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Evaluating Textbook for Content Quality, Higher-Order Thinking, Social Values, and Aesthetic Presentation of grade 8 Urdu Textbook

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In fact, the importance of the Urdu textbook lies in the fact that Urdu is an essential language for communication and literature in Pakistan. Not only do the students require vocabulary and grammatical knowledge at this grade level, but they are supposed to learn reading, writing, communication skills, creativity, critical thinking, and social and moral responsibility as well. The objectives of research work were to analyze the content and to analyze the degree of provision of Grade 8 Urdu textbook in developing high-order thinking skills among students, determination and evaluation of social and moral values in the Grade 8 Urdu textbook and evaluation of the aesthetic aspects of the Grade 8 Urdu textbook in terms of illustration, typography, layout, visual attractiveness, organization, and age-appropriate presentation. Mix method was adopted and data was collected from eight textbook authors, reviewers and teachers. The results indicate that the reviewers found the appearance of the book satisfactory. The quality of paper used in textbook is low and the layout of title and pages, and the features of the book were all rated positively. On the other hand, printing and binding got relatively mixed results, while the graphics were mostly considered somewhat satisfactory. Findings also show that the textbook functions relatively well in terms of fostering creativity, critical thinking, and values. It was concluded that the book is aesthetically and durably acceptable, but it may become even better if there will be some improvements made to the printing/binding process and the graphics included in it. It was recommended that the physical quality, printing binding of grade 8th Urdu textbook should be improved and least important content should be removed.

Introduction

Background of the Study

Education is an important aspect in the cognitive, moral, social, and cultural growth of individuals. At the school level, the quality of the materials used in education has a bearing on the efficiency of teaching and learning process. Various instructional materials exist but textbooks are very crucial since they contain structured subject matter, learning experiences, examples, exercises, and practice that help in gaining knowledge and skills.

In Pakistan, the development of textbooks is in conformity with the curriculum that gives the students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values in line with their education. In Balochistan province, the School Education Department, Bureau of Curriculum and Extension Centre, and Balochistan Textbook Board are key organizations in the process of curriculum and textbooks development and implementation. The curricular system of the province includes prescribed textbooks for various grades including Grade 8 and Balochistan Textbook Board produces textbooks in line with the curricular system.

Textbook evaluation is not just about judging the adequacy of the amount of subject matter available in a textbook. In fact, it is a comprehensive process where the quality, relevance, appropriateness, and effectiveness of a textbook can be evaluated. Mahmood (2009) highlighted the fact that textbook quality was concerned with not only content but also presentation of the content as well. According to this approach, it is essential to evaluate a textbook on the basis of certain indicators to determine the suitability of its content, organization, language, activities, and presentation in the educational context.

The first significant aspect of this research is the quality of the content. It is essential that the content of the book should be correct, appropriate, relevant, coherent, balanced, comprehensible, and appropriate for the age and educational level of learners. In the case of the Urdu textbook, the content quality could be defined in terms of the choice of prose, poetry, stories, dialogues, exercises, vocabulary, grammar, comprehension passages, and composition exercises. The content should be consistent with the goals of the curriculum, providing learners with the chance to relate classroom learning to real life. The content should be diversified enough to satisfy different interests and abilities of students.

The second aspect of this study is higher order thinking. Today's education stresses the need of developing not only knowledge of the subject but skills of thinking critically, problem solving, analysis, evaluation, and idea generation. It is essential that textbooks should play an important role in the development of such skills, since questions, exercises, and activities could stimulate higher order thinking or limit learners to memorization and reproduction.

The third dimension of the present study pertains to the topic of social values. Schools do not merely serve as centers for learning academic information but also work towards developing responsible, cooperative, ethical, and socially aware individuals. This is where textbooks can play their role by means of themes, characters, situations, examples, dialogues, stories, poems, and activities that they present. Since the Urdu textbook possesses literary and communicative dimensions, therefore, it holds great potential in terms of promoting social values like respect, honesty, tolerance, cooperation, compassion, patriotism, equality, responsibility, dignity of labor, justice, and respect for others.

Recently conducted studies regarding Urdu textbooks in Pakistan have highlighted the need to look into social and moral values found in the textbooks. Junaid Ahamad and Khan (2024) revealed that the secondary Urdu textbooks contain values like service to humanity, unity, patriotism, dignity of labor, good manners, virtue, and sacrifice, in addition to areas where other social and moral values can be incorporated. KP Heart Institute Such studies reveal the ability of the Urdu textbooks to act as a tool for value education; however, a systematic evaluation is needed for this purpose.

The fourth dimension in the present study refers to the topic of aesthetic presentation. The visual and physical presentation of a textbook plays a major role in influencing the interest and motivation levels of a student. The aesthetic dimension of a textbook might include elements like design of its cover, type of its typography, page layout, illustrations, colors, spaces, headings, diagrams, pictures, and overall presentation. For younger students, the textbook having an attractive presentation becomes easy to learn from.

The significance of taking into account both content and aesthetics has already been acknowledged in the literature on evaluation of textbooks. According to Mahmood (2009), content quality and presentation quality are important issues in textbook development and indicators of textbook quality have been suggested in the context of Pakistan. This means that in the current study, textbook aesthetics is considered a component of textbook quality.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to fulfill the following objectives:

1. Assessment of the Grade 8 Urdu textbook of Balochistan concerning relevance, accuracy, organization and appropriateness of content.
2. To analyze the degree of provision of Grade 8 Urdu textbook in developing high-order thinking skills among students.
3. Determination and evaluation of social and moral values in the Grade 8 Urdu textbook.
4. Evaluation of the aesthetic aspects of the Grade 8 Urdu textbook in terms of illustration, typography, layout, visual attractiveness, organization, and age-appropriate presentation.
5. Determination of the strengths and weaknesses of the Grade 8 Urdu textbook and recommendations for improvements.

Research Questions

The current study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How far do the Grade 8 Urdu textbook of Balochistan satisfy the requirements of quality, relevance, accuracy, organization, and appropriateness of content?
2. How far does the Grade 8 Urdu textbook help develop the higher order thinking skills of the students?
3. What are the social and moral values depicted in the Grade 8 Urdu textbook, and how well have they been included?
4. How far does the aesthetic aspect of the Grade 8 Urdu textbook prove to be attractive, appropriate, balanced, and conducive for learning?
5. What are the main strengths and weaknesses of the Grade 8 Urdu textbook in terms of quality of content, higher order thinking, social values, and aesthetics?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for various players in education sector for several reasons. In the first place, it can be beneficial for curriculum designers and textbook authorities because this study is a systematic way of evaluating the quality of an existing textbook. The information derived from the findings of this study will help curriculum planners determine what should be maintained in future versions and where there is room for improvement. Secondly, it may be useful for textbook writers and publishers. The results obtained will guide them in choosing suitable literary and informative content, formulation of questions that develop higher order thinking skills, incorporation of social values, and presentation of materials aesthetically. Rather than viewing the textbook as a compilation of lessons, textbook writers will be able to make their writing more meaningful based on the evaluation findings.

Thirdly, the study is significant for teachers. Teachers depend heavily on textbooks for lesson preparation, assignment of activities, concept explanation, and assessment of students' understanding of concepts taught. Evaluation will help teachers determine the strengths and limitations of the textbook they use. Where the textbook lacks opportunities for higher order thinking, social discussion, and creative expression among others, they may supplement it with appropriate classroom activities.

Fourthly, the study can be useful for students. Students are the main consumers of school textbooks. A good Urdu textbook can help them in becoming fluent speakers, think critically, creatively, and become socially aware among other benefits. The shortcomings in an existing textbook will help them in making future textbooks better.

Delimitations of the Study

1. The study only takes into account the Grade 8 Urdu textbook used in Balochistan and no other Urdu textbooks of different grades.
2. The study only focuses on four aspects of textbook quality: content quality, higher order thinking, social values, and aesthetic qualities.
3. The study does not intend to assess the performance of Urdu teachers, students, schools, and the education system in Balochistan.
4. The study takes into account only the content and presentation of the chosen textbook and not any supplementary guide, commercially published guide, workbook, or any other auxiliary materials.
5. The study mainly focuses on assessing higher order thinking through learning tasks in the textbook and not measuring higher order thinking of students directly.

Literature Review

Textbooks are one of the most important instructional resources in formal education, especially in countries developing educational systems where teachers and students depend largely on textbooks prescribed for teaching and learning in the classroom. The textbook is more than just a content resource; it conveys educational goals, a culture, social values, learning activities, and modes of thinking that may affect students intellectually and socially. This makes the assessment of the textbook quality an analysis of various interrelated aspects like accuracy and relevancy of content, higher order thinking opportunities, social and moral values reflected in the book, and the presentation of the book itself. Cunningsworth (1995) states that textbook evaluation should take into account the relation between the content of the textbook, the curriculum, needs of the learners, and

the teaching-learning situation. McGrath (2002) also stresses that the systematic evaluation is required to ensure that the instructional materials satisfy the requirements of the educational process and the needs of the learners.

Textbooks play an especially important role in Pakistan, since they provide the most common form of instructional materials for teachers and students to use. In the study conducted by Mahmood (2011), textbook quality plays an essential role in the education system of Pakistan, as textbooks are supposed to transfer curricular intentions into practice. Mahmood's research of textbook quality in Pakistan revealed that approved textbooks do not always exhibit all desirable qualities of quality textbooks.

The importance of evaluating textbooks is demonstrated by the educational setting of Balochistan as well. According to Panezai and Channa (2017), who conducted evaluation of English textbooks used in government primary schools of Balochistan, there were issues associated with vocabulary development, grammatical correctness, level of comprehension of learners, teachers' preparation, and availability of instructional materials. Their results suggest that textbooks should not be evaluated based on whether they comply with the curricula but in connection with educational needs of learners.

Content Quality of Textbooks

Content Quality is one of the basic criteria in the process of textbook evaluation. A high-quality textbook must include accurate, appropriate, age-appropriate, organized and curriculum-aligned content. According to Cunningsworth (1995), such criteria as the connection between course content, objectives of the lessons, needs of the learners, the organization of the materials, and progress of the study must be considered in evaluating a textbook. Similar arguments are put forward by McGrath (2002) who explains that textbook materials must be analyzed taking into account their suitability for particular learners, educational objectives, and teaching situations. Therefore, content quality must not be seen as just the quantity of information included in a textbook but must include its appropriateness, accuracy, organization, relevance, and usefulness for education.

The research done in Pakistan shows that it is important to pay attention to the content and educational possibilities provided by a textbook. The content analysis of the Grade 8 Urdu textbook of the Punjab Textbook Board done by Baig et al. (2021) proves that the textbook includes many elements related to reading comprehension but provides less opportunities for thinking, writing, speaking and listening and lexical development. In other words, a textbook may contain all the necessary content of the curriculum but fails to provide balanced educational opportunities. Therefore, in evaluating the Grade 8 Urdu textbook, it is important to analyze whether the textbook lessons, activities, examples and exercises meet the needs of the learners.

Higher-Order Thinking Skills in Textbooks

Anderson & Krathwohl (2001) revised Bloom's taxonomy and classified the cognitive processes into remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The last three types of the process, namely, analyzing, evaluating, and creating, are regarded as more complicated than the others and can be a great tool for evaluation of how textbooks contribute to development of HOTS.

According to recent findings from Pakistani research, textbook exercises often lack opportunities for HOTS. For instance, Pervez et al. (2022) evaluated prescribed and tested curricula in Pakistan and concluded that while the prescribed curriculum was characterized by better attention paid to higher-order thinking, exercises from textbooks and exams focused on lower-order thinking skills. Naseer et al. (2022) studied the presence of critical thinking in a textbook dedicated to Pakistan Studies and came to a conclusion that the text-based exercises in the textbook were not appropriate enough to develop critical thinking. According to a systematic review of textbook studies on critical thinking provided by Soe (2024), Bloom's taxonomy and its revised version were the most commonly used tools to evaluate thinking skills. Furthermore, the study found that HOTS were less common than LOTS in textbooks.

Social and Moral Values in Textbooks

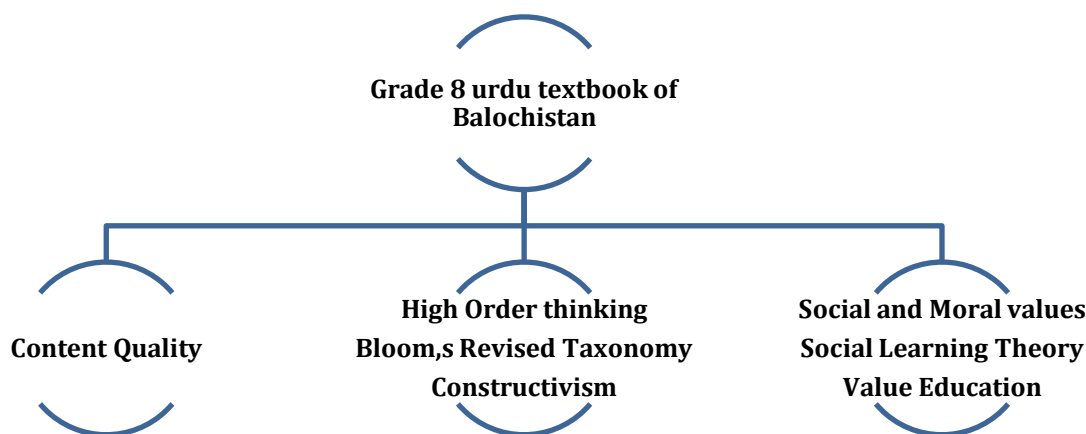
Research in Urdu textbooks in Pakistan confirms the significance of this dimension. Ahamad and Khan (2024) conducted a study on the integration of social and moral values in secondary Urdu textbooks using qualitative content analysis. The results of the research pointed to the presence of values such as service to humanity, unity, patriotism, value of labor, good manners, virtue, and sacrifice. However, it was also recommended that there should be more emphasis on values such as honesty, justice, tolerance, patience, responsibility, social justice, family values, and rights of deprived sections of society.

Aesthetic Presentation of Textbooks

According to Cunningsworth (1995), design and organization are some of the factors that should be considered when evaluating textbooks. Evaluation of instructional materials based on practical features is one of the considerations that McGrath (2002) has acknowledged when it comes to textbook evaluation. The evaluation criteria of textbooks in Balochistan have considered

the book presentation and its aesthetics as some of the factors for the evaluation of textbooks. These criteria are related to the attractiveness and relevance of the title page, table of contents, font size, readability, and illustrations.

Theoretical Framework



Aesthetic Representation

Overall quality of textbook

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, descriptive evaluative research methodology was used in which a systematic content analysis technique was used to assess the Grade 8 textbook of the Urdu language of Balochistan. Descriptive evaluative research was deemed suitable for this study because the aim of the study was to assess the quality of the textbook in accordance with the predetermined criteria.

One on one discussions with authors, reviewers and teachers had carried out for such purpose check was used. The feedback from the authors and textbook reviewers was taken into account along with content analysis. This study was basically quantitative and qualitative in nature.

Population of the Study

This population included all Urdu text book authors, reviewers and teachers and the Grade 8 Urdu textbook recommended by the Balochistan education department to be used in government schools of Balochistan. The reason is that the study was focused on the evaluation of this textbook as well as the views of its writers and textbook reviewers.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Since the study had been limited to a single prescribed book and views of textbook writers, reviewers, and teachers on the subject, purposive sampling method was employed to choose the Grade 8 Urdu textbook as the sample. This particular textbook was chosen due to its direct relevance to the aims and objectives of the research.

In the case of higher order thinking skills, all questions and tasks found in the textbook were treated as individual units of analysis. In addition, all appropriate textual parts were analyzed in respect of social and moral values, while all illustrations and design elements were analyzed in respect of aesthetic value.

This sampling technique is thought to be justified as analyzing the whole textbook in accordance with textbook writers, reviewers, and teachers decreases the possibility of sampling bias within the textbook.

Research Instrument

The Textbook Evaluation Checklist was prepared and served as the main tool for data collection. The preparation of the checklist was done based on the aims of the study and the existing literature on textbook evaluation.

Analysis and Results

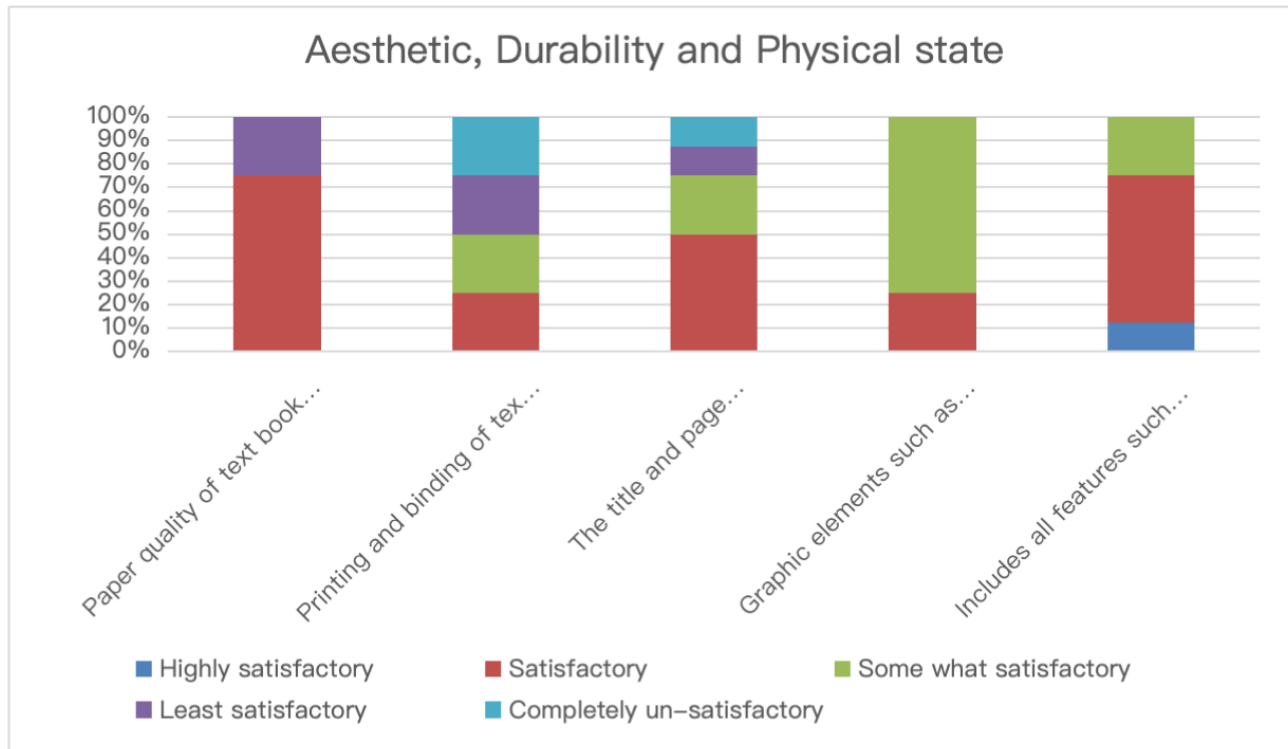


Figure 1 shows Aesthetic, Durability and Physical state of textbook.

The figure above shows the views of the reviewers on the aesthetic value, durability, and physical state of the book. These views can be classified into five levels namely; Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Somewhat Satisfactory, Least Satisfactory, and completely Satisfactory. From the findings, it is apparent that most of the physical and aesthetic qualities of the book were rated in a good way.

Paper quality

The quality of paper has received a relatively positive rating. About 75% of the reviewers found it to be satisfactory, whereas the other 25% found it to be least satisfactory. This indicates that most of the reviewers were satisfied with the quality of the paper.

Printing and Binding

There is greater diversity in opinions with regards to this area as well. About 25% found it satisfactory, 25% somewhat satisfactory, 25% least satisfactory, and another 25% completely unsatisfactory. This means that printing and binding were one of the poorer aspects physically about the book.

Title and Page Layout

In this case, the response was relatively positive. 50% of the respondents considered it to be satisfactory, 25% considered it to be somewhat satisfactory, while 12–13% felt that it was highly satisfactory and completely unsatisfactory respectively.

Elements of graphics

According to the chart, around 75% of the answers can be considered satisfactory while 25% were somewhat satisfactory. Therefore, it means that the utilization of maps, charts, diagrams, and other graphic materials was satisfactory, yet reviewers could have desired something better.

General features and additional features

With respect to the inclusion of features such as title, cover and table of contents, the responses were mostly positive. About 12–13% gave very high satisfaction, 62–63% gave high satisfaction, and 25% gave medium satisfaction. There seems to be no dissatisfaction in this section at all.

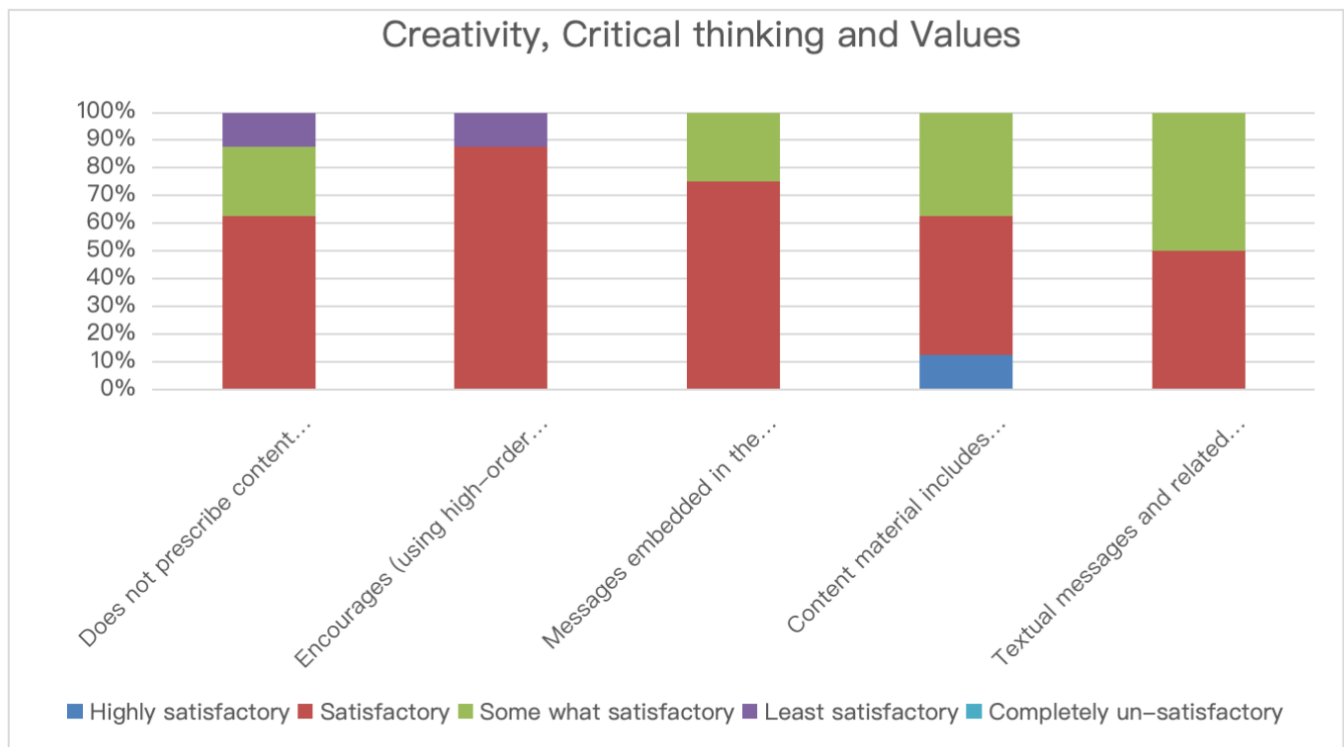


Figure 2: shows Creativity, Critical Thinking and Values

In the graph below is the reviewers', authors and teachers rating regarding the effectiveness of the textbook in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and values to students. There is a total of five statements, which the reviewers have given a rating ranging from Highly Satisfactory to Completely Unsatisfactory.

1. Does not prescribe content knowledge to be merely memorized by students

It can be interpreted that most of the respondents 62.5% found that it is satisfactory that the book does not just make the students memorize facts. However, a quarter of the respondents 25% found this feature to be somewhat satisfactory.

2. Encourages students to think and act creatively and critically

This is one of the strongest sections in the textbook. A very high percentage of respondents believed that the textbook prompts students to question, think out of the box, and be critically minded. 87.5% of the respondents are satisfied while 12.5% of the respondents are least satisfied.

3. The values that are promoted by messages in the content include social justice, civic responsibility, balance between rights and responsibilities.

The figure 2 shows the data regarding the values that are promoted by messages in the content include social justice, civic responsibility, balance between rights and responsibilities. According to the figure 75% of respondents are satisfied while 25% of the responded somewhat satisfactory. It is evident that the results obtained are very positive. In three out of four cases, the reviewers were satisfied with the fact that the textbook is promoting certain social and civic values.

4. Content includes information, activities, experiences, tests, questions and topics that foster critical and creative thinking

Generally speaking, the response is quite positive, with 62.5% of the respondents rating it either satisfactory or very satisfactory. The significant proportion of the somewhat satisfactory response (37.5%) indicates that there is room for more activities, questions, and experiences that foster higher-order thinking.

5. Textual messages and related materials instill values such as truth, honesty, integrity, empathy and sympathy

According to the figure 50% of the responded are satisfied and 50% are not completely satisfied with the textual messages and related materials of values. The answer is positive but weaker compared to other sections. Half of the reviewers were happy with this section, while the remaining half viewed it as acceptably unacceptable. This shows that value-based messages are present in the textbook, but can be improved.

Content Analysis

2026 Urdu textbook is developed from the curriculum 2022-2023. It is a pilot edition and circulating around the whole public schools under the umbrella of secondary education department. Urdu text book of grade 8 is combined with islamiat textbook in single binding. There are 24 lessons and total number of pages are 160 having pictures, tables, student learning outcomes and divided in small portions like what we learn, stop and tell, think and tell, do you know, instruction for teachers, exercises questions and a large portion of Urdu grammar.

There are sixty-nine pictures with no transparent appearance. Few pictures are repeated. The paper quality is not according to standard prescribed by secondary education department, that's why pictures seem unattractive. In some textbooks the ink of picture is spread on pages due to low quality of printing.

The competency of Urdu is listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar. A bulk of content is existed in this text book without any reason and need and there is no any alignment between content, question exercises and competencies. For example, "Yaadgar safar" this chapter is related to a journey of a person from Islamabad to Quetta than Ziarat. The content in this chapter is related to person's journey and information from Quetta and Ziarat but in exercises questions there are general knowledge questions like "world largest juniper forest is in which country". Exercises question answer, true false, fill in the blanks and MCQs having general knowledge questions having no relevancy with Urdu competencies and this gap is repeated mostly in all exercises.

Some SLOs are repeated. Five chapters are related to personalities and another four chapters having no SLOs. According to authors, the reason behind this is these chapters are only for listening competency. This listening competency can also be covered from other chapters. This logic seems irrational. The author concluded these four chapters in core plus category which means these chapters are related to our Balochistan province. A number of exercise questions having low order thinking. Most of the pages or lessons were observed overburden content.

Activities and exercises cover creativity, critical thinking and values. Messages present in the text book embedded in content reflect and promote such values as national coherence and equitable social justice, civic responsibilities and balance of rights and responsibilities. Textual messages and related materials used stress inculcation and nurturing of such values as truthfulness honesty integrity, empathy and sympathy. It was also observed that some exercises encourage high order questions and creative activities to encourages students and also to think an act creatively and critically.

Discussion

It is very important to note the significance of the gap in literature as Balochistan has its own unique curriculum and educational context. It is the Balochistan Textbook Board that prepares textbooks for the province while the Bureau of Curriculum & Extension Centre is responsible for curriculum development and review process. As per the latest official information available, grade 8 textbooks are part of the curriculum of the province.

Analyzing the Grade 8 Urdu textbook based on the four dimensions of content, high order of thinking, social values, and aesthetics will give a more holistic view of the educational value of the textbook. According to the literature review, an ideal textbook is an accurate and relevant book, stimulating intellectually, socially responsible, and aesthetically attractive. The current study contributes to these theoretical notions by bringing these four dimensions into consideration in the context of Grade 8 Urdu textbook of Balochistan. This kind of analysis of the textbook can help reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook.

The analysis reveals that the book makes positive contributions to developing creativity, critical thinking, and values. The most satisfactory level was achieved in the ability of the book to stimulate students' creative and critical thinking (87.5% satisfactory). Moreover, 75% of those who reviewed the book found the incorporation of social and civic values satisfactory. Nevertheless, the results obtained during the process of the analysis also indicate some aspects which need improvement, namely, systematic incorporation of activities aimed at promoting higher-order thinking and personal/ethical values. Overall, the results obtained during the analysis show that the book provides a good basis for creativity, critical thinking, and values education, although more attention should be paid to this issue.

Conclusion

In clear language, most reviewers thought that the book was physically well-designed. It seems like the best qualities of the book in terms of physical appearance are the paper quality, title/page design, and the book features. The areas that seem to require some works are printing/binding and graphics.

This means that the book is aesthetically and durably acceptable, but it may become even better if there will be some improvements made to the printing/binding process and the graphics included in it.

The results indicate that the reviewers found the appearance of the book satisfactory. The quality of paper used, the layout of title and pages, and the features of the book were all rated positively. On the other hand, printing and binding got relatively mixed results, while the graphics were mostly considered somewhat satisfactory. Thus, the overall results show that even though the physical presentation of the book is satisfactory, there is still need for some improvements in terms of printing, binding, and graphic materials.

Findings show that the textbook functions relatively well in terms of fostering creativity, critical thinking, and values. The best result is linked to encouraging the students' ability to think critically and creatively, with 87.5% of the respondents stating that the textbook is satisfactory in this regard.

The same result, 75%, was received concerning the promotion of values such as social justice, civic responsibility, and responsibility. It can be noted that the textbook performs quite well in terms of fostering critical and creative thinking through content and activities, even though there was a suggestion that it could be improved.

The poorer result concerns the promotion of personal and ethical values such as honesty, integrity, truthfulness, empathy, and sympathy. Here the answers were equally divided between "satisfactory" and "somewhat satisfactory".

In general, the textbook appears to be adequate in fostering creativity, critical thinking skills, and values in students. The textbook does an excellent job of inspiring creative and critical thinking in students, as well as instilling values regarding social and civic responsibility. Nevertheless, more focus can be made on exercises that will foster higher-order thinking skills, as well as instilling personal and ethical values.

From the literature reviewed above, it can be concluded that the quality of the textbooks is multidimensional and cannot be evaluated merely based on the coverage of the curriculum. There have been many studies done in Pakistan that have considered aspects like the content of the textbook, the language skills of the textbook, teachers' perception of the textbook, critical thinking aspect, and the social or moral value of the textbooks. However, most of the researches conducted have considered either English, Pakistan Studies or the general quality of textbooks.

Recommendations

- The paper quality should be improved as per standards approved by school education department.
- Ink used in printing should be of good quality and binding must be durable.
- The context related to Balochistan should be focused as a main theme for text book not just merely assessing listening competency and should have separate SLOs.
- There should be alignment between competencies of literacy, SLOs, context and few exercise questions.
- Urdu text book content should be focused on competencies of literacy rather than general knowledge. Exercise questions should be developed and reviewed by BAEC.
- It is recommended that Urdu text book should have more focused on higher order thinking, critical thinking, reasoning skills, creative thinking and moral values for nurturing students for their social life.

- Picture representation and quality should be attractive. Text books should have visually balance pages rather than visually rich pages.
- There should be some practical activities embedded in text book that promote and fosters the ethical values as honesty, integrity, truthfulness, empathy, and sympathy.
- Repeated SLOs and irrelevant content should be removed.
- Less text-heavy pages should be embedded instead of content-heavy pages.

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