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Holistic Development of a Child's Personality in Pakistan's Single National Curriculum at Primary Level: An Islamic Appraisal

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Abstract

This article appraises Pakistan's primary-level Single National Curriculum (SNC) through an Islamic framework of holistic personality development. Using a pragmatic qualitative documentary design, it analyses selected Qur'anic and Prophetic sources, classical Muslim educational thought, the National Curriculum Framework, SNC standards, benchmarks, Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for Grades I–V, selected textbooks, activities, teacher guidance, and assessment provisions. Evidence is classified as explicit, implicit, or aspirational and interpreted through alignment, coverage gap, productive overlap, and structural tension. The SNC shows strong alignment in spiritual and moral formation, accountable reasoning, social responsibility, citizenship, health, and selected environmental concerns, especially where values are translated into observable performance. Its main weaknesses are limited progression in emotional and aesthetic development, weak integration of economic competence with ethical dealing, inadequate multilingual assessment pathways, curriculum overload, and assessment that may privilege recall over understanding. Comparison with the 2006 Islamiyat curriculum shows reorganisation, relocation, and selective addition rather than wholesale removal of moral or Sufi content. The study concludes that the SNC provides a credible but incomplete foundation for Islamic holistic development and requires tighter sequencing, cross-curricular value integration, multilingual assessment support, targeted teacher development, and evidence-based assessment.

Keywords: holistic personality development; Single National Curriculum; Islamic education; primary education; qualitative content analysis; Pakistan

1. Introduction

Primary education is not only the source of what a child knows, but also of the ways he or she thinks, self-regulates, interacts with others, and experiences morality. In the first years of primary school, in particular, the quality of early education (teacher–child interaction and purposeful learning) continues to have an impact on language and mathematics skills (Rademacher et al., 2025). Physical activity can also be used to foster social-emotional learning, and teachers need to plan, facilitate, and reflect to support play-based learning (Moon et al., 2024; Li & Kangas, 2024). Holistic development is thus the integrated development of intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and physical dimensions, rather than an add-on to academic learning. This question is particularly pertinent in Pakistan, where the SNC functions in the context of linguistic hierarchy, provincial differences, institutional disparities, and divergent expectations regarding religion, national identity, and modern competence. At the primary level, its goals are manifested in standards, benchmarks, SLOs, textbooks, activities, teacher guidance, and assessment in Islamiyat, languages, Social Studies, Science, and other subjects. What matters is whether commitments to character, citizenship, creativity, or critical thinking are prioritised in the SNC, supported by the materials, and manifested in learning outcomes.

Policy research warns against taking for granted a linear path of curriculum change from policy to practice. In Pakistan, policy is reframed through federal, institutional, local, and geopolitical dynamics (Dingwall & Hall, 2025). Recent SNC research also shows that tensions exist between national standardisation and cultural responsiveness due to restricted use of local knowledge and diversity as influenced by centralised materials, limited preparation time, language barriers and high-stakes testing (Saleem & Dare, 2026). English further is associated with status and opportunity in the form of colonial and neoliberal language ideologies which continue to be sustained (Ali, 2026). Linguistic and cultural inclusion is therefore at the centre, and not on the margins, of holistic development. Through the study of declared aims in documentary evidence from textbooks, it is shown that there is a need to look at declared aims. In the English textbooks of Grades 1-5 used in Pakistani schools, males are more likely to be represented in authoritative and professional roles whereas females are more likely to be represented in domestic and subordinate roles (Kumar et al., 2025). Additionally, General Knowledge and Science textbooks have traditionally framed nature as a resource or backdrop rather than focusing on ecological interdependence and sustained responsibility (Shoib & Lin, 2025). Studies from Punjab indicate that the relevance of global citizenship is realised through local, reflexive, and ethical action (Kester et al., 2025). Presence in curricular activities alone does not, therefore, ensure developmental adequacy.

The gap between stated and enacted purposes also appears in teaching and assessment. Teacher competencies vary in Pakistan's public schools, which affects the value of uniform professional development (Kalim, 2024), and Pakistani English teachers hold varying conceptions of assessment, which influence assessment for learning and accountability (Hidri et al., 2024). Content coverage alone does not lead to moral reasoning, cooperation, creativity, empathy, and responsible behaviour. The enacted curriculum can become more restricted because of overloaded SLOs, recall-oriented assessment, and limited support for reflective pedagogy. An Islamic appraisal is appropriate because Islamic education involves knowledge, character, spirituality, and social responsibility. *Fitrah*, *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, *ta'dib*, and *tazkiyah* are interconnected in a single process of human formation, encompassing intellectual development, purification, moral conduct, and responsibility. Agbaria (2024) posits that relying solely on transmission and recall in Islamic education makes teaching and learning developmentally weak, whereas Alotaibi (2025) shows that teacher-centred approaches, inadequate teacher training, and a lack of critical thinking are obstacles to higher-order thinking skills. The appropriate test of the SNC is therefore not how much Islam is included, but whether curricular knowledge contributes to understanding, moral agency, spiritual consciousness, disciplined conduct, and just social relations.

Previous research addresses policy recontextualisation, language hierarchy, textbook representation, citizenship, teacher competence, assessment, and Islamic pedagogy individually. What is lacking is a comprehensive evaluation of the entire primary-level SNC from a holistic Islamic perspective on personality development. To address this gap, official standards and benchmarks, selected textbooks, activities, teacher guidance, and assessment expectations in spiritual, moral, cognitive, social-emotional, physical, aesthetic, linguistic, civic, economic, and life-skills dimensions have been analysed. This helps identify substantive alignment and nominal inclusion, as well as gaps, overlap, and structural tension, in relation to what children can understand, practise, internalise, and become through the SNC's documentary architecture.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Holistic Personality Development

Conceptual inflation and curriculum fragmentation can negatively affect holistic development. Holistic development cannot be reduced to a list of cognitive, emotional, moral, physical, social, and spiritual outcomes; it concerns capacities developing through interaction. Language and emotion influence reasoning; knowledge, empathy, and action shape moral judgement; intellectual freedom and psychological security support creativity; and a sense of identity, communication, moral insight, and social engagement fosters civic responsibility. A substantive view of the human person and the life of which education is a part is needed (Arthur et al., 2025), while an understanding of flourishing becomes empty if considered in isolation from character, virtue, and practical judgement (Kristjánsson, 2025). This study refers to the integrated development of capacities and dispositions in a child's 'whole' personality, through which the child gains knowledge, regulates the self, makes responsible judgements, forms relationships, responds to beauty, participates in society, and develops a morally grounded sense of purpose. Here, personality does not refer to a stable and fixed set of attributes, but to a personality formed through the educative processes of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, institutional, linguistic, and social contexts. Literacy and numeracy can be enhanced in a curriculum, but if the curriculum is developmentally limited, it may neglect moral agency, emotional regulation, reflection, physical well-being, creativity, or responsibility. Extensive value statements, on the other hand, are only as holistic as the learning experiences and actions through which they are integrated.

2.2 The Primary Stage and Language Learning

The primary years are formative because children move from predominantly family-mediated learning to a sustained institutional learning environment where they encounter rules, authority, cooperation, competition, evaluation, social difference, and public knowledge. These experiences influence their self-understanding as learners and their attitudes towards responsibility, success, belonging, religion, work, citizenship, and justice. Rademacher et al. (2025) revealed that the quality of early education remains a factor in initial primary outcomes, especially through meaningful teacher–child interaction and purposeful learning, rather than structural aspects alone. This suggests that curriculum models cannot assume that standards or textbooks will produce development without classroom relationships. Mediating curricular intentions through responsive instruction, active participation, age-appropriate challenge, and connections to experience makes primary education formative.

Academic and social-emotional learning are not mutually exclusive. Social-emotional learning (SEL) programmes have a positive impact on students' academic outcomes, with varying degrees of success depending on SEL design, implementation, and school level, according to a meta-analysis of over 33,000 students (Ha et al., 2025). However, these skills account for only part of the socioeconomic achievement gaps (Gruijters et al., 2024). A holistic educational approach is thus required to deal with the capabilities of individuals and with conditions of unequal development.

2.3 Types of Holistic Development

Cognitive development is where an individual understands, thinks, questions, analyses, creates and appraises knowledge. In rare instances, as Bubikova-Moan et al. (2026) show, critical thinking is mentioned without any reference to pedagogical or ethical discipline. The same holds true for

wording in the school curriculum: if the question, evidence, discussion and assessment do not require a higher order thinking verb to be used, then it is not a higher order thinking verb. However, the creative and aesthetic development also must be differentiated from the decorative activity. The implementation, duration, group size, content and assessment are all factors that affect whether a DT intervention can improve creativity or not (Muneer et al., 2026). Creativity is not just a bit of drawing or craft activity that is extraneous to intellectual activity, it is an opportunity to investigate, imagine, make, refine and explain. Social-emotional development includes self-awareness and self-management, cooperation, empathy, and perseverance, and responsible decision making. De Fruyt and Scheirlinckx (2025) note that there are inconsistencies in the terminology, that self-reporting is often used, and that the context is often missing – in the context of curriculum, this means that general guidelines, like ‘show respect’ are not sufficiently operationalized without the specification of situation, behaviour, and assessment criteria. Cooperation, self-management, interpersonal competence and emotional learning are all part of physical development, which is more than fitness (Moon et al., 2024).

Language development is a part of cognition, identity and participation. Evidence is least robust for SE interventions for multilingual learners, and curricula can attribute low levels of proficiency in the language of instruction to low levels of reasoning and confidence. The prestige, mobility and intelligence of English/Urdu and regional languages and their colonial and neoliberal associations further exacerbate these risks in Pakistan. Language inclusion is thus an intrinsic developmental condition. Holism is not just a matter of personal virtue, but it is also about civic, economic and ecological development. Civic development encompasses the capacity to identify difference and injustice and deliberation respectfully; economic development includes honesty in exchange, sensitivity towards social consequences of transactions, work ethic and stewardship, and ecological responsibility relates to how humans act in relation to the natural world. Pakistani textbooks have been found to be anthropocentric in nature (Shoaib & Lin, 2025) and portray gendered role patterns (Kumar et al., 2025). Thus the normalised identities, relationships, and hierarchies of the curricular representation as well as the overt values have an impact on holistic development.

2.4 Islamic Foundations: Fitrah, Tarbiyah, Ta’lim, Ta’dib and Tazkiyah

The Islamic educational thought has presented a complete view for the formation of human beings with the concept of the Tawhīd as the unity of divine truth and the integration of knowledge, character, worship, and action. But, as Ahmed and Chowdhury (2025) contend, Islamic education does not come simply by adding on religious components to an unaltered conception of schooling. The main question is: what is the attitude of the curriculum to the learner, to the knowledge, to the responsibility and to human flourishing? In this worldview, fitrah is the disposition and the ability to know the truth, to recognise moral meaning, to make relationships and to grow that the child was created with. It doesn't mean that development is automatic, but that God given potentialities should be developed appropriately through education. The child is not a ‘blank slate’ nor an entirely independent person developed solely by his/her own interests.

Tarbiyah cannot be simply translated as education or moral training as suggested by Abdalla (2025), as it means a nurturing process that takes time, builds relationships, and is purposeful that leads towards maturity and right action. The meanings of ta’lim are knowledge, ta’dib is good judgement and good behaviour and tazkiyah is purification and discipline of self. These concepts can be summed up by the words movement from knowledge to understanding, inward formation and responsible action. As Memon et al. (2024) pointed out, teacher formation plays a pivotal role in both worldview and knowledge, as well as in ethics and pedagogy. This is important for SNC

appraisal: if teachers are only ready to transmit merely the content in the textbook and to manage the examination, then it is not possible to fully realize a curriculum based on Islamic values.

2.5 Principles of the Qur'an and the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wassallam)

In the perspective of the Qur'an, education is related to moral and spiritual transformation. In Qur'an 35:28 knowledge is coupled with reverence, Qur'an 62:2 revelation and wisdom with purification, Qur'an 16:90 justice with excellence and Qur'an 49:13 diversity as a means of recognition not domination. These are learning principles which make knowledge, character, spirituality, social behaviour in a natural way educational goals. Prophetic pedagogy translates these objectives into an educative process that is characterized by compassion, sequential learning, dialogue, modelling, practice and awareness of the different situations. Agbaria (2024) questions passive learning in RE and Alotaibi (2025) correlates low HOTS to teacher-centred, rote and poor teacher preparation. Memorisation is acceptable, particularly in the field of Qur'anic studies, but it has to serve as a facilitator for understanding, reflection, internalisation and application. The SNC aims for common standards in a society with several provincial disparities and inequities in school systems, multilingual classrooms and multiple constructions of national identity. Policy is reframed in the context of federal institutions, relationships and history of authority (Dingwall & Hall, 2025).

Saleem and Dare (2026) see the relationship between national unity and cultural responsiveness as a tension, whereas Kester et al. (2025) reveal that citizenship can be meaningful if it is not only associated with peace and responsibility, but also with local inequality, power, dialogue and moral participation. Common expectations can advance equity, and standardisation can be limiting if it impacts regional knowledge, language, identity or experience. A crucial condition that is mediated is teacher capacity. The level of professional competence of teachers in Pakistan's public schools is also wide, and the training of teachers will not be uniform enough to solve the varying needs for teaching and learning (Kalim, 2024). The SNC's vision of integration is highly dependent on how teachers view and interpret it, as well as how they are able to manage multilingual participation and how they assess complex outcomes.

2.6 Islamic Holistic Analytical Framework

The study uses four criteria to assess the SNC: representation, progression, integration and enactability. Representation refers to explicit, implicit, or aspirational provision; progression looks at progression of learning across Grades I–V; integration is concerned with reinforcing learning of knowledge, faith, reflection, behaviour and cross-curricular learning; and enactability is the question of whether desired learning is feasible, based on activities, teacher guidance, language conditions and assessment. Results are then classified as alignment, gap, overlap and/or structural tension. 'Alignment' means that it is substantively related to Islamic principles; 'gaps' means that dimensions are either missing or not operationalised; 'overlap' means reinforcement or repetition of dimensions; and 'structural tension' means that there is a clash between a holistic aim and the overloaded SLO, recall-driven assessment, multilingual realities, stereotypical representation, or teacher preparation. The SNC's coherence in relation to the promotion of knowledge, character, spirituality, well-being, responsibility and action is therefore explored.

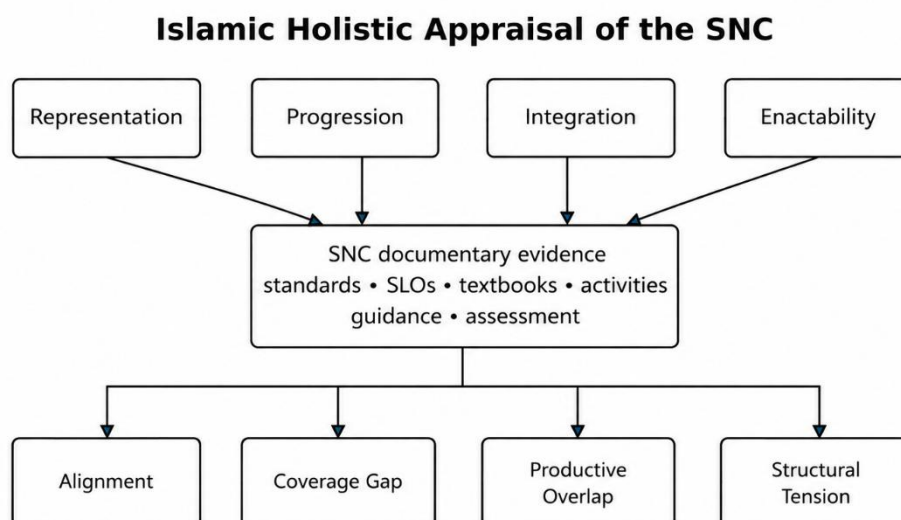


Figure 1. Islamic holistic analytical framework used to appraise the SNC.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Paradigm and Design

The research paradigm is the qualitative paradigm. This is qualitative documentary research that examines how personality development from an Islamic perspective is addressed in Pakistan's primary-level SNC. It did not involve new surveys, interviews, observations, experiments, or learner assessments. The analysis focused on how developmental aims and Islamic educational principles are manifested in standards, benchmarks, SLOs, textbooks, activities, teacher guidance, and assessment provisions in order to identify patterns within the documents. The guiding principle was pragmatism, which links method to the research problem and to the usefulness of the knowledge attained (Peirce, 1878; Dewey, 1938). This was appropriate for a study involving two sets of documents: Islamic sources that provided conceptual and evaluative principles, and SNC curricular documents that were evaluated against those principles. Islamic sources thus served as criteria for appraisal, not as evidence that the curriculum had achieved the desired outcomes.

Qualitative content analysis was the main method as it allows for the analysis of the meanings, priorities, values and expectations in official texts (Schreier, 2012; Krippendorff, 2019). Document analysis conceived of curriculum documents as institutional texts, that is, texts that express official intentions and assumptions (Bowen, 2009). A thematic coding process, drawing on Braun and Clarke (2006), revealed common themes of teacher mediation, assessment orientation, multilingual conditions, curriculum overload, inclusion and a disjuncture between policy aspiration and operational provision.

3.2 Documentary Corpus and Coding Procedure

The corpus comprised two groups. The Islamic corpus consisted of selected verses of the Qur'an, authentic hadith, and ideas from al-Ghazālī, Ibn Khaldūn, and al-Zarnūjī relevant to education; these were used to define concepts such as *fiṭrah*, *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, *ta'dib*, *tazkiyah*, *akhlaq*, *amanah*, justice, compassion, and responsible social conduct. The curriculum corpus comprised the official SNC and related national documents for Grades I–V, standards, benchmarks, SLOs,

selected prescribed textbooks, activities, teacher instructions, and assessment guidance. Islamiyat was examined as the primary source of spiritual and moral formation, while other subjects were examined for cross-curricular developmental outcomes and values.

Units of analysis were individual policy statements, standards, benchmarks, SLOs, textbook passages, questions, activities, teacher instructions, and assessment expectations. Broad claims were rejected unless supported by curricular evidence; for instance, the term ‘critical thinking’ was treated as aspirational unless supported by tasks such as ‘explain/compare/apply/analyse/evaluate’. The revised taxonomy of Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) helped interpret cognitive demand; however, verbs were analysed together with the task and the learner's expected response.

Repeated close reading and systematic coding were conducted to make the analysis. The identification of indicators began with Islamic sources to identify indicators of spiritual, moral, cognitive, social-emotional, physical, aesthetic, linguistic, civic, economic, and life-skills development and then applied to the SNC corpus. Evidence was coded as explicit if it was expressed and operationalised, implicit if meaningfully included in an outcome or activity and ‘aspirational’ if only in generic policy language. Progressions in Grades I–V and coherence from standards to SLOs to textbooks to activities to assessments were also taken into account. Coded evidence was segmented into: Alignment, Coverage Gap, Overlap, and Structural Tension. Substantial correspondence with Islamic educational principles was termed as alignment, absent or weak development was coded as gap, repetition across grade or discipline was coded as overlap, and absence or weak presence of holistic intentions was coded as structural tension, which included four factors: 1) overload of SLOs, 2) recall-oriented assessment, 3) multilingual conditions, and 4) lack of teacher preparation. Consistency was ensured by consistent definitions of categories, repeated readings and by comparing each interpretation with the context in which it was found.

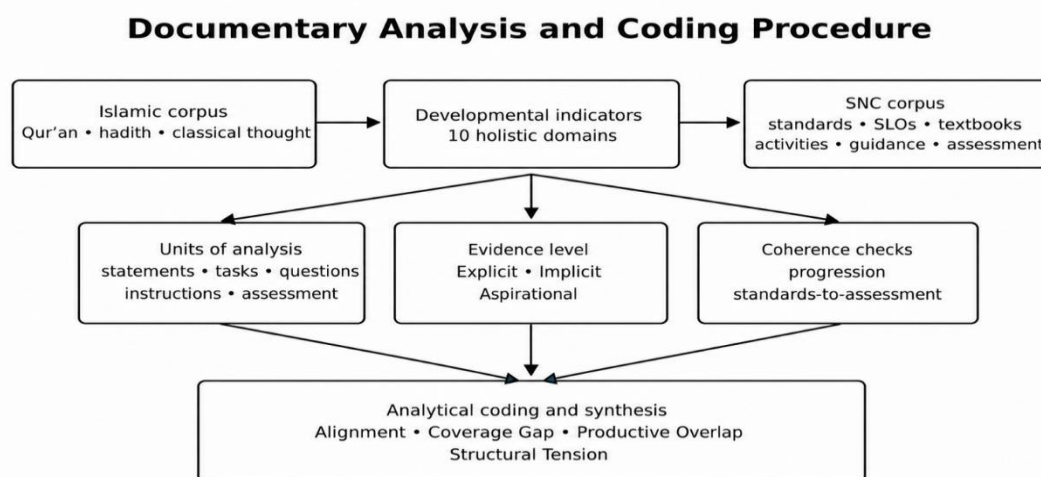


Figure 2. Documentary analysis and coding procedure used in the study.

4. Results and Analysis

Documentary evidence was analysed at four levels: policy intention, curriculum specification, textbook/activity enactment and assessment demand. The results were then coded in terms of explicit, implicit or aspirational and then as alignment, gap, productive overlap or structural

tension. The SNC has very ambitious formative aspirations in knowledge, character, citizenship, communication, health, inquiry and responsibility; these aspirations are not realised consistently. Spiritual, moral, cognitive, social and civic purposes are relatively strong and the economic ethics, multilingual inclusion, aesthetic progression and assessable emotional development are relatively weak. There is evidence of holistic development when values become visible actions, such as citing information in an honest fashion, engaging in justifiable reasoning, treating others with respect, noticing and describing what is seen, following fair procedures, and conducting oneself responsibly, rather than merely being general statements.

An Islamic appraisal thus cannot be reduced to counting religious terms. The central issue is whether learning affects understanding, intention, habit, speech, relationships, bodily discipline, judgement, and action. The Qur'anic description of the human being as created by Allah with dignity and developmental potential provides a general starting point:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَن تَقْوِيمٍ
"Surely, we have created man in the best mould" (Qur'an 95:4).

The SNC shows promise on this criterion, but it is conditional in that many aspects of holistic development are included, but not always as a developmental sequence. The analysis thus discriminates between what is possible and what is highly likely in terms of how the curriculum is enacted in the classroom and between what is aimed for and what is needed in order to enact the curriculum.

4.1 Holistic Vision and Developmental Progression

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) provides a clear policy landscape that considers the seven priorities for the curriculum: development of all aspects, individual potential, critical thinking, social justice, cultural diversity, citizenship, life skills and economic participation. It also views curriculum, textbooks, teaching, teacher preparation, assessment and feedback as a system (Government of Pakistan, 2018, pp. 19–20, 25–28, 69–72). The learner is thus not only an examination candidate but is someone who can think, talk, join in, co-operate, make decisions, and be a citizen.

The Islamiyat curriculum provides the clearest moral and spiritual structure. It has seven strands that include Qur'an, Hadith, 'Aqeeda' (belief), 'Ibaadat' (worship), Seerah, Adab (manners and character), Mu'asharate (social dealings), the personality of a good Muslim, and its application to modern times (Government of Pakistan, 2020a, p. 12). At the design level, recitation, conduct, belief, and social responsibility are not treated as isolated domains; knowledge is intended to guide action. This integration is reflected in the Qur'an:

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ
"He is the One Who sent among them a Messenger who recites to them His verses, purifies them, and teaches them the Book and wisdom" (Qur'an 62:2).

There is a general progression of development throughout the grades. The focus in Grades I – II is on recognising, being able to recite, imitate, and encourage good manners, for example, being truthful, saying salam, being respectful, kind, doing supplications, beliefs and worship. Grade III progresses towards explanation and relationships, in the form of conversation manners, rights of family and neighbours, good behaviour in public, cleanliness and longer biographical examples. In Grade IV-V, there is more focus on consequences, public responsibility and application along with workers rights, service, citizenship, water, promise keeping, brotherhood, child protection,

environment, and exemplary personalities (Government of Pakistan, 2020a, pp. 26–31, 36–38, 44–47, 54–57).

This sequence is educationally valid as long as there is an increase in task demands at each grade level. Younger children might replicate honest behaviour and older children can compare and predict results, explain decisions and apply concepts to society. A virtue that has no pathway from narrative or recognising to the scenarios, discussion, justification and/or practical responsibility becomes curricular loading. The curriculum also considers knowledge as formative not just as informative. The beginning of revelation is with literate devotion and connects reading with the source and purpose of knowledge:

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ... الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ؛ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ
 “Read in the Name of your Lord who created ... who taught by the pen; taught the human being what he did not know” (Qur’an 96:1, 4–5).

This view refines the NCF's whole school statement that “Literacy is the disciplined reception and expression of knowledge; Numeracy is fair measure and clear procedure; Social Studies is responsible citizenship; and Science is honest observation and submission to evidence.” These connections are unevenly distributed throughout subjects and assessment in the SNC.

Developmental Progression across Grades I-V

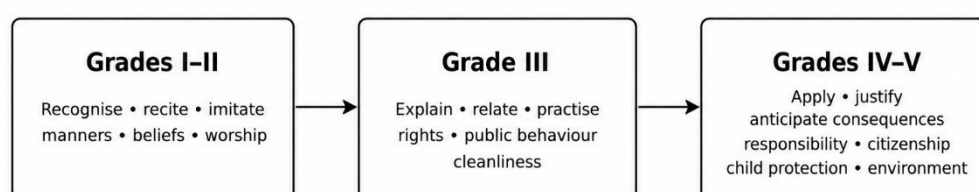


Figure 3. Developmental progression envisaged across Grades I–V in the analysed curriculum.

4.2 Spiritual, moral and social development

The best-developed strand in the corpus is spiritual and moral formation. Islamiyat is not limited to belief and worship but progresses into character, social behaviour, and contemporary responsibility. Early outcomes concern Allah's oneness and gratitude, reliance and prayer, cleanliness, supplications, and respect, laying the groundwork for a pattern in which belief is followed by repeated practice. In the Qur'an, mercy, revelation, human creation, and expression are connected.

الرَّحْمَنُ ؛ عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ ؛ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ ؛ عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ
 “The Most Merciful taught the Qur'an, created the human being, and taught him expression” (Qur'an 55:1–4).

Belief is therefore placed alongside gratitude, worship, discipline, moral speech, and related practices rather than treated merely as doctrine. Cleanliness, regularly performed prayers, ordered recitation, and supplications can also support attention, time-consciousness, self-regulation, and emotional steadiness. However, these broader implications are not always explicit in the SLOs or assessment, and pupils may be taught sequence without its purpose or related moral habit. Seerah and Akhlaq develop character through truthfulness, trustworthiness, honesty, simplicity, punctuality, service, forgiveness, tolerance, mercy, frugality, promise-keeping, brotherhood, and

protection against harmful speech. This is not merely moral vocabulary, but a framework of justice and excellence:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ

“Indeed, Allah commands justice and excellence” (Qur’an 16:90).

إِنَّ مِنْ خَيْرِكُمْ أَحْسَنَكُمْ أَخْلَاقًا

“Among the best of you are those with the best character” (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 3559).

Moral outcomes are best achieved when they follow the sequence of naming a value, explaining, applying, and evaluating. e.g. promise-keeping should involve the hurt that came from unfaithfulness and rebuilding trust; forgiveness should not be confused with suffering injustice. Recognition, explanation and application of the SNC often occurs, but the sustained moral judgement is not as consistent. The grade IV treatment of the household workers is more stringent as it includes rights, Prophetic example, conduct, service and respect under the true imbalance of power (Government of Pakistan, 2020a, pp. 45–46). The teaching of the Prophet is clear:

هُمْ إِخْوَانُكُمْ جَعَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ تَحْتَ أَيْدِيكُمْ ... وَلَا تُكَلِّفُوهُمْ مَا يَغْلِبُهُمْ، فَإِنْ كَلَّفْتُمُوهُمْ فَأَعِينُوهُمْ

“They are your brothers whom Allah has placed in your care ... do not burden them beyond their capacity; if you do, then help them” (Sahih Muslim, no. 1661a; see also Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 30).

This outcome identifies vulnerability, obligation, and observable conduct, and it can extend into labour dignity, fairness, and economic responsibility. But the relation is not also systematically extended in Social Studies and Mathematics: the moral principle is also clearly mentioned in Islamiyat and civic and economic practices are not so thick. A similar cross curricular opportunity exists in speech and interaction. Grade III conversation manners and listening skills, respectful address and Grade V avoidance of tale-bearing signify an understanding of the moral implications of language. Truthful faith is connected with disciplined speech in the Qur'an:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا

“O you who believe, be mindful of Allah and speak a straight and sound word” (Qur’an 33:70).

الْمُسْلِمُ مَنْ سَلِمَ الْمُسْلِمُونَ مِنْ لِسَانِهِ وَيَدِهِ

“A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand other Muslims are safe” (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 10).

These principles become educationally meaningful when discussion norms are observable: giving full attention to others, disagreeing without putting others down, crediting the sources of ideas, and modifying claims in light of evidence. Such practices are provided for in English and Social Studies, but the assessment may reflect fluency more than fairness, restraint or accuracy. The SNC makes a strong push for respect, cooperation, patience, service, and responsibility, but pays less systematic attention to recognizing and regulating emotions as social-emotional provision is less well developed. Nonetheless, there are clear points of grounding for gentleness and self-control in Islamic sources:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ إِنْت لَهِمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ

“It was by mercy from Allah that you were gentle with them; had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you” (Qur’an 3:159).

لَيْسَ الشَّدِيدُ بِالصُّرَعَةِ، إِنَّمَا الشَّدِيدُ الَّذِي يَمْلِكُ نَفْسَهُ عِنْدَ الْغَضَبِ

“The strong person is not the one who overpowers others, but the one who controls himself when angry” (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 6114; Sahih Muslim, no. 2609).

The curriculum is more explicit about respectful behaviour than about fear, frustration, grief, anger, shame, peer pressure, or help-seeking. Grade V child protection has been identified as a strength as it encompasses danger, dignity, safety and protective action (Government of Pakistan, 2020a, p. 57), however, age appropriate guidance, confidentiality and referral awareness are necessary to enact this safely. The output is good social morality with only partial emotional literacy, which is heavily reliant upon the competence of teachers. Diversity also enriches the moral content of the curriculum. The Qur’an considers human plurality as a foundation for relationship, and not hierarchy:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا

“O humankind, We created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes so that you may know one another” (Qur’an 49:13).

This principle is a foundation for the SNC's values of tolerance, peaceful coexistence, citizenship and cultural diversity. But inclusive intent will be assessed against the textbook representation: ongoing privilege of one gender, language, region, or social group can be constraining of formal expressions of respect. It is, therefore, crucial for inclusive experience that learners encounter examples of this.

4.3 Cognitive, Linguistic, and Civic Development across the SNC

The cognitive development is more powerful than to only read Islamiyat. Language outcomes are built from comprehension and retelling to paraphrase, inference, text evidence, fact/opinion and coherent expression. Mathematics involves reasoning, problem solving, explaining and checking for reasonableness; Science involves observing, conducting fair tests, measuring, recording and making conclusions based on evidence; Social Studies involves timelines, causes, rights, responsibilities, diversity, conflict and civic decision making (Government of Pakistan, 2020b, pp. 36–38, 242–243; Government of Pakistan, 2020c, pp. 2–4, 189; Government of Pakistan, 2020d, pp. 6–8, 34–39; Government of Pakistan, 2020e, p. 2). These expectations do fit in with a Qur’anic notion of the human faculties as trusts:

وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِّن بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

“Allah brought you out of your mothers’ wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing, sight, and hearts so that you may be grateful” (Qur’an 16:78).

Higher-order potential is strongest where tasks require reasons, evidence, and visible method. Accurate quotation and paraphrase combine comprehension with intellectual honesty; mathematical working with a reasonableness check exposes understanding; and a science record that distinguishes observation from inference makes claims accountable to evidence. These

ordinary tasks carry a moral structure because claims are warranted, methods remain open to scrutiny, and errors can be corrected.

قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

“Say: bring your proof, if you are truthful” (Qur’an 2:111).

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا

“Do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge; surely the hearing, sight, and heart will all be questioned” (Qur’an 17:36).

The strongest cognitive SLOs make knowledge inspectable through explanation, comparison, evidence, correction, and justification. When the higher order verbs are linked to low level tasks such as 'analyse' and then a short, memorised answer, then the weakness will show. Therefore, the prompt, expected product and assessment criterion, and not action verbs, were evaluated in this study. Even though the Qur'an emphasises on contemplation and observation, reflection is there but it is not even:

أَفَلَا يَتَذَكَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا

“Do they not contemplate the Qur’an? Had it been from other than Allah, they would have found in it much contradiction” (Qur’an 4:82).

قُلْ سِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ بَدَأَ الْخَلْقَ

“Say: travel through the land and observe how He began creation” (Qur’an 29:20).

Science and Social Studies offer natural settings for disciplined reflection, while Islamiyat can connect reflection with moral purpose. But, the curriculum load may make it possible for reflection to be optional when teachers are more concerned about providing a response that is quick to give and mark. It is thus an authentic strength only if reasons are time, exemplars, and assessed. The NCF identifies a clear tension in the case of linguistic development: the importance of mother tongue, and the challenges of learning in one language while being assessed in another (Government of Pakistan, 2018, p. 63–68). This concern is further highlighted by the Islamic acceptance of the linguistic plurality:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالاختلافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَاللَّوَانِكُمْ

“Among His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and colours” (Qur’an 30:22).

Operational support for multilingual understanding remains limited. While standards focus on speaking, listening, reading, and writing, guidance for assessment is sparse on bilingual glossaries, home-language paraphrase prior to target-language expression, translation of cited expressions, and other ways to demonstrate conceptual understanding. A learner might have a scientific, mathematical or a social concept in their native language (Punjabi/Sindhi/Pashto/Balochi/Brahui or other language) and look weak when he/she is asked to express it immediately in English or Urdu. It's not about lesser standards, it's about construct validity, that is, the assessment should assess not only the speed of the language, but also the concept that is being assessed. The

communicative ethics of the Qur'ān also help the speech of the classroom to be dialogic, accurate, and wise:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction” (Qur'an 16:125).

الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ

“Those who listen to speech and follow the best of it” (Qur'an 39:18).

مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلْيَقُلْ خَيْرًا أَوْ لِيَصْمُتْ

*“Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak what is good or remain silent”
(Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 6018).*

These principles make a difference between communication and quiet compliance. A whole class environment where learners can ask, clarify, disagree and revise without contempt. The moral quality of classroom talk should therefore be apparent via some brief criteria: listening, relevance, evidence, accurate representation of other view, and restrain in disagreeing. In terms of civic content, Social Studies offers some good support on rights and responsibilities, tolerance, diversity, conflict resolution, national identity, community and public participation through discussion and role play, beyond recall (Government of Pakistan, 2020d, pp. 6–8, 34–39). Islamic criterion is justice even if it entails some effort on the part of fairness since it is easy to be fair when it is in one's self-interest or group feeling.:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِكُمْ

*“O you who believe, stand firmly for justice as witnesses for Allah, even against yourselves”
(Qur'an 4:135).*

وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاَنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَى أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا اعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَى

*“Do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to piety”
(Qur'an 5:8).*

The curriculum aligns in this regard, as citizenship is understood to be fair participation, difference recognised, responsible disagreement, and protection of rights. The weakness of alignment is when patriotism turns into emotional attachment or national unity does not tolerate regional, linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity. The NCF language of unity in diversity is used to promote common standards while maintaining local knowledge/experience. Civic development is thus a strong aspect, nonetheless, textbook representation and learners' perspectives matter to the inclusiveness.

4.4 Physical, Aesthetic, Economic, and Life-Skills Development

Physical and health development is evident in Islamiyat, General science, Physical education and school routines, it is not as coherently organised as spiritual and cognitive development. Cleanliness, hygiene, food, water, movement, plant, animal and care of the environment are spread throughout subjects. Their total potential is to provide a linkage among moral framing, scientific explanation, bodily practice, self-regulation and responsibility.

The Qur'an frames bodily life through moderation and protection:

وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ

"Eat and drink, but do not be excessive; surely He does not love the wasteful" (Qur'an 7:31).

إِنَّ لِبَدَنِكَ عَلَيْكَ حَقًّا

"Your body has a right over you" (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 5199).

These principles underpin learning around cleanliness, nutrition, rest, movement, safety and responsible use of resources that is age appropriate. However, the progressions are incomplete: the progressions in Islamiyat might be to the moral aspects of hygiene, and in Science, the progressions might be to health; and there might be no explicit cross-subject progressions. Additional components to the sequence would be to go from personal habits to health consequences and then family or community responsibility. In the upper levels of primary education, there are some indications of environmental responsibility, such as the Grade V outcomes, which shift from naming the benefits of trees to care and action (Government of Pakistan, 2020a, p. 57). Prophetic teaching brings a social and spiritual significance to this work:

مَا مِنْ مُسْلِمٍ يَغْرِسُ غَرْسًا أَوْ يَزْرَعُ زَرْعًا فَيَأْكُلُ مِنْهُ طَيْرٌ أَوْ إِنْسَانٌ أَوْ بَهِيمَةٌ إِلَّا كَانَ لَهُ بِهِ صَدَقَةٌ

"No Muslim plants a tree or sows a crop from which a bird, a person, or an animal eats except that it is counted as charity for him" (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 2320).

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ

"Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what people's hands have earned" (Qur'an 30:41).

Environmental alignment is most pronounced when learners explore a local issue, document evidence, and suggest a feasible action, and consider responsibility. A water-use record, plant-care log or cleanliness audit does a better job of incorporating moral intention, scientific observation, numeracy, team work and action than just a poster alone. It is not always necessary to do such tasks, but it is possible. Even less operationalisation of aesthetic and creative development. Storytelling, drawing, role play, poetry, creative writing, models, and design are included, however, creativity typically is used as a vehicle to teach other content areas, but not as a sequenced domain. The documents offer little guidance in terms of originality, appreciation of aesthetics, revision, choice of expression or reflection on making. The emphasis of order, excellence and observation in Islam gives a relevant moral base:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَتَبَ الْإِحْسَانَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

"Allah has prescribed excellence in all things" (Sahih Muslim, no. 1955).

Opportunities for creativity are therefore available although there is no progression and clear assessment. Other criteria for assessment of a poster or drawing, such as choice, communication, relevance, care, revision, and explanation would make creativity more than just decoration if the only criterion is factual correctness. The trend is different in the realm of economic and life-skills development: there is extensive practical development, but less integration of ethical content. Social Studies includes topics such as production, distribution, consumption, entrepreneurship,

trade, inflation, banking, expenditure, pocket money and saving; whereas Mathematics deals with money, measurement and problem solving (Government of Pakistan, 2020d, pp. 15–17). Markets, records, wages, measures, and contracts, however, are moral, as well as technical spaces in Islamic education.

وَأَقِيمُوا الْوَزْنَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ

“Maintain the measure with justice and do not give short weight” (Qur’an 55:9).

وَيْلٌ لِّلْمُطَفِّفِينَ ۚ الَّذِينَ إِذَا اكْتَالُوا عَلَى النَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ ۖ وَإِذَا كَالُوا لَهُمْ أَوْ وَزَنُوا لَهُمْ يُخْسِرُونَ

“Woe to those who give less than due: those who take their full measure from others, but give less when they measure or weigh for them” (Qur’an 83:1–3).

In the analysed curriculum, measurement is usually assessed for numerical correctness, while its civic meanings fairness, non-exploitation, and public trust rarely become explicit criteria. Money-management activities may likewise teach saving and expenditure without addressing truthful records, fair distribution, needs and wants, generosity, or the consequences of dishonest exchange. Economic education is therefore present, but economic competence remains insufficiently connected to economic ethics.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا تَدَايَنْتُمْ بِدَيْنٍ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى فَاكْتُبُوهُ

“O you who believe, when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down” (Qur’an 2:282).

At primary level, the principle of documentary clarity can be translated into simple practices: recording expenditure, stating conditions for a shared task, tracking borrowed materials, checking quantities, or explaining a fair price. These tasks connect numeracy, literacy, responsibility, and trust without turning Mathematics into moral preaching. The SNC contains the necessary subject content but does not systematise the integration. Life skills are similarly distributed across subject’s decision-making, problem solving, communication, cooperation, health, safety, environmental care, and money management without a clear common progression. A small set of shared indicators for responsible decision-making, clear communication, self-management, cooperation, and practical problem solving would make this cross-curricular development visible.

Table 1: Cross-curricular relationship between practical economic learning and ethical dealing identified in the analysis.

Developmental domain	Strongest evidence in the SNC	Main analytical finding
Spiritual and moral	Belief, worship, Seerah, Akhlaq, promises, forgiveness, service, daily conduct	Strong explicit coverage; quality rises when values are connected with explanation, situations, and observable conduct.
Cognitive and intellectual	Textual evidence, paraphrase, mathematical reasoning, fair testing, conclusions from data	Substantial potential beyond recall; verbs alone are insufficient when tasks remain low-demand.
Social and civic	Rights, responsibilities, discussion, tolerance, workers’ rights, child protection, conflict resolution	Broadly represented; emotional literacy and repair of conflict are less systematically sequenced.
Linguistic and communicative	Listening, speaking, reading, writing, evidence-based response; policy recognition of mother tongue	Communication is strong, but multilingual routes to demonstrating understanding remain weakly operationalised.

Physical and environmental	Cleanliness, health, water, animals, plants, trees, scientific enquiry	Meaningful but dispersed; progression depends on cross-subject coordination and practical tasks.
Economic and life skills	Money, savings, trade, banking, measurement, problem solving	Practical content is present; fairness, trust, record-keeping, and responsible dealing are insufficiently integrated.
Aesthetic and creative	Creative writing, drawing, role play, posters, models, projects	Opportunities exist, but creativity is more often a teaching method than a sequenced, assessable domain.



Figure 4. Cross-curricular relationship between practical economic learning and ethical dealing identified in the analysis.

4.5 Character-Building Narratives and Verified Curriculum Change

Comparison of the 2006 National Curriculum with the 2020 SNC does not support the broad claim that earlier moral or Sufi lessons were simply removed. The documents use different architectures: the 2006 Grades III–XII curriculum is largely organised through class-wise content lists, whereas the 2020 primary SNC specifies strands, standards, benchmarks, SLOs, activities, teacher guidance, assessment principles, and textbook-writing directions (Government of Pakistan, 2006, pp. 3–9; Government of Pakistan, 2020a, pp. 5, 12–15, 58, 61, 63–67). Fewer visible headings therefore do not by themselves establish content loss.

Most earlier Grade IV–V moral topics remain but are reorganised. Grade IV themes such as trustworthiness, simplicity, service, gathering etiquette, punctuality, and love of homeland now appear through Diyanat-dari, Akhlaq, service, rights, social dealings, and citizenship. Grade V themes such as promise-keeping, forgiveness, tolerance, mercy, frugality, brotherhood, and Qur’anic recitation etiquette are redistributed across Akhlaq-o-Adab, Husn-e-Mu’amalat-o-Mu’asharat, and Qur’an-related guidance (Government of Pakistan, 2006, pp. 6–9; Government of Pakistan, 2020a, pp. 44–45, 54–58). The change is therefore better described as reorganisation and expansion than wholesale deletion.

Narratives remain important because primary learners often grasp a virtue more clearly when it is embodied in a person, choice, and consequence. The Qur’an itself presents the Prophetic model as guidance:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ

“Surely, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example” (Qur’an 33:21).

The personality sequence shows continuity, relocation, addition, and one verified omission. Abu Bakr remains in Grade III; Musa and Umar in Grade IV; and Isa in Grade V. Ibrahim moves from

Grade III to IV, Uthman from Grade V to IV, while Adam and Nuh appear in Grade III and Ali is added in Grade V. Khalid ibn al-Walid, named in the 2006 Grade V list, has no named equivalent in the current Grade V list (Government of Pakistan, 2006, pp. 4–9; Government of Pakistan, 2020a, pp. 36–38, 44–46, 56). This is the clearest verified curriculum-level omission. Its educational significance depends on whether the distinctive functions of the narrative transformation, courage, strategic judgement, discipline, and service remain available through another personality or activity. The relevant issue is therefore not the name alone but the formative function of the narrative.

The Sufi evidence requires the same precision. Grade V explicitly includes Shaykh Abd al-Qadir Jilani, Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi, Data Ganj Bakhsh Ali Hujwiri, and Sayyid Muhammad Rashid Roza Dhani, with outcomes addressing selected life events, religious services, teachings, and personal application (Government of Pakistan, 2020a, p. 56). The documents therefore do not support a general claim that the SNC eliminated Sufi heritage. Junayd al-Baghdadi is different: he is not named in the Grade III–V personality lists of the 2006 curriculum or the current Grade V Sufi list. A claim of removal would require edition-level textbook evidence identifying the earlier and current board, grade, edition, lesson, and page. Until then, Junayd is a possible textbook-level omission, not a proven national-curriculum deletion.

Table 2: Patterns of curriculum change from the 2006 curriculum to the 2020 SNC.

Earlier curriculum evidence	Current SNC evidence	Verified status	Analytical meaning
Ibrahim Grade III	Ibrahim Grade IV	Relocated	Moved to a later developmental stage.
Abu Bakr Grade III	Abu Bakr Grade III	Retained/expanded	Continuity in sacrifice, service, truthfulness, and character modelling.
Musa and Umar Grade IV	Musa and Umar Grade IV	Retained/expanded	Continuity with more explicit outcomes and application.
Uthman Grade V	Uthman Grade IV	Relocated	Placed earlier within the caliphal sequence.
Isa Grade V	Isa Grade V	Retained/expanded	Continuity in prophetic biography and moral example.
Khalid ibn al-Walid Grade V	No named current equivalent	Omitted	Verified named-personality omission; the loss or survival of his narrative function must be analysed.
No equivalent named Sufi set in the compared lists	Ali and four named Sufi personalities Grade V	Added	Broadens the canon towards caliphal completion and spiritual-ethical exemplars.
Remembered Junayd al-Baghdadi lesson	Not named in either compared curriculum list	Textbook verification required	No removal claim is justified without earlier and current prescribed textbook pages.

Verified Patterns of Curriculum Change: 2006 Curriculum → 2020 SNC

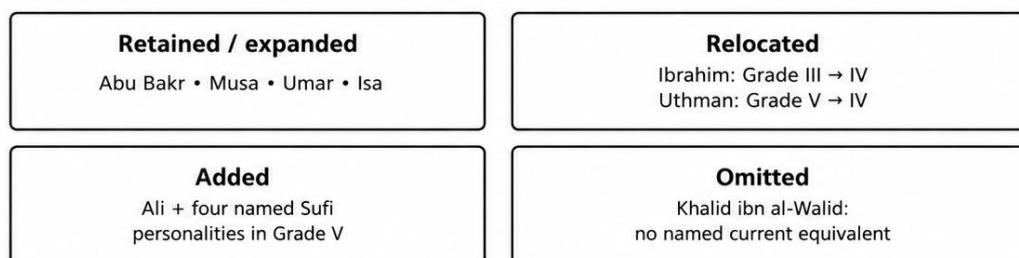


Figure 5. Patterns of curriculum change from the 2006 curriculum to the 2020 SNC.

Whether retained narratives are formative depends largely on the textbook exercises. A personality may be retained while developmental value is lost if a lesson is overly long; a shorter lesson may be stronger if learners can identify motives, compare choices, explain consequences, and relate the virtue to school or family life. Judgement should therefore focus on the formative function of the narrative, not only on whether a name is present.

4.6 Assessment, Teacher Mediation and Overall Synthesis

Assessment is the pivot on which curricular purposes turn and through which evidence of progress becomes visible. The NCF emphasises assessing what learners know, can do, and value, and proposes formative and summative assessments aligned with a child-centred, whole-child curriculum (Government of Pakistan, 2018, pp. 69–72). Understanding, attitude, conduct, analysis, and application can be assessed orally and/or in writing according to SNC Islamiyat guidance (Government of Pakistan, 2020a, pp. 58, 61). The formal framework therefore goes beyond memorisation. An Islamic criterion adds accountability, reflection, and proportion: learners should demonstrate the formation of knowledge, while tasks should remain proportionate to their capacities.

أَفَلَا يَتَذَكَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَى قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا

“Do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon their hearts?” (Qur'an 47:24).

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا

“Allah does not burden a soul with more than it can bear” (Qur'an 2:286).

This is because of the various competing assessment tensions. For one, some SLOs can be supported by application-oriented exercises in addition to those just based on definitions. Second, reasoning can be indicated as correct response alone without giving credit for method, evidence or explanation. Thirdly, complex behaviours can be judged on inexplicit impressions instead of behavior. In such instances, assessment should be less than the purpose or goal and undermines curricular validity..

The answer is not to 'moralise' everything that we do, but to make the right performance visible. Intellectual honesty can be demonstrated in the following ways: accurate citation and paraphrase in Languages; accountable procedure (working) and reasonableness checks in Mathematics; observation record in Science; responsibility in collaboration through turn taking, role fulfilment or care of shared materials in Social Studies. These indicators are specific to tasks and do not give a general impression of a child's personality.

The problem is compounded by curriculum overload. With limited time, teacher preparation and assessment, there are so many outcomes that teaching can become a rush to teach and even mark, leading to a drift towards promoting a structure of explanation to recall. It's not the aspiration itself that is the issue, it's too many conflicting aspirations. A short list of essential outcomes that are well exemplified and well assessed would be more indicative of a holistic approach than a long list which lacked depth of assessment and/or exemplification.

Mediating by teachers is also important as SNC assumes that teachers will connect belief to behavior, foster dialogue, accommodate multilingual contributions, address difficult content, encourage inquiry and evaluate complex results. According to the NCF professional standards (Government of Pakistan, 2018), teachers are expected to make knowledge available to students in various ways, link learning to real life and facilitate intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development of students. In addition, SNC Islamiyat guidance also focuses on understanding, interpreting, modelling and internalizing (Government of Pakistan, 2020a, p. 58).

يَسِّرُوا وَلَا تُعَسِّرُوا، وَيَسِّرُوا وَلَا تُعَسِّرُوا

“Make things easy and do not make things difficult; give glad tidings and do not drive people away” (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 69; Sahih Muslim, no. 1734).

خَدَمْتُ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَشْرَ سِنِينَ، فَمَا قَالَ لِي أُفٍّ، وَلَا لِمَ صَنَعْتُ، وَلَا أَلَّا صَنَعْتُ

“I served the Prophet for ten years, and he never said to me ‘uff’, nor ‘Why did you do this?’ or ‘Why did you not do this?’” (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 6038; Sahih Muslim, no. 2309a).

As these examples from the prophets demonstrate, correction doesn't have to be embarrassing and authority doesn't have to be oppressive. Values can be made 'lived' through dialogic teaching which includes the use of open questions, wait time, rephrasing, asking pupils for evidence, providing pupils with opportunities for revision and understanding of pupils. The way a wrong answer is dealt with can teach dignity, a consistent application of criteria can teach justice and a willingness to revise an answer when a better one comes to light can teach humility.

Multilingualism may be a problem or it can be a resource as mediated by teachers. Original language quotations with accurate translations or bilingual glossaries, or clarification in a familiar language, can make the pathway to cognition visible prior to response in the target language. These practices are not alternatives to language learning but can help to differentiate between conceptual knowledge and fluency in the target language.

When knowledge and responsibility go hand in hand, there is the strongest link: evidence is dealt with honestly, procedures are transparent, speech respects dignity and values are not only defined but are put into practice. Significant gaps exist in ethical economic life, multilingual assessment pathways, systematic emotional literacy and aesthetic progression is grade-wise, physical and environmental outcomes are significant but disjointed. This repetition is only productive if the value is now more demanding in a new context, and if there is no further reasoning, application or assessment, this is curricular loading.

Analytical result	Evidence strength	Principal limitation or tension
Knowledge, faith, and character are structurally connected	Strong	Some values remain stated rather than translated into observable and assessable conduct.
Cognitive development extends beyond recall	Moderate to strong	Outcome load and examination format may reward reproduction instead of reasoning.
Social and civic responsibility is broadly represented	Strong	Emotional literacy, conflict repair, and help-seeking are less explicit.
Cross-curricular moral transfer is possible	Moderate to strong	Integration depends on task design, textbook exercises, and teacher interpretation.
Physical, health, and environmental responsibility is visible	Moderate	Coverage is dispersed and not always sequenced across grades and subjects.
Language and inclusion are recognised in policy	Moderate	Multilingual understanding is not consistently protected in SLOs and assessment.
Economic competence is present	Moderate	Fair measure, transparency, trust, wages, and responsible transactions remain thinly operationalised.
Aesthetic and creative opportunities exist	Weak to moderate	Progression, originality, revision, and assessment criteria are insufficiently explicit.
Curriculum change mainly reflects reorganisation and selective addition	Strong	Specific textbook-story removals require edition-level comparison.

The results indicate the SNC's "mixed formative impulses" and "mixed realisations. The best part

of it is the ability to connect faith, character, citizenship, health and reasoning all in one learning experience. This resonates with Arthur et al. (2025) who prioritise a substantive understanding of the person and Ahmed and Chowdhury (2025) who consider Islamic schooling as being reliant on its organising logic and not the amount of religious content. Success depends on the extent to which SLOs link knowledge with behaviour and when values are not only discussed in policy terms, the SNC is weak. Thus it should not be assumed that a high level of spiritual and moral content is the same as realised character formation. Islamiyat has a wealth of technical vocabulary pertaining to belief, worship, the example of the Prophet, rights and promises and social behavior, but motives, consequences, relationships and choices must be explored to develop moral agency. It corroborates Memon et al. (2024) on teacher formation, Agbaria (2024) on active religious learning and Alotaibi (2025) on the limitations of recall-based teaching. Memorisation may be the basis but it should be followed by interpretation and reflection and application, especially with regard to the Qur'ān. An original aspect of this paper is the cross curricularity of moral development. Academic practices have ethical aspects in mathematics working, civic claims, accurate paraphrase, and truthful observation. The principles of amanah and justice can be explained in Islamiyat, and it can be seen in contexts in the subject field of Languages, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. More developmentally powerful than having the same value statement repeated in the different subjects, and makes evidence to do with character task specific rather than impressionistic.

Social-emotional and physical development remain less systematic. The SNC identifies important values of respect, patience, service, responsibility, health, cleanliness, and safety, but is less specific about emotion recognition, anger management, conflict resolution, peer pressure, and help-seeking. This matters because SEL can affect academic performance (Ha et al., 2025), physical activity can strengthen cooperation and self-management (Moon et al., 2024), and vague constructs create problems for assessment reliability (De Fruyt & Scheirlinckx, 2025). A concise grade-level sequence of observable emotional and relational practices is therefore needed. Language also reveals a tension between equality of standards and equality of access. Pakistan's language hierarchy is well documented, as is the tension between uniformity and cultural responsiveness in the SNC (Ali, 2026; Saleem & Dare, 2026), while multilingual learners are underrepresented in the broader social-emotional evidence base (Lucas et al., 2026). A common curriculum does not require a single linguistic pathway to understanding. When language itself is not the construct being assessed, home-language clarification, bilingual glossaries, or translated quotations may support conceptual validity without reducing language standards.

The findings on textbooks and narratives show that curriculum change should be examined through two dimensions: representation and function. Even well-intentioned formal targets can be undermined by representations that reproduce gender norms or narrow environmental discourses (Kumar et al., 2025; Shoaib & Lin, 2025). The same applies to Seerah, Companion, and Sufi narratives: their inclusion should be justified by authentic, age-appropriate, and reflective educational value, not simply by tradition. The 2006–2020 comparison illustrates reconfiguration rather than eradication, and edition-level evidence is needed to confirm claims about individual textbook narratives. Finally, implementation matters. Institutional and local processes influence how policy is shaped (Dingwall & Hall, 2025), while teacher competence and conceptions of assessment vary (Kalim, 2024; Hidri et al., 2024). With overloaded outcomes and rapidly marked examinations, complex expectations for dialogue, multilingual participation, inquiry, reasoning, and conduct may fall back to coverage and recall. This documentary study does not claim that such narrowing occurs in every classroom; rather, it identifies a structural risk because holistic potential depends on prioritised outcomes, usable exemplars, valid assessment, and adequate teacher support.

5. Conclusion

Pakistan's primary-level SNC provides a credible but incomplete foundation for holistic personality development. It is strongest in integrating faith, character, reasoning, citizenship, health, and social responsibility, and weaker in connecting economic competence with ethics, supporting multilingual access, developing emotional literacy and creativity, and aligning assessment with holistic aims. The curriculum becomes more genuinely holistic when values move from naming to observable practice through truthful use of evidence, justified reasoning, fair procedure, disciplined speech, care, and responsible action. This requires fewer essential outcomes, stronger coordination across subjects, clearer evidence of textbook change, greater teacher support, and assessment that makes understanding visible.

6. Recommendations and Implications

Curriculum authorities should identify a smaller number of non-negotiable outcomes for each grade and subject. When a later SLO builds on an earlier SLO for example, when SLO A progresses to SLO B, SLO C, and SLO D the earlier outcome should not simply be restated in later SLOs. Each major unit should include at least one explanation task, one real-life application task, and one evidence-based task. Definition-only questions should not be used for SLOs that require application, analysis, or evaluation. The SNC should identify where values are observable: in Languages, through accurate citation and fair summarisation of texts; in Mathematics, through clear working and fair measurement; in Science, through truthful recording and correction of results; and in Social Studies, through source attribution, justice, and respectful disagreement. Assessment guidance should permit brief clarification in the home language, use of a bilingual glossary, or an oral/home-language explanation before a final response in Urdu or English where appropriate. Unless language competence is the construct being measured, conceptual marks should not be deducted solely for language errors when conceptual understanding is accurate. An emotional-development sequence should be specified for each grade: Grades I–II emotion recognition, self-calming, and safe help-seeking; Grade III self-regulation and respectful disagreement; Grades IV–V conflict repair, peer pressure, empathy, consent, and responsible decision-making. Curriculum revision should include an evidence trail identifying the board, grade, edition, lesson, page, replacement content, represented virtue, and reason for change. Representation audits should similarly examine gender, region, language, disability, occupations, environment, and exemplary personalities.

7. Limitations

Documentary and interpretive analysis is the only type of analysis that can be used in this study because the primary curriculum is intended. It does not dictate what goes on in the curriculum in any province or school system, classroom or language community, nor does it assess what children learn and become as a result of the curriculum. The corpus is not based on the assumption that all provincial textbook editions of the prescribed materials, and any current and earlier corresponding curriculum documents, are necessarily included; rather, it is based on the assumption that all materials prescribed in the study were taken from a selected number of provincial textbook editions and that matched earlier and current versions of these are required for claims of narrative inclusion or omission. Analysis was carried out by one researcher and further consistency was achieved by use of stable coding definitions, repeated reading and checking the codes in context rather than inter-coder reliability. Evaluative criteria were Qur'anic and Prophetic principles but not the effectiveness of these principles. These findings should, therefore, be interpreted as a reflection on the potential, coherence and structural dangers of the curriculum, rather than as a reflection of classroom processes.

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