



Localization of Higher Education Commission Curricula: A Case Study of Economics Curriculum

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Abstract

The new millennium education priorities have led the policy makers to modify the higher education curriculum in accordance with the international standards. Thus, the curriculum standards across the country were forced to be uniform since the inception Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan. The universities under HEC are not allowed to modify or localize the curricula according to local needs, requirements and capacities. This paper in a phenomenological way evaluates the effect of reforms related to uniform curriculum standards on students, teachers and universities of backward areas in the country. The study highlights problems related to HEC curriculum; taken 'economics' discipline as a case study. The study calls for the revisit of other curriculums already in place and re-assess in lieu of local needs, requirements and capacities in the context of uniformity and localization. The paper provides a road map from localization of curriculum to uniform curriculum standards based on combined framework of bottom-up and top-down approach. The former approach involves all stakeholders at different tiers for the curriculum development, while the latter one deals with trainings and providing forum / platform for the coordination between the faculty members and curriculum developers.

Keywords: High School Curriculum, University Educational Decisions, Education Performance, Bottom-up Approach

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Introduction

Pakistan has undergone various reforms to achieve the desired economic growth and sustainability of the economy since the beginning of new millennium. Besides the key macro-economic reforms, there were several socio-economic reforms were also initiated including health and education. Education reforms mainly targets the primary and tertiary level of education. To achieve the latter objective of education reforms, Higher Education Commission (HEC) was established in 2002, replacing the University Grant Commission (UGC) having limited powers. The main objectives of HEC were to increase the outreach of the universities to backward areas as well as improve the quality of tertiary education in the country. For this, HEC has introduced uniform curriculum to establish linkage among universities as well as to fulfill the market need of industries. To increase the outreach, the HEC granted permission for new universities in the backward areas of the country, in particularly in the rural areas to make higher education accessible for everyone. In parallel to this, the HEC introduced several programs of faculty development and scholarships. Besides this, HEC also focus on: quality education by making compulsory the establishments of *Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC)* at every university of Pakistan.

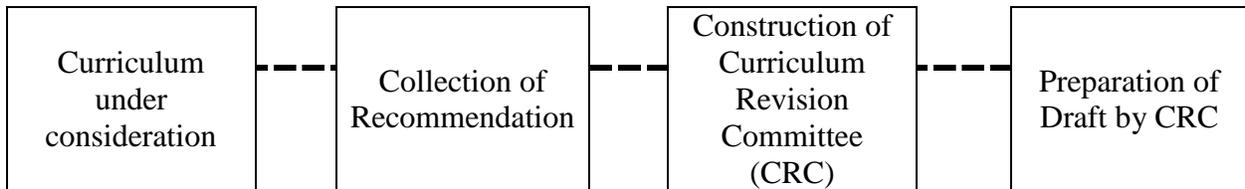
Along with the establishing universities, HEC also revisited the existing curriculums taught in different universities. With the objective of uniformity and linkage among universities across the country, the concept of uniform curricula was introduced. Subject analyst and experts were taken on board to design the curricula according to market need and standardization of the curriculum with international principles. Accordingly, 'uniform curriculums' with international standards were formed for all subjects taught in tertiary education. These curriculums mainly include teaching methodologies, scheme of studies, course contents, objectives, learning

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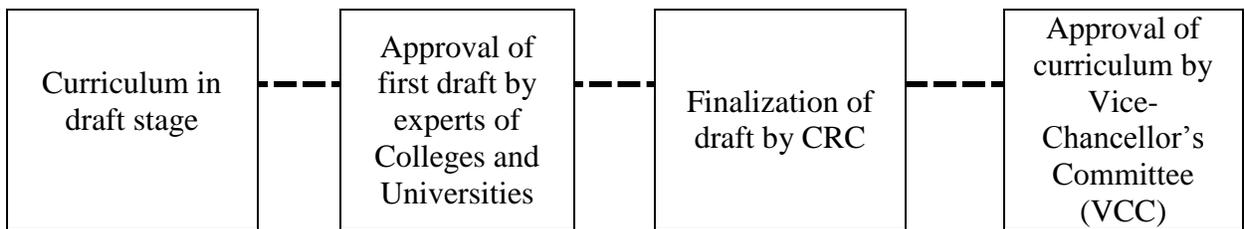
outcomes and assessment of learning. The Stage wise curriculum development and evaluation structure of HEC is presented in the Box-1 below:

Box -1: HEC Curriculum Development & Evaluation Structure

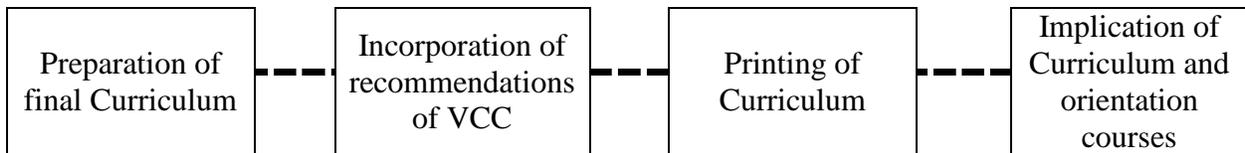
Stage 1:



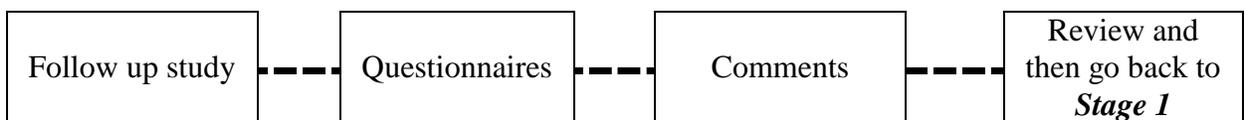
Stage 2:



Stage 3: (Final Stage)



Stage 4:



Source: Curriculum of Economics for BS (4 Years), 2013, HEC, Islamabad

According to the standards for the development of the curriculum, the important sources are; teachers, students, subject experts and curriculum experts, policy makers, entrepreneurs and employers. The HEC's National Curriculum Revision Committees (NCRCs) meet at every three years to revise and revamp the curriculums according to the trends and demand of the educational needs coincide with the pace of modern world. The members of committee are selected from different universities on approval of Vice Chancellor and Registrar

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in response to a request from HEC, however, the final approval come from HEC, because HEC have the right to accepted or reject the nominated person from respective university without any reason. Despite HEC comprehensive curriculum development process connecting all stakeholders on board, the representation of universities from backward areas was remained dismal. Unfortunately the curriculum development and the revision of curriculums are pivoted around just some universities and teachers, nothing more. Therefore, the HEC curriculum is not as much effective for newly established universities in rural and backward areas of the country as it should have been. This is mainly because of the lack of state-of-the-art facilities, absence of highly qualified faculty members and subject specialist, and inactive Departmental Board of Studies (DBS). In fact, the most important division for faculty and curriculum development is missing in almost most of universities in the backward areas. Therefore, due to absence of efficient DBS with HEC curriculum, students as well as teachers are facing problem and ambiguities. The existing structures of curriculum revision are having the following problems.

The important missing element which can effectively solve the issues arising from uniform curriculum was a drawback of absence of qualified Head of Departments (HoDs). Either, the inexperienced HoDs do not have idea about the importance of DBS, or they just strictly follow HEC curriculum due to pressure from the respective authority. However, at the current level of province wise mixed education standards and the different standards followed for the primary, secondary and higher secondary education in each province of Pakistan, the uniformity of the curriculum is not feasible. Secondly, the infrastructure and the academic situation of the universities are very heterogeneous in Pakistan, some universities are scares in resources while other are having plenty of resources; some universities are established in well settled areas while other are established in very disconnected and remote areas; some of

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universities are having highly qualified local as well as foreign teachers and researchers; while other universities are having very young inexperienced faculty members. Similarly, the input which comes to these universities every year in the form of students, the intelligence (IQ) level of these students also vary due to non-uniform education standards in each province as discussed above. Third, HEC curriculums are much diversified usually for every subject, especially for Social Sciences. Considering the monetary resource constraints, it is not possible to hire qualified faculty members. Moreover, the infrastructure constraints, accessibility issues of rural areas and security issues in remote areas hinder the highly qualified faculty members even at high remuneration. For example, university situated in very rural, remote and disconnected areas like, Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences, (LUAMWS), Uthal , Balochistan where faculty members are not available even on visiting purpose, so most of the subjects are taught by those teachers in which they don't have any qualification and specialization. Thus, this reveals the important problem and the application of the national curriculum do not display the true spirit.

Literature Review

Curriculum referred as program (Daud et. al. 2012) is a hub of any educational institute through which education is transacted (Memon, 1999). It has ultimate impact on the enrollment of any education program in particular the higher tertiary education. The organization of the study covers the scope of the learning for the very beginning to the completion of the course under consideration (Brown & Green, 2006). Beside curriculum, the administrative factors in the higher education also have significant impact on the student enrollment. Faculties at higher education institutions are required to be interactive and other knowledgeable interactions for sustainability of programs (Daud et. al. 2012). The higher interaction, and the student support in

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all areas i.e. curriculum assistance and administrative assistance leads to success of any program or curricula. The content of a program have strong influence on enrollment of the students in particular program or higher education institute (Dyer, Lacey & Osborne, 1996)

Curriculum should be considered as dynamic process which has evolving nature all the time. To make lived curriculum, the teachers and supervisory persons should be allowed and motivate to evolve curriculum in response to specific context. Memon (1999) in the context of Pakistan, states that lived curriculum does not mean that there is no importance of centralized national curriculum. He further explains that there should be a room for improvements in the curricula within the framework of national curricula. This is only possible by developing teachers as curriculum developers having understanding of dynamics of curriculum development process. Based on the authors personal reflection on curriculum development ‘the poor curriculum development process is a general perceived dilemma of the developing countries since many curricular innovations developed in USA and UK had been directly imported to the educational system of a variety of developing countries. Imported innovations produce a façade of change but have little impact on classroom process.’ He explains the dilemma, that the teacher participation in the curriculum planning has received a little attention from the curriculum experts.

Webber (2005) in his reflections on curriculum development stated that new members of academia and the teaching staff encounter many issues and problem. The paper also explores the curriculum development discourse, discusses the lesson learnt from the exercise and experience. The author emphasizes on the design and implementation of course, with specific focus on contents, assessments and delivery. His reflections include the knowledge accumulated through interaction with the academia and the feedback from students.

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Gorlitz et. al. (2015) in their paper studied the impact of high a high school curriculum reform on enrollment in the university. For the study, he analyzes the impact on the choice of Science, Technology or Mathematics subject. They applied difference-in-difference model and the results shows the reforms increase university enrollment for these subject for males only.

Gorlitz et. al. (2015) in their paper on analyzing the impact of increasing the standards of high school curriculum on school dropout states that the dropout rates have increase for both the gender. This is mainly on the back of increase in the curriculum standards. A gender based interesting finding states that the effect vanishes out in two years for males and three year for female students.

Kginowichet. al. (2015) analyzes the USA's public policies to increase outreach and the impact on adjusted curricula. He stated that selective public colleges adopt a less demanding curriculum in order to accommodate the student with low or moderate capacity. However, this way produces low quality human resource in the form of output.

Daudet. al. (2012) applying the empirical model on Programme Enrollment Intentions (PEI) in higher education institution in Malaysia. Their finding supports the argument that curriculum in higher and tertiary education have significant influence on PEI in Malaysia. The other variables used in the model were administrative easiness and education pricing. The former variable also has significant influence on PEI in Malaysia.

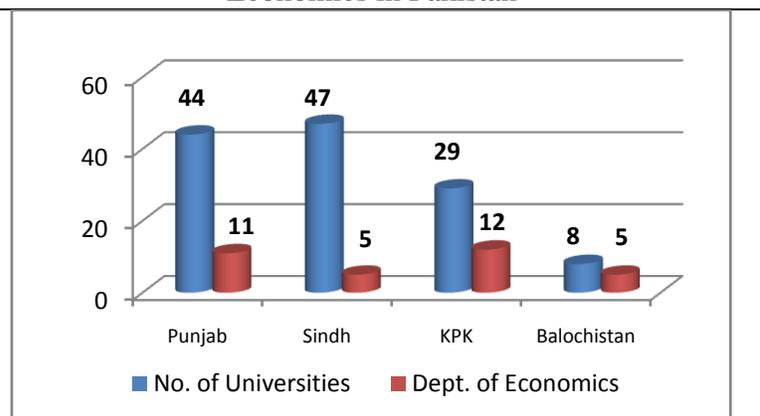
Methodology

The analysis of the paper is mixed of qualitative and quantitative review mainly considers the uniform curriculum as a phenomenon. The phenomenological research model aims to explain a phenomenon through the eyes of the actors who are experiencing the phenomena (Creswell 2013).

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Public and private sector universities having Department of Economics (DoE) are considered as the population of this research study. Presently there are 163 accredited University/ degree awarding institutions in Pakistan, following figure (Figure-1) exhibits the province wise share of universities

Figure-1: Province Universities & Department of Economics in Pakistan



Source: HEC accredited universities/Degree awarding institutes as on March 07, 2012 Published by Learning Innovation Division, HEC, Islamabad

Other than provincial level universities, 30 universities are in the capital territory Islamabad, six (6) in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and two (2) universities are in Gilgit Baltistan. As exhibit in the Figure 1, the

It is interesting to note that establishment of department for economics discipline is considerably higher in public sector universities vis-à-vis private sector universities in Pakistan (Table 2). A total of 45 public universities have established DoE representing almost 50 percent of the total established public sector universities, while a meager share of only 14 percent private sector universities have established DoE. Table-2 exhibits the territory wise presence of the DoE with respect to public and private sector universities.

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To derive the objective of our study we divide all of the public and private sector universities into two categories: Comprehensive Universities (CUs) and Incomprehensive Universities (ICUs). Those universities which are established before 2002 can be define as CUs while those established after 2002 can be consider ICUs. The year 2002 is considered as the structural break point in the history of higher education of Pakistan with the establishment of HEC. Based on the HEC criteria to permit a university to offer the Masters of Philosophy (M. Phil) and Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) degrees in Economics should have PhD faculty member (at least two or more). Therefore, the universities established after the structural break but offering the above degree programmes in Economics discipline are also considered as CUs in our logical model.

The Table-3 exhibits the role, representation and effectiveness of CUs and ICUs in National Curriculum Review Committee (NCRC). The first meeting of NCRC was held in 2006, attended by 21 members among 26 selected members. However, despite a good overall participation rate, there was no participation of ICUs. Similarly, the NCRC of 2008 there was no single representation from ICUs to give their recommendations and highlights the problems, which they are facing with the implementation of HEC curriculum. The reason cited behind is the non-recommendation of competent authority for ICUs participation in the national strategic event.

Year of Curriculum Revision	2006	2008	2013
Members from CUs (Nos)	21	14	18
Members from ICUs (Nos)	0	0	1
Proportion of participation from CUs (%)	100	100	94.7
Proportion of participation from ICUs (%)	0	0	5.3
Absent members of ICUs (Nos)	0	0	3
Absent members of CUs (Nos)	5	0	9
Absent members (Nos)	5	*	12

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Total members attending NCRC meetings (Nos)	21	14	19
Total members of NCRC (Nos)	26	14	31
<i>Source: HEC curriculum for BS Economics (4 years) 2006, HEC revised BS Economics (4 Years) curriculum 2008 and HEC revised BS Economics (4 Years) curriculum 2013.</i>			
<i>* Not Mentioned, Nos, Numbers</i>			

The last meeting of NCRC was held in 2013, the total members invited and recommended for the meeting was relatively higher than other meetings; however, the participation rate was just above 60 percent. The story of third (2013) NCRC meeting is also not different from other two meetings; however, for the first time an ostensible representation with the single representative participation was recorded. Keeping in view the above facts of NCRC meetings raises the question of quality and effectiveness of curriculum development, evaluation and review. One can ask how it is possible to develop and revise curriculum(s) efficiently and effectively without the participations of those universities which are most vulnerable to HEC curriculum.

Year of Curriculum Revision	2006	2008	2013
Representation from Balochistan	1 (4.76)	1(7.14)	(0)
Representation from Islamabad	6 (28.6)	5(35.71)	1 (5.3%)
Representation from KP	3 (14.3)	1(07.1)	3 (15.8)
Representation from Punjab	5 (23.8)	5(35.7)	11 (54.9)
Representation from Sindh	6(28.6)	2(14.3)	3(15.8)
Representation from GilgitBaltistan	(0)	(0)	(0)
Representation from AJK	(0)	(0)	1 (5.3%)
Absent members of the meeting	5	*	12
Absent members from Islamabad	(0)	*	2
Absent members from Punjab	4	*	3
Absent members for Sindh	1	*	(0)
Absent members from KP	(0)	*	5
Absent members from Balochistan	(0)	*	2
Members attending the Meeting	21 (80.7)	14 (100)	19 (61.3)
Total member of NCRC	26	14	31

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Source: HEC curriculum for BS Economics (4 years) 2006, HEC revised BS Economics (4 Years) curriculum 2008 and HEC revised BS Economics (4 Years) curriculum 2013. Figures in parenthesis are percentages
 * Not Mentioned

Table-4 presents the distribution of the NCRC members on provincial basis. It is really surprising to see that the most vulnerable and the backward province has almost no representation or very less representation i.e. 4.8 percent and 7.1 percent in the first two meetings 1st (2006), and (2008), respectively. Further, in the 3rd (2013) meeting of NCRC, there was no representation from Balochistan province. Moreover, the representation from the capital territory Islamabad which is smaller than the provincial territories in Pakistan has higher representation of 28.6 percent and 35.7 percent in first two meetings of 2006 and 2008, respectively. The no representation from Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir area confirms the discriminatory attitude of the higher authority in the respect, with an exception of so-called single representative in the meeting of the year 2013. The above records and representation explains the improper and ad-hoc based methodology for the selection of NCRC members.

Table 5: Rural and Urban Wise Representation in NCRC

Year of Curriculum Revision	2006	2008	2013
Representation of urban areas	19 (90.5)	14 (100)	14 (73.7)
Representation of rural areas	1 (9.6)	(0)	5 (26.3)
Presents members	21 (100)	14 (100)	19 (100)
Absent members	5 (100)	*	12 (100)
Absent members of urban area	5 (100)	*	9 (75)
Absent members of rural area	(0)	*	3 (25)
Total member of NCRC	26	14	31

Note:

Urban Districts: (Islamabad, Quetta, Mardan, Multan, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Bahawalpur and Peshawar).

Rural Districts: (D.I. Khan, Mansehra, Kohat, Gilgit, Lasbella, Mirpur, Jamshoro, Sargodha, Malakand, Bannu, Swat, Turbat and Muazaffarbad)

Figures in parenthesis are percentages

**Not Mentioned*

Of the total universities in Pakistan, about 60 percent are situated in the urban areas, while the rest are situated in semi-urban and rural areas (See Appendix-1 for details). Most of the

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universities which are established in urban areas are well established and developed while those universities which are placed in rural areas are still deprived of resources and struggling hard.

Table-5 exhibits the representation of rural and urban universities representation in NCRC meetings. Again with an exception in year 2013, urban area universities dominate the representation by over 90 percent in 2006 and almost 100 percent in 2008. The year 2013 provided some room and opportunity for deprived universities (rural area) to have one third representation in the overall present quorum. This reveals that urban sector and impervious universities remained dominant to influence curriculum. Despite the fact that rural sector universities are more vulnerable, needs more attention and care to get developed. It is highly important to take note of their recommendations about curriculum in NCRC; however, unfortunately, they were the least priority on the representation in NCRC meetings. This illustrates the random pattern selection of the members for NCRC with no proper methodology. Thus, 'the members' selection remained very dramatic and totally ignores the contribution of deprived universities. Therefore, to make the NCRC meeting nationally representative, the study suggests some methodologies as under:

S. #	Province	PSUs	PRSUs	Total	Representation (%)
1.	Federal Capital, Islamabad	24	6	30	18.4
2.	Punjab	20	22	44	27.0
3.	Sindh	17	30	47	28.8
4.	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	19	10	29	17.7
5.	Balochistan	6	2	8	4.9
6.	Azad Jammu & Kashmir	4	2	6	3.7
7.	Gilgit Baltistan	1	0	2	1.2
Total		91	72	163	100

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Source: HEC curriculum for BS Economics (4 years) 2006, HEC revised BS Economics (4 Years) curriculum 2008 and HEC revised BS Economics (4 Years) curriculum 2013.

The first and foremost thing to do is to develop membership criteria for provinces on the basis of public and private sector universities. Table 6 simulates the proportion of the members on the basis of suggested criteria in respective province. This way there will be a possible national representation. However, despite this criteria the province of Balochistan, AJK and Gilgit Baltistan have a very small proportion of representation.

Considering the universities having DOE is another way off setting up criteria for the membership to each province. Table-7 simulates the numbers of public and private sector universities having the DoE.

S. #	Province	PSUs have DOE	PRSUs have DOE	Total	Rep:
1.	Islamabad	9	1	10	18.18
2.	Punjab	11	7	18	32.73
3.	Sindh	5	1	6	10.91
4.	KP	12	1	13	23.64
5.	Balochistan	5	00	5	9.09
6.	AJK	2	00	2	3.64
7.	Gilgit Baltistan	1	00	1	1.82
Total		45	10	55	100

Note: Those universities they have DOE their names are reported in appendix 01, furthermore, in appendix 01 column four and five mentioned establishment date of university and numbers of PhDs in DoE respectively.

Third criteria should be; to give equal weight to all five provinces including federal capital, thus the share of each province will be become one-sixth (16.66 percent).

All these three suggested criteria have same problems of either less representation of vulnerable and deprived universities either by means of province or by means of rural-urban divide. The last proposed criteria ignore the universities of urban areas and give equal share to each province

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despite the numbers of universities in respective province. Therefore, this study produces another innovative and comprehensive procedure for revision of curriculum by incorporating all of the stakeholders, and ensures the participation of all public and private sector universities in curriculum revision. We developed the procedure – *a bottom-up approach* - with the help of departmental board of studies which are based on three steps:

Box 2: Proposed Stepwise Structure of Curriculum Revision

A Bottom-up Approach

Proposed Step 1

Call the meetings of Departmental Boards of Studies at each public and private sector university and discuss the problems related to the implementation and revise of curriculum and also take recommendations.



Proposed Step 2

Call the meetings of Provincial Curriculum Revision Committee (PCRC) at HEC regional centre and further filter the problems and recommendations of DBS for National Curriculum Revision Committee (NCRC)



Proposed Step 3

Call the meeting of National Curriculum Revision Committee (NCRC) and revise the curriculum in the light of expert opinions and recommendations and problem highlighted by the PCRCs and DBSs.

It will be much better, if HEC notify to all universities to established DBS and then with the help of HEC regional centre establish a Provincial Curriculum Revision Committees

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(PCRC) for each of the subject and allocate some power to these committees. Moreover, before calling the NCRC meeting to revise the curriculum, it is very important to call the meeting of DBS at each university and then Provincial Curriculum Revision Committees (PCRC) meeting at each province respectively to get comments, suggestions, and recommendations. After the comprehensive and deliberate discussions all these comments, suggestions, recommendations and criticisms will be forwarded to the NCRC for approval and further discussions. So, through this bottom up approach, we will get a very compressive and suitable curriculum for each of the subject that keeps the national interest in true spirit. Moreover, there is aneed to create framework based on combination of both bottom-up and top-down approaches of curriculum development and revision. This way there will be a strong coordination between the curriculum developers and representative subject and faculty members. There is a need of cooperative endeavor and mutual understanding between the teachers and curriculum developers (Memon 1999). This will allow faculty members to share their experience with the existing curriculum and the challenges faced with development of required curriculum. It is important that the advices and suggestions in the curriculum matters by faculty members should be valued by curriculum developers. This will enable the environment of professionalism and make responsible the teachers who are real decision makers as well and the curriculum implementers in the respective classes. Looking at the existing procedures, and considering the objectives of education policies, it seems that the current policies either failed to understand the underline objectives of educational reform. Thus, the translation of curriculum development objectives in to the proper and implementable curriculum drafts has been failed. The top-down approach would be organizing different workshops at all levels i.e. for Deans/ Chairperson / HODs, the

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faculty members and the administrative staff related to curriculum development to increase awareness about curriculum, syllabus and working of DBS.

Conclusion

Books, outlines and guided drafts often provides a road map to completion of a course, however reflections on experiences on curriculum allow the curriculum developers to evaluate the existing curriculums. As stated earlier, curriculum development is a dynamic process with evolving nature all the time. Autonomy to provide input by teachers and faculty members allows proper implementation and improvement in the existing curriculum in exercise. This allows the universities to change their curriculum according to their needs and requirements. Presently the HEC curriculum revision procedure based on inductive methodology rather than deductive methodology; therefore, the small and emerging universities are experiencing problems and challenges with provided HEC curriculum. Thus, this study proposed new procedure for curriculum revision, based on bottom-up approach which considered the recommendations and suggestions of all stakeholders. Taking the two way approach, we suggest the combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches for the best and effective curriculum development in the country. In the long run, this approach would lead to national standard curriculum policies. A road map is needed to develop from the non-standardization to the standardization of curriculum development in the country. This methodology would provide some breathing space for the backward and deprived universities both in the urban and rural areas to improve and build their resources in all aspects.

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