EVALUATION OF CURRICULUM OVERLOAD ON STUDENTS LEADING TO ACADEMIC STRESS- A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract :-

UNESCO (2003) discovered overloaded curricula in Asian countries. The majority of Asian countries' curriculums are overburdened. Teachers asserted that their aims were not achieved, and that slow learners would not receive personalized support even if they were unable to grasp complicated ideas due to a lack of time. Primary schools regularly encounter job overload. The study advises that the curriculum be revised in order to reduce work overload. Over-schooling should be thoroughly studied in order to provide children with the education essential for national growth. **Objectives-** Based on this, the present systematic review will- (a) identify sources of academic stress, (b) examine the impact of academic load on students due to curriculum overload, and (c) explore the recommendations of policy makers to handle curriculum overload leading to academic stress. **Method-** Systematic review of secondary data sources was done and collected data was analyzed and converted into charts and conclusions were drawn from it. **Conclusion-** Students have a strong curiosity and hunger for information; to fulfill the students' intrinsic curiosity and thirst for knowledge, one shall open the students' world to improve the students' learning space and time, and to enrich the students' content after school life.

Keywords :- Academic Stress, Academic Load, Curriculum Planning, Curriculum Overload, Academic Overload.

Introduction :-

Education sector has always been under the radar of continuous development with regards to the ever-changing needs of the society with its new demands and roles. To cater to these demands there is a constant need of gaining the required skills, attitudes and knowledge about various aspects ranging from ICT in teaching-learning to education for sustainable development, etc. In order to fulfill these, parents, children and other interest groups along with the teachers put pressure on the administration and governments to respond to these new demands by modifying the existing educational curriculums they currently follow. At the same time, the existing curriculum lacks the capacity to add any new content or modify the existing ones without hampering its quality.

Defining Curriculum Overload

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2010) has defined overload as an inconsistency between capacity of an individual and load. It can further be described as a misproportion between the extent of our mental faculties to stimulate a curriculum. Prevalence of curriculum overload has been reported by a number of researchers in both developed and developing countries including India. Curriculum overload also known as curriculum overcrowding or curriculum expansion (Voogt, Nieveen and Klopping, 2017) indicates the propensity to add new content components in the curriculum as a reaction to new societal insistence without careful consideration of what needs to be taken off. The expansion of curriculum is ever growing and progressive but it comes at the cost of failed efforts to remove previous and unrequired material which further leads to overcrowding or overloading of curriculum over time (Alexander and Flutter, 2009; Kärner et al., 2014; Kuiper, Nieveen and Berkvens, 2013; Voogt, Nieveen and Klopping, 2017; Morgan and Craith, 2015).

According to OECD, curriculum overload is further divided into four types which includes, curriculum expansion, content overload, perceived overload and curriculum imbalance. While curriculum expansion is the adding of new topics without removing the existing literature, content overload refers to the surplus amount of content to be taught and learned with respect to the availability of time as a constraint (Boersma, 2001). A poorly structured curriculum can increase the overloading of content due to lack of appropriate design and coherence. Further, the delivery of the lesson is

affected as the teachers are not able to operate the curriculum and are more likely to misunderstand which results in inadequacy in its usage. Perceived overload on the other hand, refers to the experiencing of overload as stated by teachers and students and curriculum imbalance as the name suggests is the disproportionate concentration given to specific sections of the curriculum without giving due attention to other sections or areas.

Curriculum Development

Curriculum is not just meant for students to learn but also for the school to help the children learn and grow holistically (OECD, 2019; Abiko, 2019). A good curriculum makes sense of the teaching-learning process and enables the students to develop motivation and a purpose in learning in the classroom and also develop the required skills and abilities (Eccles and Midgley, 1989). Also students get a feeling of purpose when the curriculum is in accordance with the existing life circumstances and give them a taste of real life situations. On the other hand, students become stressed when the curriculum they are studying overcrowded leaving them overburdened between competing for the assessment and evaluation exams and multiple lines of assignments.

Academic stress has become a common phenomenon among students, especially in today's highly competitive academic environment. The pressure to perform well in academics, meet parental and social expectations, and secure a good future has led to an increase in academic stress among students at all levels of education. This stress can manifest as anxiety, depression, performance anxiety, burnout, and other mental health issues that can negatively affect students' academic performance and overall well-being.

Academic stressors can be caused by factors such as academic workload, challenging coursework, competition with peers, high GPA expectations, financial worries, inadequate support systems, and lack of effective coping mechanisms. It is important to understand the causes and intensity of academic stress experienced by students, as well as the impact it has on their academic performance and mental health. Certainly, academic and curriculum overload becomes one of the many reasons leading to stress in individuals and the effects are much worse when evaluating academic performance of an individual in the long run.

Academic stress can also lead to anxiety, depression and other sleeping problems & disorders in students (Michaela et al., 2019); also, the series of academic and curriculum overload characterized by constant stress may generate some problems in the students such as sleeping problems, headaches, body pain, fatigue, weight gain, stomach aches, etc (Chraif et al., 2012) which can further affect their physical and mental health. The different characteristics of curriculum overload are regarded as possible stress activators for students keeping in view that stress is any natural or external activator of biological occurrences which affects the body and the state of awareness of students in response to stressors (Yaribeygi et al., 2017). Due to the academic and curriculum overload students somehow manage to complete their educational tasks and are able to progress in terms of their studies but this overload hampers their working capacity in the long run. In turn it leads to decreased capacity of concentration, their skill and magnitude of other tasks also critically declines. Continuous accumulation of overburdening of curriculum impacts the student's abilities and it impacts the working memory which has a direct relation to the cognitive abilities which demands the understanding of the brain's architecture & that of the memory.

This research study aims to examine the prevalence and nature of academic stress experienced by students, the strategies and coping mechanisms used to manage this stress, and the effectiveness of support services and interventions in reducing academic stress. The findings of this study can help inform educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders in developing effective strategies to help students manage academic stress and improve their well-being and academic performance.

Objectives

1. To identify the sources of academic stress.
2. To examine the impact of academic load on students due to curriculum overload.

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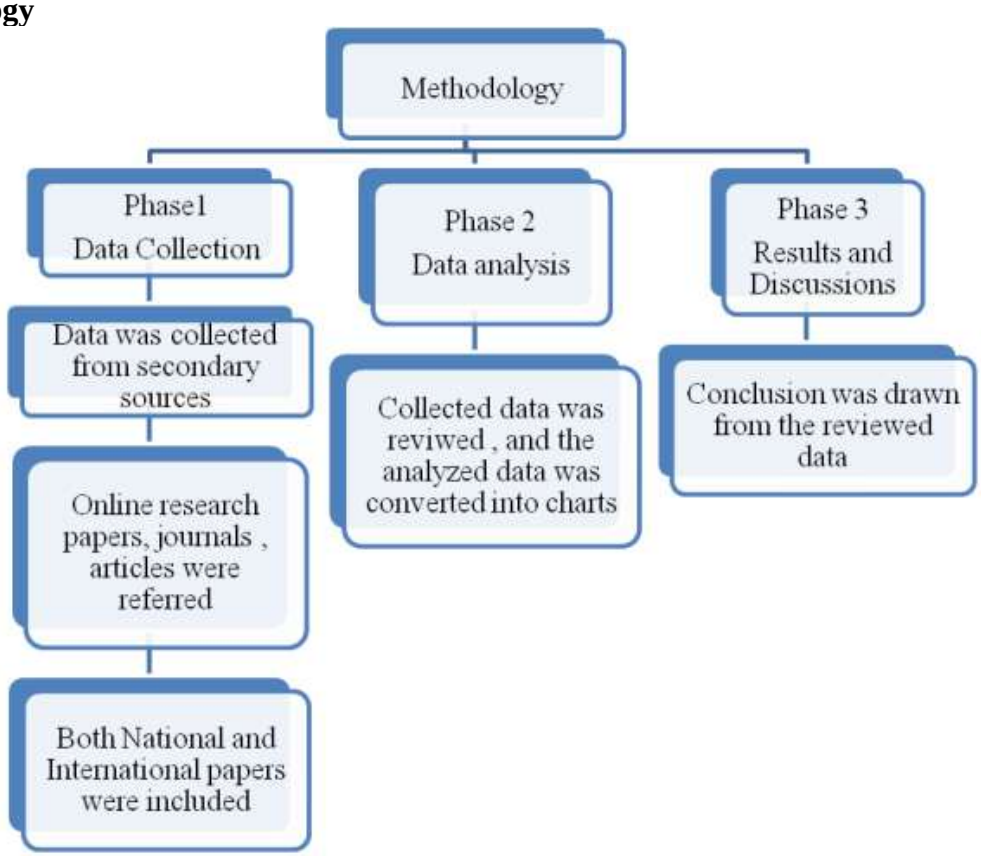
3. To explore the recommendations of policy makers to handle curriculum overload leading to academic stress.

Methodology



Analysis

In India, we follow a very conventional pedagogical approach that burdens students with an overly ambitious curriculum which exceeds what students can really learn and accomplish in the allotted period that obstructs their natural learning process and contributes to expanding learning disparities. Cognitive growth stages are clearly neglected during curriculum design. The curriculum is faster than the students' learning capacity which affects parents and children by involving them with excessive schoolwork. The curriculum load exists in the form of assignments, competitions, content of subject and poor relation with teachers which further leads to academic stress. It also identifies how stress affects academic performance through negative attitude towards school, strain relationship with teacher & parents, failed subjects and lack of confidence in their academic work. The main source of stress for the students is the inadequacy of right support. There is a standard Evaluation procedure followed in India which does not give enough scope to the students to experiment and push the boundaries to excel, academic load had negative consequences on the quality of work produced.

Due to excessive academic overload young students may experience academic burnout and theyface attention-related issues, may have negative effects, including loss of motivation resulting in being denied time to participate in other co-curricular activities. According to ASER 2019, a significant fraction of kids between the ages of 4 and 5 are unable to carry out the cognitive activities that are expected of them. Four out of every five Indian students who enter a grade illiterate depart with no improvement in their reading abilities. They also came to the conclusion that during an academic year, 7 out of 8 students fail to achieve any skill-based development. The resources allotted to "educate" India's millions of students are being utterly wasted in this situation. The students become less creative and more theoretical. A student is given too much information in the name of the curriculum which leads to a curriculum gap resulting in the students not being able to do well in the next levels. Prolonged

stress can lead to physical and emotional disorder resulting in anxiety and depression. Lack of clarity and unavailability of right career counselors lead to directionless goals.

During primary schooling, emphasis should be placed on mentoring and forging close bonds with the kids. At this age, the kid should be taught the fundamentals of living, and it is crucial that the teacher pays close attention to the students' requirements. Mentorship in basic schooling, however, is a factor that is lacking in the current situation. Jean Piaget's cognitive theory suggested that instruction must be customized to each student's developmental stage. The upcoming education policy i.e. NEP 2020 calls for reducing curriculum content to enhance essential learning and critical thinking as well as improving overall pedagogy to improve cognitive development. Also, in order to produce the anticipated instructional goals, a good curriculum must only include the needs that are absolutely important for the society of the learners. Meaningful interactions with their parents, friends, peers, and loved ones is the basic strategy to handle the stress.

Contemporary Models of Education

A comparison of the curricula used in Japan, the United States, and India is provided here in tabular form.

Features	India	USA	Japan
System of Education	5+3+2+2 (5 years, Primary education + 3 years of middle, 2-2 years of secondary and senior secondary school)	5+3+4 as most common system (5 years, primary education, 3 years, mid years and 4 years, high school)	6+3+3 (6 years, primary education, 3 years, mid years and 3 years, high school)
School type	Private + Public schooling	Private + Public schooling	Private (0.01%) + Public schooling
Status	Comes under free and compulsory education	Comes under free and compulsory education	Comes under free and compulsory education
Meals	Depending on school may be provided by school or by parents	Depending on school may be provided by school or by parents	School lunch is an integral part of school life as well as educational activities
Curriculum	At Grades 1 & 2 ● languages ● Maths ● Art of healthy & productive living. At Grades 3 to 5 ● language ● Maths ● Environmental Study ● Art of healthy & productive living ● Traditional Nature ● Emphasize more on core subjects ● Sports and extracurricular activities are optional (do not hold the same importance).	For the Elementary Education the student usually learns: ● Basic arithmetic & sometimes rudimentary algebra in math ● English (such as basic grammar, spelling, and vocabulary). ● Maths ● Social studies subjects ● Science ● Physical development study ● Fine arts ● Reading ● Sports and extracurricular	At Grade 1 & 2 ● Japanese language ● Arithmetic ● Living environment studies ● Music ● Art and Handicrafts ● Physical Education ● Moral Education ● Special activities. At Grade 3 and 4 (subjects in addition to that of Grade 1 and 2) ● Social Studies ● Science ● Period for integrated studies At Grade 5 and 6 (subjects in addition

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		activities hold equal importance as core/main subjects	to Grade 3 and 4) ● Home Economics ● Foreign language activities

(Source: Bhardwaj & Hazarika, 2022)

Discussion & Conclusion

The literature we reviewed focuses on several key areas related to cognitive development in children across different age groups, contemporary education models, quality parameters for effective education delivery, and key stakeholders in curriculum and education effectiveness. The review reveals that primary education is a critical foundation for overall growth and development. However, the conventional pedagogy in India burdens students with an overambitious curriculum, hindering their natural learning process and leaving them less innovative and more theoretical. Additionally, the review highlights that the learning abilities of children depend on their cognitive development and that a child's receptivity to specific skills and teaching/mentoring styles should be considered when designing and delivering curriculum.

The primary curriculum appears to focus too much on abstract knowledge, neglecting the overall personality development of the child. The new education policy seeks to address these issues by reducing curriculum content to enhance essential learning and critical thinking and improving pedagogy to support cognitive development. Furthermore, the review suggests that incorporating activities and teaching strategies that support Piaget's stages of development can have long-lasting positive impacts.

Also, excessive schooling in private primary schools has adverse effects on the cognitive and psychosocial development of pupils. Moreover, the study concludes that the educational attainment of mothers does not significantly affect the perception of the impact of cognitive and psychosocial development on pupils in private primary schools in Awka South Local Government Area.

To cater to the natural curiosity and thirst for knowledge among students, it is crucial to develop their learning environment and enrich their after-school life. However, there must be an objective and rational analysis of the current educational system's heavy workload and its potential harm to students. Feasible measures should be implemented to lift this burden and create a reasonable atmosphere for students. The study reveals that excessive academic pressure results in stress among students, which negatively affects their academic performance. Stress coping strategies such as problem-focused techniques can be useful, and schools should provide adequate support, career guidance, and counseling to help students navigate their goals. Additionally, students should be encouraged to engage in meditation and exercise to cope with stress.

When creating a curriculum, educators often end up incorporating pre-existing learning experiences and materials, which may not necessarily align with the needs of the learners' society. A good curriculum must only include essential learning goals that align with the learners' needs. students with academic demands beyond their capability can result in negative outcomes such as reduced motivation and attention issues. The amount of instructional time devoted to a subject significantly affects students' academic performance and study habits. The burden of an overloaded curriculum falls heavily on teachers, leading to a high teacher-to-student ratio, paperwork overload, and inadequate preparation for lessons. These workloads can compromise the quality of work produced and hinder the ability to provide individualized support to struggling students. For young learners, excessive homework and lack of time for extracurricular activities can lead to academic burnout.

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