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Description: To Examine Curriculum Overload and Secondary Students' Learning Performance in Pakistan

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Abstract

Curriculum planning plays a central role in shaping students' learning experiences and academic outcomes. In Pakistan, the secondary school curriculum has increasingly expanded due to the continuous inclusion of new subjects and topics without the systematic removal of outdated or less relevant content, resulting in curriculum overload. This study examines the concept of curriculum overload at the secondary school level in Pakistan and analyzes its impact on students' learning performance. Adopting a quantitative and descriptive research design, the study relies on a structured review and thematic analysis of relevant Pakistani research articles published between 2010 and 2025. The findings reveal that curriculum overload leads to excessive academic pressure, limited instructional time, and an emphasis on syllabus completion rather than conceptual understanding. Consequently, students experience increased stress, reduced motivation, reliance on rote memorization, and diminished critical thinking skills, all of which negatively affect academic performance. The study further highlights that inadequate curriculum planning and poor alignment between content, time, and available resources exacerbate these challenges. The paper concludes that periodic curriculum review, rationalization of content, and balanced curriculum planning are essential to promote meaningful learning, reduce academic stress, and improve secondary students' educational outcomes in Pakistan.

Keywords

Curriculum overload; Secondary education; Learning performance; Curriculum planning; Pakistan

Introduction Concept of Curriculum

A curriculum serves as a foundation for directing instruction. It is referred to as a course of study and the entirety of a student's educational experience. The following questions must be addressed in curriculum design: pedagogy, assessment, curriculum purpose, curriculum framework, and what new things the curriculum will bring. The curriculum should be created in a way that fosters students' creativity and develops their general skills. Curriculum should not be utilized solely for social needs; rather, it should be a document that promotes student development and integrates skills into disciplines so that students may use their knowledge in real-world contexts. Curricula should be created for early specialization, technological



Vol. 4 No. 1 (January) (2026)

advancement, and critical thinking in addition to literacy. A child's curriculum serves as a document for their overall growth (Priestly, 2019). Curriculum should not be used for the sake of social needs alone but it should be a document that should foster students' improvement and bring about merging skills to subjects as this will enable students' apply their skills in authentic situations. Curriculum should not be designed for students' literacy. The direction and efficacy of learning outcomes are shaped by curriculum planning, which is widely recognized as a key factor in determining the quality of education. Curriculum is now viewed in modern educational research as an integrated system of planned and unplanned learning experiences meant to prepare students for academic, professional, and civic engagement rather than just as a body of knowledge (Stauffer, 2020; Anierobi, Ezeonwumelu, Ufearo & Okika, 2023). Curriculum design and implementation require careful balancing of content volume, instructional time and resource availability, as the misalignment of these factors can significantly weaken attainment of intended objectives (Chaudhary, 2015; Ejike & Oke, 2018). Curriculum overload is also known as curriculum expansion which simply means the injection of new content items in the curriculum as an adjustment to new trends in society without considering what needs to be discarded. It is the introduction of new areas of interest like digital literacy ranging from coding, Block chain, financial literacy and understanding the history of the nation and refusing to remove that which is obsolete or becoming irrelevant (Majoni, 2017). According to research, overload has a wide range of negative effects, including decreased comprehension of fundamental concepts, rote memorization, superficial learning, and eventually diminishing student performance. In terms of pedagogy, teacher-centered coverage models that put syllabus completion ahead of critical thinking or problem-solving are encouraged by overcrowded curricula. Psychologically, students who are overburdened with coursework frequently suffer from stress, exhaustion, disengagement, and decreased motivation, all of which impair retention and advancement. (Awofala & Sopekan, 2013; Dawal & Mangu, 2021). Families are under financial strain due to increased test preparation, more classes, and learning resources; those in lower socioeconomic categories are disproportionately affected (Eduwem & Ezeonwumelu, 2020; Kanu & Simon, 2020). The policy goal of creating coherent foundational competencies for later educational stages is undermined by these issues, which are especially severe in secondary education due to overburdened schedules, a heavy subject load, and a lack of teacher specialization (Majoni, 2017; Mathew, 2014; Ogba, 2020). In light of this gap, this study looked at the factors that contribute to curricular overload and assessed how they affect Pakistani secondary school students' academic achievement.

Problem Statement

Due to the constant addition of new material without the removal of out-of-date content, Pakistan's secondary school curriculum has grown increasingly overburdened. Students who experience this overload are more likely to learn superficially, experience stress, be less motivated, and perform worse academically. Learning results are further weakened when curriculum volume, instructional time, and resources are not aligned. Examining how curricular overload impacts Pakistani secondary students' learning outcomes is crucial.



Vol. 4 No. 1 (January) (2026)

Research Objectives

1. To examine the concept of curriculum overload at the secondary school level in Pakistan.
2. To analyze the impact of curriculum overload on students' learning outcomes.
3. To explore the role of curriculum planning in students' academic performance at the
4. secondary level.

Research Questions

1. What is curriculum overload at the secondary school level in Pakistan?
2. How does curriculum overload affect students' learning outcomes?
3. How does curriculum planning influence the academic performance of secondary school students?

Literature review

Every defined educational program revolves around its curriculum. Strangely, numerous attempts over the years to provide a succinct description of the idea have produced more questions than answers. The Latin verb "curare," which means "to run," is where the word "curriculum" originated (Etuk et al., 2019). stated that "the planned learning contents and opportunities used for the education of the learners which gives them worthwhile learning experiences within the school setting" are included in a school curriculum. The entirety of a student's educational experiences makes up their curriculum (Maduabum, 2006). One of the issues with modern educational institutions is an overburdened curriculum (Sa, 2012). One of the issues with modern educational institutions is an overburdened curriculum (Odey & Opoh, 2015) Academic overload is another issue related to an overcrowded curriculum, in addition to material duplication. Simply put, academic overload is when students are subjected to so many academic activities that they find it difficult to handle the workload or intensity. Academic burnout and other types of psycho-social stress result from professors trying to cover a wide range of topics in the curriculum by giving students more assignments and material. This is known as academic overload. (Sulaiman & Akinsanya, 2011) (Luciano, 2017). Numerous research on academic overload have demonstrated how common it is in secondary schools and have emphasized the detrimental psycho-somatic effects it has on students. (Yang, 2014) (Sommer & Dumont, 2011) suggested that our curriculum's shortcomings are evident at both the creation and implementation stages due to a perceived lack of involvement from instructors and students, who are important stakeholders in the educational process. Attempts to match accessible materials and pedagogies with our complex developmental requirements are linked to some of the deficiencies in our curriculum. (Ukor & Agbidye, 2015) proposed that incorporating new teaching techniques into routine classroom activities is a necessary part of curriculum implementation. These approaches include teachers and students in ways that lessen disparities. (Roehrig et al.,2017) It entails putting concepts or reforms into reality through activities and developing a framework that transforms the curriculum into real classroom teaching. Giving students knowledge, experience, and skills and assisting them in making successful use of them is the primary objective of curricular implementation. In order to promote good changes in pupils, it entails implementing the same curriculum in all schools at



Vol. 4 No. 1 (January) (2026)

the same grade levels under the direction of teachers (Gleeson et al., 2020). Teachers are certainly expected to adapt the curriculum effectively and translate it into activities in the classroom (Marques & Ronualdo, 2020). The training and continuous professional development that pre-service teachers require for effective implementation are sometimes overlooked in the planning and execution of curriculum modifications (WB, 2020). Textbooks and curricula reflect educational objectives, contain methodical instructional content, and play a crucial role in raising educational standards (Amir, 2023). The COVID-19 epidemic unexpectedly swept around the world, impacting all facets of society, including academic institutions. It significantly affects the academic setting and teaching-learning activities (Bozkurt et al., 2022), including in Pakistan, where this study was conducted. Responding to the COVID-19 outbreak, Pakistani government ensures the closure of schools and universities, and moves the education activities to digital spaces (Khan & Abid, 2021; Rafique et al., 2021) Although this approach seemed to be quite successful in reducing direct interaction between students and relevant school stakeholders, it negatively impacted the students' daily routines, particularly with regard to their learning habits and styles (Buchanan et al., 2022). But as a result of the worldwide school closures, it became evident right away that pupils were suffering from severe learning losses as a result of the unanticipated shift from in-person instruction to remote learning (Ullah et al., 2021).

Research Methodology

The current research used a quantitative and descriptive research design to examine the reasons and consequences of curriculum overload on the workload of teachers, their instruction and learning performance in Pakistan among secondary students. Descriptive research approach was applied since the research was to examine and quantify the existing conditions, attitudes and perception without controlling any variable. Through this design, it was possible to have a clear picture of the impact of curriculum overload on teaching as well as learning. Data Collection The data have been gathered in the form of different research papers and studies connected with the topic of curriculum overload in the Pakistani context. Articles published within the decade of 2010-2025 were factored in so as to be relevant to date. The research was carried out in terms of literature that shed some light to the causes, effects and educational implications of curriculum overload on teachers and students. Population and Sample The sample of the research was all the research articles that were published in Pakistan on the topic of curriculum overload between 2010 and 2025, the total amounting to 30 articles. The purposive sampling method was used to identify pertinent researches that could offer valuable information on factors that lead to curriculum overload, its effects on the workload of teachers, instructional delivery, and the performance of students in learning. **Data Analysis**

The data that were gathered were evaluated in a descriptive and thematic way. The major results of the reviewed literature were structured into the themes, including: Curriculum overload causes (e.g. too much, too fast of reforms, bad planning) Influence on workload and teaching performance of teachers. Impacts on learning performance, motivation and cognitive engagement of students. Impact on evaluation systems and education results. These results were generalized to come up with trends and links between curriculum overload and the learning performance of students, using evidence of the studies reviewed. **Finding and discussion**



Vol. 4 No. 1 (January) (2026)

The results of this research would show that curriculum overload is a critical problem at the secondary school level in Pakistan. It can be seen in the reviewed literature that there is a continuous addition of new subjects and topics to the curriculum without any deletion of outdated and less relevant materials. This makes the syllabus long and hard to cover using the available time of instruction. The inadequate planning of the curriculum and absence of correspondence between content and time and available resources also add to this issue and effective teaching and learning becomes a great challenge. The research also indicates that curriculum overload affects learning outcomes of the students negatively. As a result of intense academic pressure, students usually memorize the content instead of having the capacity to form a conceptual grasp and be able to think critically. Due to these factors, many students are likely to have academic stress and fatigue resulting in poor academic performance and also lack of motivation. Teachers do not have the time to employ student-centered teaching in the stress to cover the syllabus. Thus, the research underlines the necessity of balanced and properly designed curricula, which encourage meaningful learning and enhance academic performance of students.

Conclusion

This research paper has found curriculum overload to be a major issue in a secondary school curriculum in Pakistan largely because of the constant introduction of new content without the elimination of the old one. A bulky curriculum puts pressure on teachers to cover the syllabus and constrains the students to come out with profound knowledge, critical thinking and meaningful learning. It also enhances the stress levels in academics, it diminishes the motivation and rote learning, which is a negative factor influencing the academic performance of the students. Thus, the research paper points to the necessity of the effective planning of a curriculum, periodic review of the curriculum and rationalization of curriculum content to have the balanced curriculum that promotes the quality education and better learning results.

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Vol. 4 No. 1 (January) (2026)

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