cogent reasoning, critical thinking skills are considered core literacy skills ([UNESCO, 2015](#)). For the professional development of in-service teachers, critical thinking enhances the knowledge, skills and performance ([NPST, 2009, Pakistan](#)).

Rudd, Baker, Hoover, and Gregg (1999) defined it as a reasoned, intentional, and introspective approach for problem-solving or addressing questions with concrete evidence and information. [Kong \(2007\)](#) defined critical thinking as a multifaceted and multi-dimensional cognitive ability.

[Paul and Elder \(p.257, 2005\)](#) identified the following stages for the development of critical thinking.

**Stage 1:** Unreflective thinker

When one is unaware of significant problems in thinking

**Staged 2:** Challenged thinker

When one is aware of problems in the thinking

**Stage 3:** Beginning thinker

When one is trying to improve but without regular practice

**Stage 4:** Practicing thinker

When one recognizes the necessity of regular practice

**Stage 5:** Advanced thinker

When one advances in accordance with regular practice

**Stage 6:** Master thinker

Skilled and insightful thinking becomes second nature

According to [Iqbal and Shayer \(1995\)](#), loopholes are found between the cognitive learning level of school children and science curricula. To enhance students cognitive learning, there is a need to review classroom methodology. [Iqbal and Shayer \(2000\)](#) recommended that even with low-level activities in the syllabus, students cognitive abilities can be enhanced by refining teaching practices and skills. Therefore to develop enriched cognitive learning, a shift from rote to cognitive learning needed. [Ashraf and Rarieya 2008](#) found that to produce critical thinker, the current teaching style needs to be changed. [Cassum et al. \(2013\)](#) conducted a study perception of teachers about critical thinking in Pakistan. This study revealed that curricular and institutional endeavor is needed to apply and promote critical thinking in higher education in Pakistan. The faculty perceived that critical thinking (analysis, evaluation and decision making) is a multifaceted concept, skills and dispositions both are involved in it. There is intimate need to educate teachers in critical thinking skill as it is considered mandatory due to workplace demand and to produce productive citizen of society ([NEP, 2009](#)).

[Mahmood \(2017, p226\)](#) concluded that to develop critical thinkers in Pakistan, there is a need to develop teacher-focused interventions, a constructive, self-regulated and collaborative method for developing innovative instructions and value-oriented professional development of teachers. According to Khan (2017), to develop critical thinking among learners, there is a need to focus on specific skills and promoting questions and change assessment criteria.

[Cosgrove \(2011, p 228-233\)](#) referred that an integrated, long term, well planned and well-funded approach to professional development is needed that focus on improving, teaching and learning for critical thinking across the institution. Khan (2017, p 197) concluded while working on the concept of critical thinking in the context of functional English course in B. Ed degree in Pakistan that specific skills should be focused on, questioning should be promoted, assessment criteria as well student background are also a hindrance for the development of critical thinking.

## **Discussion**

### **Curriculum and Planning**

The National curriculum document analysis of English (2006) showed that it was planned by considering all activities at each grade level that lead from moderate development of the lower intellectual level of skills of simple knowledge and comprehension to higher-order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation to ratify the ability of reasoning, problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity. The curriculum is a methodical process that includes course content, learning experiences, teaching strategies, assessment system, learning outcomes, the educational environment, the individual student's learning style, personal time table and program of work ([Harden, R.M,2001](#)). The curriculum is narrated as a "planned outcome" ([Morris and Adamson,2010](#)). Curriculum act as "a selected template" for learning that procures its base from "contents and performance standards" ([Mc Tighe & Wiggins,2012](#)). The curriculum sets the direction for all the contents that had to be blended in a textbook, even examined the classroom methodology that needs to be adopted, assessment procedure and guidelines for selection of textbook and material writing.

### **Development of Text Books (Planned Curriculum)**

For the development of textbooks curriculum provided the configuration, it was intimated that selection of text material, classroom methodology and assessment procedure should be outlined in a way to enhance critical thinking. Planned curriculum ([Gehrke, Knapp, & Sirotnik, 1992](#)) refer to the goals and activities depicted in textbooks.

### **Critical Thinking and Text Books of English**

When textbooks of English were examined for answering research question 2, it was found that contents were not substantial enough to enhance critical thinking in the reader. According to modern trends and technology, workforce demands and global changes that are taking place around us, there is a need to renovate the textbooks. As it is an age of dynamism and contents had not been amended for so many years ago, there is a need to evaluate or rebuild the content every year. Few loopholes were found between intended and planned curricula. Textbooks

were not designed in a way to promote critical thinking in students, no such exercises were planned, and no activities were given for the application of specific skills in any of the textbook; rather, there was overloading of topics. The questions outlined were mostly the knowledge typed or closed questions where students were expected to recall the specific knowledge and the retention of already learned material is examined (Blosser, 2000, pp.3-4).

### **Analysis of Hidden Text**

Skills should be taught to the students for analysis of hidden behind the texts. According to [Luke and Freebody \(1999a\)](#), there is a need of practicing critically analyzing and transforming texts to explore values and ideologies that the plot or character conveyed. No visuals, mind maps or flow charts were found in any of the textbooks. Maps, drawing, graphs, pictures that helped to understand the text better was not incorporated.

### **Visual Text**

Visual texts prompted by multiplex mental processes because insight and averment were provided by them, which words alone cannot provide ([Brill, Kim, & Branch, 2007](#); [Evans, 1998](#); [Unsworth & Wheeler, 2002](#)). According to [Dowhower \(1997\)](#), visual text reading, because of its implicit meaning, leads to more chances for inference. Even contents are not developed in a way that promotes inquiry, reasoning and analytical abilities. The enacted curriculum is not implemented in true essence by the classroom teacher.

### **Teacher Focused Intervention**

curriculum document of English claimed that to promote critical thinking, both in-service and pre-service training will be provided to nurture self-directive, analytical and reflective teachers that will not merely passively teach textbooks but will able to devise their own teaching material and classroom activities for successful implementation of this curriculum. Most of the teachers were still using the lecture and discussion method when classroom practices were observed. Some teachers even read the text by their selves. To prompt critical thinking in the reader, classroom activities were applied by few teachers. [Mahmood \(2017, p 226\)](#) inferred in Pakistan, there is a need to develop teacher-focused intercession, a constructive, self-regulated and collaborative method to make instructions innovative and value-oriented professional development of teachers to develop critical thinkers.

### **Amendments in Assessment Criteria**

Khan (2017) concluded that to develop critical thinking among learners, specific skills need to be focused and questioning promoted, and assessment criteria to be changed. Although it is stated in the National curriculum document of English (2006) that an assessment system should be designed in a way that it will be skill-based using unseen text and material is recommended. Through interpretive exercises, skills like analytic ability, critical thinking, application, reasoning skills separate from content knowledge will be assessed.

### **Professional Development**

[Cosgrove \(2011, p228-233\)](#) referred that well planned, integrated, long term and well-funded approach to professional development is needed that focus on improving, teaching and learning for critical thinking across the institution. [Meng \(2016, p 200-205\)](#) inferred that to develop critical thinking in learners; they should be prompted to ask questions that will enhance their critical thinking and faculty should be developed in such a way to foster critical thinking in students, annotating text to deep comprehension, promoting co-operative learning, focusing on real-world issues.

### **Critical Questioning**

Data obtained from interviews and classroom practices disclosed that open-ended, thought-provoking questioning was a remarkable strategy used by the teacher for fostering critical thinking skill. Open-ended,

thought-provoking questions are higher-order questions that can stimulate higher order thinking ([Renaud & Murray, 2007](#)).

### **Central Idea Prompt Critical Analysis**

The central theme of the story reflected the key message of the story that the writer wanted to convey to students. From the perspective of critical literacy, it was assumed that text is not neutral ([Luke & Freebody, 1999 b](#)). If the teacher discussed the central idea or key message hidden in the story, it leads to the practice and development of the analytic abilities of the student ([Luke & Freebody, 1999 b](#)). Therefore it was recommended that the teacher should identify and discuss the central idea of the story to promote critical analysis.

### **Interconnecting Peers**

Very few teachers organized peer discussions, according to the socio-constructivist interpretation of learning, it was suggested that interconnection among people synchronized the learning ([Denscombe, 2010](#); [Creswell, 2009](#)). When students are provided with the chance to discuss, they develop shared meanings by interchanging views that were called social intervention ([Lave, 2009](#); [Wenger, 2009](#)) that provoke critical thinking in learners. For assuring meaningful learning of students, it is indispensable to relate it with student's existing knowledge and experiences in classrooms (Gonzalez, 2005; Luke & Freebody, 1999a; Rosenbelt, 1978).

### **Conclusions**

Global changes and quest for twenty-first-century skills led the curriculum planners to develop the intended curriculum that is National curriculum document of English (2006) for providing standardized learning opportunities to learners. Regardless of all these endeavor that was done by curriculum planners and textbooks developers, shortcomings were found in intended, planned and enacted curriculum. Data analysis and finding of the study helped to deduce the following conclusions:

1. Curriculum planners developed the National curriculum document of English (2006) to promote higher-order thinking skills in learner's, especially critical thinking, by delineating the competencies, standards, benchmarks and student learning outcomes for each grade level (I-XII). Textbook writers were provided direction for selection and development of text material and formulating activities, as well to teachers with instructional strategies and assessment of learning for illustration of critical thinking skills that are our enacted curriculum. For the implementation of this curriculum, teachers training (pre-service and in-service) was also recommended.
2. According to the instructions and suggestion put forward by curriculum planners, Punjab textbooks of English were not developed. Limitations were found between the textbooks (planned curriculum) and the checklist provided in the intended curriculum for the development of textbooks.
3. The teachers perceived critical thinking skills. Most of the teachers agreed that contents were not outlined in a way to promote critical thinking skills, but all of them conceded that it is on the teacher to explicate contents to nurture critical thinking skills in learners.
4. Most of the teachers employed the traditional lecture method that provided obstruction to critical thinking skills. Classroom activities were not formulated in such a way to intensify critical thinking capabilities. Self-writing and questioning were not encouraged. Classroom teachers supported the use of helping material that encouraged cramming and rote memorization leading to failure of development of higher-order thinking skills. The assessment system was not skill-based, employing unrevealed text and material that was recommended in the National curriculum document that also led to the failure of development of critical thinking skills.

### **Recommendations**

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. There should be close collaboration between curriculum planners and textbook developers to minimize the gap between the intended and planned curriculum.

2. For developing textbooks and selection of writing material aligned to the guideline provided by the National curriculum document, there is a need for professional training textbook developers.
3. The findings of this study pinpointed the gaps that are found in the planned curriculum as textbook developers are not developing textbooks according to the criteria set by the curriculum planner. It is therefore recommended to bridge up the gap between curriculum planners and textbook developers; there is a dire need to establish an ensuring committee that could ensure the development of textbooks according to the checklist developed and provided by curriculum planners.
4. This study concealed gaps between planned and enacted curriculum. Teaching methodology (because the teacher is the change agent that can bring change in thinking skills of students, so there is a need to change the mind of the teacher also) and instructional strategy both effects practical application of the enacted curriculum (development of critical thinking skills among the students which were found missing in the classroom practices). Therefore, it is forcefully recommended that within teacher preparation and professional development, some useful teaching strategies should be learned.
5. It could provide further direction for bringing change in enacted curriculum to investigate what kind of capacity building program should be introduced for teaching faculty (pre-service and in-service) to enhance critical thinking among students.
6. As clear directions for assessment system is given in the National Curriculum which needs to be implemented in true spirit to enhance critical thinking in the classrooms, that's why a further area of research could be what strategies need to be devised to implement assessment criteria in true spirit as to foster critical thinking in the students.
7. As this study was conducted on a small group of people in particular- setting at a specific time, it could not provide deep insight for the analysis of intended, planned and enacted curriculum at higher secondary school level (developing critical thinking skills) over an extended period of the time. Therefore, further research could be conducted to analyze the intended, planned and enacted curriculum for other subjects taught at higher secondary school level for developing critical thinking skills.

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