

Using Texts to Teach Cognitive-Affective Curriculum

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Abstract

The study addressed a cognitive-affective gap in the textual content of a primary English curriculum. The research design was qualitative in nature. In the first part of the study, document analysis of the textbooks from grades 1-5 was done to prove that empathetic and pro-social themes were under represented in them. The second part of the study was an intervention in which teachers were apprised to highlight empathetic and pro social themes in texts and teach them. The third part of the study noticed if the use of cognitive-affective texts raised awareness among students about the said themes and significantly affected their interest in academic work. The findings from document analysis, observations and interviews indicated that empathetic and pro-social themes were under represented in the textual content. The observations of integrated cognitive-affective lessons brought forth a significant increase in student interest in academic work and raised awareness about the stated themes. This was also authenticated by teachers and students in focused group interviews. The study was significant in terms of raising the importance of the stated skills at the primary level and prove that cognitive-affective use of textual content in schools could raise awareness about affective skills and prepare helpful and caring individuals for the society.

Keywords: cognitive-affective, curriculum, empathy, social-emotional learning, textual content

Introduction

Education plays a key role in transforming societies by making individuals knowledgeable, enlightened, and cultured. This transformation, however, is dependent on the curricular approach and philosophy undertaken to educate young minds. The curriculum taught in schools, therefore, should ensure intellectual growth and simultaneously develop human qualities which are important for a

peaceful coexistence in society. This is called the integrated cognitive-affective approach towards curriculum development. Pace (2006) defines a cognitive-affective approach as an approach that provides a philosophical foundation from which teachers can base their teaching outcomes and ensure that both the emotional and traditional cognitive realms are being delivered. However, taken on a realistic platform, this integration is seldom witnessed in both private and public schools in Pakistan. The schools mainly have a cognitive stance towards curriculum design and classroom instruction and plans, texts, assessments and teacher behavior reflect a highly cognitive standpoint. Vazir (2003) reiterates the same and adds that the curriculum practiced in Pakistan emphasizes transmission of knowledge, teacher skills of lecturing and demonstrating, and prescribed textbooks and guidelines without any emphasis on the development of affective skills.

The individual and the society must complement each other. Quality education perceives humans as a whole and supports education that feeds the affective domain as well as the cognitive domain (Association for Living Values Education International [ALVEI] & United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO]; Taylor, as cited in Iscan, & Senemoglu, 2009). Siang (2012) reiterates the same and opines that, “Education systems have an important role to play in the economic and technological progress but it can be disastrous if the systems fail to develop people’s attitudes and social behaviors at all or even positively.” (p.1040).

Background of the Problem

Texts are important elements of any school curriculum and provide a solid platform through which students view the world. One of the ways to develop appropriate behaviors and attitudes is through the thoughtful use of texts in classrooms. Research suggests that texts are valuable sources to teach important socio-emotional skills like empathy and pro-social skills (E & P). Galda and Beach (2001) are of the view that texts, readers, and contexts are inseparable from one another. When readers respond to texts, associate with characters, themes, and culture, the feelings of empathy are invoked and make students more sensitive. On the contrary, in the Pakistani context, texts are mainly used as a way to enhance the cognitive skills of students. They become the sole means through which classroom teaching objectives, mostly cognitive in nature are fulfilled. Mahmood (2010) opines the same and claims that in developing countries, it has been a regular practice

to consider textbooks as the major source of the teaching learning process to be undertaken in schools. Moreover, texts are seldom tapped for the various functions they may perform including social and emotional development of students. The evidence in this particular study suggests that English texts are approached from a highly cognitive angle and so is the methodology. It leaves no room for empathy and pro-social development among students.

Statement of the Problem

Texts, as a formidable part of the curriculum, should be exploited to the maximum to inculcate social and emotional skills among students. They should be used as rich resources to equip students with E & P skills. This can be safely achieved through the integrated approach to teaching and learning where the cognitive objectives are taught in congruence with affective targets. Both complement each other and train students to attain the desired domains in careful unison.

In Pakistan, texts are used as a major means to transmit the curriculum. Mahmood (2010) reiterates the same and opines that for the proper implementation of any school curriculum, textbooks become part and parcel of the education system. The National Education Policy of Pakistan (2009:44) verifies the same and states that, “Normally a curriculum should have the teacher as the centre but textbook development appears to be the only activity flowing from the curriculum.” Thus, little is done to teach the essence of a curriculum apart from the textbook. Moreover, the textbooks are taught with a highly cognitive focus and other essential domains, i.e. affective skills, are left unexplored. The result is that students’ gain intellectual consciousness but do not develop the required social-emotional skills to coexist peacefully and amicably with others.

This study aims to bridge the said gap by indicting that texts can be used with the dual purpose of teaching language arts and affective skills, that is, social-emotional skills and E & P in particular.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How did the under study English language textual materials from grades 1-5 support empathetic and pro-social themes?

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2. How did the texts teach cognitive and affective skills to students from grades 1-5?
 3. How did the integrated cognitive-affective English language textual materials and activities raise awareness among students about the stated themes in the classroom?
 4. How did students respond to cognitive-affective English texts at the primary level?

Literature Review

The intention of this research study is to stress that E & P skills are important components of any school curriculum and efforts should be made in classrooms to inculcate these skills in students. The objective of this effort is to apprise teachers that through an integrated cognitive-affective approach in an English language classroom, this effect can be reached. The use of E & P texts in classrooms and the use of similar activities can improve students' awareness about the said skills, raise their interest in class work and also improve academic performance. Cognition and affection, therefore, complement each other. Stout (1999) points the same and asserts that feelings can serve as moral checks to the intellect and the intellect can moderate and channel feelings in fair and logical manner. Both processes produce responsible, intellectually bright, and caring individuals who can become successful and capable members of society.

Cognitive Emphasis in the Curriculum

In contrast to the advocacy of Bloom (1956) to finely blend educational activities into cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains, schools, particularly in Pakistan, generally follow a cognitive approach towards framing and implementing of the curricula. Iscan and Senemoglu (2009) claim that in the process of education, acquisition of cognitive behaviours is emphasized most, whereas affective characteristics are ignored as their acquisition takes a long time due to the fact that it is relatively hard to make children acquire such characteristics. Vazir (2003) too reports that curriculum in Pakistan emphasizes transmission of knowledge and the affective domain of children goes unnoticed. Although the National Textbook and Learning Material Policy, [NTLMP](2007:6), notified by the Government of Pakistan (GOP), Ministry of Education (MOE), Curriculum Wing [CW], has clearly invited the publishers and textbook boards to recommend learning materials 'other

than textbook', the practice has seldom gained precedence at any level of teaching and learning. The textbook has always remained the sole source of knowledge dissemination in classrooms.

Cognitive –Affective Link

The literature review done for the purpose of the said study tends to disclaim the thought that the systematic development of cognitive skills is solely responsible in the academic journey of a student. Hasse (1981) is of the view that a child's learning occurs in cognitive, affective, psychomotor, cultural and linguistic domains. Roeper (as cited in Ferguson, 2012) too states that when affective issues are addressed and social emotional needs met, students face their challenges with emotional balance and appropriate coping mechanisms that promote success in reaching personal potential. Students are likely to engage in more adaptive learning strategies such as elaboration, organization, and critical thinking when in an emotionally supportive learning environment. Such strategies once acquired through school later aid in healthy social interactions in practical life and enable individuals to practice adaptive mechanism to adjust in society. Lam and Phillipson (2009) cite a study in Hong Kong where attention to the affective dimension of learning and its integration with the regular academic curriculum result in better academic achievement for low achieving students. Iscan and Senemoglu, (2009) cite a Turkish study which explores the effects of a fourth-grade integrated values education curriculum on the values-related cognitive behaviours, affective characteristics and performance of students. The study claims that the values-related cognitive behaviour acquisition levels of students are found to be significantly higher than those in the control group. The cognitive-affective integration is thus a formidable combination in educational curricula and ensures intellectual progress together with systematic attitudinal and behavioural growth. Brophy (2008) too considers the integration of cognition and affect in learning as a much needed movement in educational curriculum reform. Brackett, Rivers, Reyes and Salovey; Brown, Jones, LaRusso and Aber; Raver et al.; Durlak et al. (as cited in Bracket & Rivers, 2014); however, hint at several investigations, including larger scale experiments, which support the integration of social-emotional skills in the curriculum to achieve better academic outcomes and social-emotional well-being. Elizabeth and Selman (2012) state that, "Curricula that promote prosocial skills have been found to yield academic and social success for students across grade K–8" (p.15). A strong recommendation that has, therefore, come in front by virtue of several research studies is the propagation of a cognitive-

affective curriculum that looks after the academic and affective needs of students and ensures that cognitive and emotional development takes place simultaneously.

Texts as Sources to Teach Cognitive-Affective Skills

One of the ways to teach social emotional skills to students is through the careful selection and use of texts. Review of the literature hints at the success of using texts with the dual purpose of teaching cognition and emotions. Louie (2005) carried out a study of high school students on the role of multicultural texts on the empathetic development of students. The researcher collaborated with the teacher and designed a six-week unit integrating contemporary world issues and multicultural literature focusing on communist China. The findings revealed that the students developed more empathy after doing an in depth study of the protagonist who bore persecution at the hands of communist China. It therefore becomes very clear and an accepted phenomenon that the study of literature is a befitting medium through which ample empathy can be aroused and felt. Dunn and Stinson (2012) cite a case study in which drama is used as a textual source to create a set of learning experiences designed particularly to simultaneously deal with both the cognitive and the affective domains. They state that, “One means of avoiding blandness and, instead, of tapping into children’s affective domain, is to make use of process drama as a pedagogical approach” (p.205). The study discovers that drama as a potential pedagogical tool not only triggers emotions in students but impacts children’s thinking, speaking and writing. Deering (2018) cites a study in which conflict ridden and crisis laden texts are used successfully to help students experience personal growth and to target the affective domain of learning.

When teachers focus on topics like effects of behaviour on other people’s feelings, well-being and ability to learn students become more sensitive towards such behaviours. Seaman (2012, p.26) suggests that it is important to incorporate messages of compassion and empathy into what is being taught and language arts classes are rich mediums through which such opportunities can be given to students. In the language arts classes, emotional connections can be made with characters. He validates the supremacy of texts in the form of literature to raise E & P awareness among students and continues to assert that, “For literature to be meaningful there must be a relationship between the readers and the characters in the books and stories they read. In most literature that addresses intolerance and its effects on human rights, teachers can note and reinforce the similarities between

fictional characters and the students.” Louie (2005) is also of the view that when students develop personal connection with literature, empathy may be a specific form of such aesthetic response. Galda and Beach (2001) are of the view that texts, readers, and contexts are inseparable from one another. When readers respond to texts, associate with characters, themes, and culture, the feelings of empathy are invoked and make students more sensitive. Taylor and Larson (1999) reiterate the same and report that when discussing literature, the teacher can solicit students’ emotional reactions to themes, characters, and plot development.

Education through Cognitive Affective Approach

Review of the stated literature attests the fact that E & P skills are vital life skills and should be actively propagated in schools through careful use of texts and activities. For this it is important to first envision the purpose of education. Elias and Weissberg (2000) are of the view that a combination of academic and social-emotional learning must become the true standard for effective education. This is called the cognitive-affective approach which is needed in schools to manifest a wholesome concept of education. Lashari, Alias, Kesot and Akash (2013) explain cognitive-affective approach as an approach that focuses on the student’s cognitive learning with the support of affective learning. However, such landmarks can only be achieved when all stakeholders in education realize the potential effects of a cognitive-affective link and agree on the establishment of learning opportunities where both the cognitive and affective needs of students are addressed together.

Methodology

The research design followed in the study was qualitative in nature. McMillan (2008) claims that researchers using a qualitative approach believe that there are multiple realities represented in participant perspectives, and that context is critical in providing understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. The study was primarily an observational case study. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe observational case studies as studies where the major data-gathering techniques is participant observation supplemented with formal or informal interviews and review of documents.

Research Design

The research design was divided in three parts and it spanned over 14 months. The first part involved document analysis of textbooks from grades 1-5 in which the E & P themes were identified and analyzed. The second part was an intervention in which the teachers, grades 1-5, were asked to bring the textual materials that were scheduled to be taught in the classrooms from grades 1-5. The E & P themes in the texts were highlighted through a specific focus on the characters and plot. After the identification of E & P themes, i.e. themes of care, help, sharing, the teachers were taken to the next step of preparation of lesson activities around the said themes. Part III of the study was conducted to see if the cognitive-affective lesson integration, sought through texts, brought awareness about E & P skills among students, raised their interest in academic work while they focused on cognitive-affective lessons.

Tools

The following data collection tools were used for conducting the said study:

Document analysis. A total of 66 routine lesson texts and 151 story time texts from grades 1-5 were reviewed for the study. Textbooks were analysed for the E & P themes that they projected through characters and story plots, E & P themes, projected by themes of caring, sharing and helping others were noted. The checklist designed for this purpose was drawn from the view point of Taylor and Larson (1999) who stated that while teaching texts empathy could be invoked through emphasis on themes, characters, and plot development.

Observations and note taking. In observations the students and teachers were observed while cognitive-affective lessons were delivered and E & P themes were taught in classrooms, grades 1-5, through texts and activities. A total of 15 lessons from grades 1-5 were observed for this purpose. The purpose was to observe whether highlighting E & P themes through texts and activities brought about any awareness of the said themes and raised the interest of the students in academic work while they were engaged in cognitive-affective tasks.

Focused group interviews and teachers and students. For the study under investigation, focused group interviews were taken of 18 students and 8 teachers of grades 1-5 to note their experience of dealing with texts with a cognitive-affective

purpose. According to Cohen and Manion (1994:273), “the distinctive feature of this type is that it focuses on a respondent’s subjective responses to a known situation in which she has been involved and which has been analyzed by the interviewer prior to the interview.”

Findings

The following section reports the findings of the study from document analysis, classroom observations, teachers’ and students’ interviews:

Document Analysis Results

A total of 217 routine lessons and story time texts were reviewed to see how many English texts projected E & P themes. It was also examined how the curriculum document advised the teachers to teach and reinforce such themes from grades 1-5.

The following table reports the consolidated result of the textbooks from Grades 1-5:

Table 1

Percentages of the Routine Lesson and Story Time Texts with E & P Themes

Grade	Time allocation given to routine lessons	% of routine lesson texts with E & P themes	Time allocation given to story time sessions	% of story time texts with E & P themes
1	140 minutes per week	64%	45 minutes per week	15%
2	140 minutes per week	57%	45 minutes per week	10.2%
3	160 minutes per week	60%	40 minutes per week	28%
4	220 minutes per week	50%	30 minutes twice a month	15%
5	240 minutes per week	23%	30 minutes once a week	41%

Findings from observations. The following table reports the findings of observations when integrated cognitive-affective lessons were taught from grades 1-5:

Table 2

Observations of classrooms and Students' Interest in Lessons with E & P Themes

Grade	Texts and Activities	Student Interest during Lessons
1	Almost all the texts and activities used reflected e & p themes.	Students remained active participants in all activities and were seen to be achieving academic targets well with the affective integration in lesson plans.
2	All teachers integrated the affective themes with cognitive targets and conducted the blended lessons well.	They spoke well in groups and discussions, read with eagerness and wrote with concentration.
3		There were hardly any student disruptions observed.
4		They were seen to be helping each other out in groups.
5		They also took turns in responding and respected each other's' point of view.

Results of teachers' interviews. The following outlines the results of the teachers' interviews:

Experience of teaching E & P skills through texts and activities. All teachers reported that they had a wonderful experience teaching E & P skills through texts and activities. They felt that through the integration of E & P themes with regular academic objectives students were able to come up with good ideas, relate issues to real life contexts and find relevance in what they were doing. Some of the remarks of teachers are presented below:

Tr. 3 reported:

“Things were really good, positive and strong because you see sometimes we take children for granted. We don't think that they can go through that level but when we gave them the initiative they really came up with good ideas. I had a very good experience.”

Tr.1 added the same:

“In my case, I found some people who would never think, but this time I was there to involve them...and they came up with something that surprises me as well. There were a few students from whom I was not expecting.”

Tr. 7 remarked;

“At first they were reluctant to share their ideas, feelings and stories with me. Usually girls were more inclined towards being emotional. Once a few students started sharing, all started sharing. And then it became difficult to stop them.”

Teachers also commented on the thought processes that students got involved in and the relevance E & P themes brought to the real life contexts of students.

Tr. 7 continued and appreciated the skill in students and said:

“That’s something very good. They were realizing that what should be done about the major issues in life...that gave them awareness.”

Teachers were thus very happy about the experience of teaching E & P skills through texts and activities.

Students’ academic responses and interest in work through utilization of E & P themes. All teachers verified that the integration of E & P themes in texts and activities brought changes in students’ interest in academic work. They also notified that students enjoyed doing collaborative tasks based on E & P themes, got very involved in work and used language skills reasonably well. Some of the remarks of the teachers are presented below:

Tr. 1 commented on the comparison between a routine lessons she taught and round 2 of teaching and reported that:

“Generally when we come and talk about manners and etiquettes and all, they listen and forget and don’t give an input. Their response is not there. This time they were all involved, creating something or the other.”

Results of students’ interviews. The students’ interview findings also revealed that students found the integrated cognitive-affective English lessons very useful and expressed that they highly enjoyed the experience. All students repeatedly opined that they had learnt to ‘share and care’ from the experience. They also reported that they had fun doing group and pair activities based on E & P

themes. Also, after teaching the integrated cognitive-affective texts, the students demonstrated adequate awareness about E & P themes. They could ascertain E & P themes very well from the texts and referred to texts that enclosed the said themes. They also quoted instances of sharing and caring behaviours embedded in the plot and traits of characters to authenticate their awareness about the themes. It was, therefore, construed that the integration of E & P themes in regular English lessons led to better awareness of E & P concepts.

Discussion

Textbook Analysis

The textbook results showed a lean presence of E & P themes and the curricular focus was also on cognitive skill development even in the presence of the E & P themes in the texts. One of the reasons for the lack of awareness among students from grades 1-5 could be attributed to the gradual reduction of the E & P themes in routine lesson texts. The frequency of E & P themes in texts started decreasing as the grade level increased. However, Cotton (1993) argued that older children were better able to recognize emotive states in other people, more capable of relating to and sharing others' feelings, able to feel empathy for more diverse kinds of people, and more willing to express their empathetic response in generosity toward others. The story time texts, however, did not report the same reduction of themes. Rather the proportion of E & P themes in story time texts from grades 1-5 remained varied.

The study of routine lesson and story time texts and the activities that ensued from them also indicated a highly cognitive influence on the teaching of English texts. The affective domain was not kept in perspective as the texts were selected and as the activities based on texts were developed. Singer cited in Keen (2006) argued that human survival depended on effective functioning in social contexts, and that feeling what others felt, empathizing, contributed to that success. The primary purpose of using texts was academic with the aim to improve English language. The themes of texts, therefore, were not as important as teaching aspects of language. The E & P objectives had a minor presence in comparison to the cognitive targets for respective grade levels.

The analysis also revealed that the curriculum developers who selected texts and developed text related activities did not attempt to integrate the cognitive domain with the affective. This could also be attributed to either a lack of awareness or a deliberate omission to do the same. Kazemek (as cited in White, 2003) argued the same and said, “We are teaching our children and young adults not to care through our acts of commission and omission” (p. 6).

Texts and Activities used and Students’ Interest and Behavior in Classrooms

Almost all the texts and activities, used after the intervention plan was discussed with teachers, reflected E & P themes. All teachers integrated the affective themes with cognitive targets and conducted the blended lessons well. The teachers did not compromise their academic targets to teach E & P objectives. Rather they employed the language skills to make students think about E & P skills. They made the cognitive and affective domains complement each other. Pace (2006) shares the same view that the cognitive-affective approach provides a framework in which both academic and affective information and knowledge can be transmitted and individually interpreted by the students. Bishop, Stotsky and Yokota (as cited in Athanases, Christiano, & Lay, 1995) claimed the same and opined that text selection could enhance the potential of literature to foster empathy.

Some of the activities used by teachers for the purpose were:

- Group discussions on E & P themes with respect to the text or activity
- Sharing of ideas among students
- Creative writing on E & P themes
- Writing dialogues on E & P themes
- Role-plays
- Paragraph writing on E & P themes
- Sentence construction through sharing of ideas
- Presentations on situations depicting help
- Linkages of texts with real life contexts of students
- Addition of E & P adjectives and adverbs to paragraph of a text
- Isolation of E & P traits of textual characters and writing about those traits with textual references.

It was, therefore, observed that teachers utilized all genres of language, i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary and integrated E & P objectives with them.

What was noticeable was the amount of interest taken by students while doing these activities. The students remained active participants in all activities and were seen to be achieving academic targets well with the affective integration in lesson plans. They spoke well in groups and discussions, read with eagerness and wrote with concentration. There were hardly any student disruptions observed. They were seen to be helping each other out in groups. They shared ideas amicably. They also took turns in responding and respected each other's' point of view. It was also observed that students developed awareness about affective skills and specifically talked more and wrote more when social emotional issues were connected to real lives. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) observed that a healthy classroom climate directly contributed to the students' social, emotional and academic outcomes. This was considered a significant achievement which got actualized only through the integration of E & P themes with regular cognitive objectives.

Teachers' Interview Analysis

All teachers opined that the experience of teaching cognitive-affective texts led to better student awareness of the said themes. Students connected the themes to real life situation and quoted incidents from their real lives where they cared about and helped people. One of the teachers remarked in the interview that students knew about feelings but were not accorded the chance in classrooms to talk about them. In her opinion, more time should be spent on the emphasis of these themes as they were important towards building awareness. Teachers' interviews also led to the interpretation that students took better interest in academic work through the integration of E & P themes in the lessons. Sutherland (1986) suggested the same and opined that the ability to enter into the feelings of others was good and likely to produce better conditions for life for all. Teachers reported that slow learners were found better engaged in work. Moreover, students worked with more concentration in pairs and groups, responded well and actively in listening and speaking tasks, worked cohesively and came out with more thoughtful and better expressions while doing writing tasks.

Student Interview Analysis

After cognitive-affective texts were taught to students, most of the students responded at three levels. Some thought that they would share and care for others so that others could do the same to them when the need arose, i.e. a reciprocal purpose. Others wanted the application of E & P skills for a humanitarian purpose, i.e. being empathetic and helpful towards family and friends. Furthermore, some students notified that they wanted to use E & P skills because the act would make Allah happy and that would secure a place for them in heaven, i.e. a spiritual purpose. It was, therefore, interpreted that the students envisioned three main ways in which they would apply the said skills in real life contexts: reciprocal, humanitarian and spiritual. Bernstein, Marx and Bender (2005:40) rightly opined that literary text could “serve as the medium through which students gain insights into the human spirit.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study led to the conclusion that E & P themes were underrepresented in the texts used for the primary years, i.e. grades 1-5. Moreover, there was a clear lack of focus to teach E & P themes through texts and activities. The texts were again used as strong sources for language development. The cognitive-affective link was again found omitted. It was further concluded through observation of cognitive-affective lessons that texts could be effectively used to integrate cognitive-affective targets which resulted in better academic interest among students. This was mutually authenticated by students and teachers in their interviews. Teachers reported that slow learners were found better engaged in work. Moreover, students worked with more concentration in pairs and groups, responded well and actively in listening and speaking tasks, worked cohesively and came out with more thoughtful and better expressions while doing writing tasks. This led to the conclusion that cognitive-affective link could give rise to better instances of academic engagements by students. The interview findings from students also revealed that students found the integrated cognitive-affective English lessons very useful and expressed that they highly enjoyed the experience. All students repeatedly opined that they had learnt to ‘share and care’ from the experience. They also reported that they had fun doing group and pair activities based on E & P themes. Moreover, during interviews when asked questions about social-emotional elements in texts, students demonstrated adequate awareness about the same.

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