

Exploring ESL Teachers' Perceptions About In-Service Training To Teach Single National Curriculum In Pakistan

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of in-service teacher training programmes in Pakistan, particularly in implementing the Single National Curriculum (SNC) 2020 for English. Employing a qualitative research design, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with Primary School Teachers (PSTs) teaching English in government schools of Punjab. As per the findings, the online mode of SNC training is found to be ineffective, with teachers expressing a preference for face-to-face training that involves practical demonstrations. Furthermore, ¹issues such as inadequate planning, lack of learning resources, and disparities between the curriculum and actual classroom conditions were highlighted. ESL teachers also reported challenges linked with the socio-economic background of students and poor infrastructure in schools, particularly in rural areas. The study highlights the need for enhanced teacher training programmes that incorporate practical, hands-on experiences and address context-specific challenges. Recommendations include conducting face-to-face training sessions, providing learning materials, recruiting competent trainers, and improving school infrastructure. The findings underscore the pivotal role of teacher training in the successful implementation of educational innovations, suggesting that ongoing and sustained professional development is necessary to facilitate teachers in applying new curricular practices effectively.

Key words: Curriculum reforms, ELT, In-service teacher training, Single National Curriculum (SNC), Educational innovation implementation.

1. Introduction

The introduction of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) 2020 in Pakistan marks a significant milestone in the country's efforts to standardize education and promote national cohesion (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2020). As a key component of this initiative, English language instruction plays a vital role in shaping students' academic success and future opportunities (Raza & Coombe, 2022). English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers are, therefore, at the forefront of implementing the SNC, and their professional development is crucial for effective curriculum delivery.

In-service training is widely recognized as a critical factor in enhancing teachers' capacity to implement new curricula and pedagogies (Ali Alfaidi & Elhassan, 2020). However, the

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effectiveness of in-service training programs for ESL teachers in Pakistan remains a concern (Nazar et al., 2020). This study aims to explore ESL teachers' perceptions about in-service training programs, examining their experiences, challenges, and needs in relation to teaching the SNC.

The SNC aims to promote a uniform education system, addressing the socio-economic disparities and regional disparities in Pakistan (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2020). The new curriculum emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, requiring teachers to adopt innovative pedagogical approaches (Chughtai, 2022). ESL teachers, in particular, face the challenge of developing students' language proficiency while integrating language instruction with subject content (Raza & Coombe, 2022).

Research has shown that teachers' beliefs and perceptions significantly influence their instructional practices and attitudes towards curriculum change (Wang et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding ESL teachers' perceptions about in-service training is essential for developing effective professional development programs that address their needs and concerns.

Pakistan has made significant efforts to enhance the quality of education through teacher training initiatives (Siddiqui et al., 2021). However, the impact of these programs on ESL teachers' capacity to teach the SNC remains unexplored. This study seeks to address this knowledge gap by investigating ESL teachers' perceptions about in-service training programs, examining the following research questions:

1. What are ESL teachers' experiences with in-service training programs in relation to teaching the SNC?
2. What are ESL teachers' perceived needs in terms of in-service training to effectively teach the SNC?

2. Literature Review

Teachers are one of the main participants in an educational change process as they are the implementers of innovation at a micro-level. Hence, communicating innovation to the practicing teachers is the first part of the innovation diffusion process as 'it is the teachers who are responsible for passing on the changes through their teaching to their students' (Fullan, 1993, p.4). The pivotal role of teachers in the implementation of innovation has also been stressed by Brown (1980) who argues that teachers' contribution to and active engagement with innovation is essential because, without their willingness and cooperation, change is not possible. Similarly, it is the teachers who bring about change in the lives of their students, ones for the betterment of whose future the process of change is initiated. Likewise, Chang et.al. (2010) identify teachers as a key to the effective implementation of educational innovations. Artificial intelligence helps English language learning and teacher's feedback and learning strategies impact (Javaid et al., 2024). Second language learners have trouble in vocabulary development (Ikramullah et al., 2023). Expressive writing may aid in better responses (Javaid & Mahmood, 2023).

Teachers' role as stakeholders in the educational change process has been described in various ways, for example, key players (Kirkgoz, 2008b), implementers (Wang, 2008), decision-makers, and main stakeholders (Wang & Cheng, 2008) and frontline change agents (Bolitho, 2012). Likewise, Karavas-Doukas (1995) argues that

“in the long and arduous journey of implementing an innovation the teachers' role and contribution is essential because teachers are the instruments of change” (p. 55).

Hence, the successful implementation of educational innovations is not possible without teachers' willingness, preparedness and ongoing commitment. Mindful teachers influence well (Javaid et al., 2023). Moreover, teachers' essential role in curriculum reform cannot be overlooked for its effective implementation (Wang & Cheng, 2008).

Evidently, teachers have a large part of the responsibility when it comes to implementing intended educational change through their teaching. Nonetheless, their ability to actively engage in reform and acquire the intended outcomes is very much dependent upon the provision of adequate resources and support. Therefore, for the successful implementation of reform initiatives, teachers require support in acquiring knowledge and pedagogical skills relevant to the new curriculum and their evolving roles. Such requisite knowledge and skills can be attained through systematic training and professional development interventions. Without the provision of ample support, it is unlikely that the teachers embrace and adapt to these changes. A similar argument is put forward by Kennedy (1996),

“Teachers can be a powerful positive force for change but only if they are given the resources and support which will enable them to carry out implementation effectively, otherwise the change is more likely to cause stress and disaffection with the change remaining as a pilot with certain schools rather than creating a renewed national system.” (p. 87)

In the light of the above-mentioned arguments and views, it can be maintained that the efficacy of educational innovation hinges upon the receptiveness, willingness and preparedness of the teachers to implement new educational policy. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that teacher quality has a substantial impact on student outcomes and therefore, enhancing teacher competence has become an integral part of global efforts to elevate educational quality (Borg, 2022). Providing with best policies and working environment can help in engaging them and eventually performance (Khan & Javaid, 2023) and wellbeing (Javaid et al., 2023) improves. Remote work options may enhance engagement (Fatima et al., 2024). Conflicts should be resolved as well for better exposure (Ali et al., 2024). Media sensitisation do impact on perceptions as well (Iqbal et al., 2024). Social media enhances academic motivation of English language learners (Ramzan et al., 2023). Javaid et al (2023) found in another study language skills are linked to emotions. Leaders can persuade well with their words (Ramzan et al., 2023). Responsible leadership makes working environment friendly and engaging (Jabeen et al., 2024). Therefore, it is pertinent that I discuss the theoretical underpinning of learning activities (education, training and professional development) to prepare teachers, particularly, English language teachers in general and to accept and practice innovations in their classrooms to achieve the desired outcomes being expected by the policymakers.

2.1. Preparing Teachers to Implement Educational Innovations

“Teacher education still has the honor of being simultaneously the worst problem and the best solution in education.” (Fullan 1993, p.105)

As argued by Karavas Doukas (2013), ongoing and systematic teacher education can bring about intended change in teaching practice. The review of literature, on educational reforms in general as well as in ELE, highlights the crucial role of teacher training and professional development in the success or failure of the change implementation. The provision of innovation-specific training is an essential part of the innovation management phase. Thus, as reported in various studies, Waters & Vilches (2007), Kirkgoz (2007), Orafi & Borg (2009), and Karavas Doukas (2013), Padwad & Dixit (2018), Karim (2020) lack of teacher training and professional support is one of the major reasons behind the failure or limited implementation of curriculum or pedagogical reforms. Classroom environment if enjoyable

produces excellent outcome (Ramzan et al., 2023). While the pivotal significance of continuous professional development has been underscored, innovations continue to be introduced across various global contexts through one-off large-scale training sessions. During these sessions, teachers are provided with theoretical knowledge about novel approaches or concepts with an expectation that the teachers will implement newly learned ideas in their classrooms. This is one of the common ways educational reforms are managed (Karavas Doukas, 2013). This practice is found to be ineffective because, as argued by Brindley and Hood (1990, p. 245),

“if teachers are being asked to change some aspect of their classroom behaviour they need professional development activities which enable them at the same time to use innovation and to work through the implications of the change with colleagues. This requires an ongoing program in which teachers commit themselves to classroom action followed by reflection and theory as necessary.”

2.2. INSET and educational reforms

Traditionally, INSET has been considered an essential part of educational reforms to modify classroom practices and therefore the success of these reforms is contingent upon the effective planning and delivery of INSET programmes. In this perspective, professional in-service development for teachers is deemed as a way to improve schools and enhance standards (Macaro & Mutton, 2002). According to Chang et. al. (2010), INSET programmes aim at:

- aiding the introduction of innovations in curricula, material and teaching and learning methods,
- preparing teachers for new roles,
- providing courses for teachers to refresh disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge,
- in some context, to elevating teachers with inadequate qualifications and
- training novice teachers in their initial year of teaching.

However, the underlying and ultimate aim of all the INSET activities is the same, enhancement of students' learning through teachers' professional development. Contrary to this expectation, the research shows that evaluating students' performance alone to assess the effectiveness of the INSET programme is not fruitful because student achievement measures do not necessarily uncover the changes in teaching practices resulting from the impact of in-service teacher development programme (Boyle, Lamprianou & Boyle, 2005). However, Chang et. al. (2010) contends that an effective and systematic evaluation of large-scale INSET is required to establish a link between teachers' professional development through these programmes and increased student performance. In this regard, as per the review of the literature, a common practice is to evaluate a small-scale programme that is comprised of one-off courses (Lamb, 1996; Moon & Boullon, 1997).

Hayes (2019) identifies the transmissive nature of CPD as one of the reasons for the ineffective implementation of educational reforms because this model of teacher training ‘results in primarily surface adoption by teachers of the rhetoric of reform whilst changes in actual classroom practice may be minimal’. The underlying cause of this failure to exert a positive impact on practice is the exclusion of teachers’ participation in the planning and development of CPD programmes (Gemedá et al. 2014).

In this regard, a study by Dastaghian & Scull (2021) underscores the significance of collaborative approaches, alternative forms of CPD, to teacher education as part of professional development against the backdrop of effective implementation of English language teaching reforms in Iran. They investigated the impact of collaborative professional learning of three junior high school teachers on their teaching practices. The data collected through teacher observations and interviews reveal that 'teachers' collaboration and engagement, and the time devoted to reviewing and reflection on their teaching' (p.1), help them make changes in their teaching that are in line with the reform agenda.

2.3. Innovation-specific Training

Preparing teachers through training workshops and conferences is a part of the innovation implementation process. This is usually achieved by designing and conducting large-scale training programmes –INSET or professional development- which are based on traditional top-down approaches to teacher training (Hayes, 2000; Lamb, 1995; McDevitt, 1998; Ono & Ferreira, 2010; Wedell, 2005). However, such professional training is usually conducted by external providers who are unaware of the realities of 'teachers' classroom experiences' (Nezakat-Alhossanini & Ketab, 2013).

Various studies report failed or ineffective implementation of educational innovations on account of a lack of teachers' awareness about the proposed reforms because of inappropriate or ineffective professional training (Waters & Vilches:2007, Kirkgoz:2007, Orafi & Borg:2009, and Karavas-Doukas:2013). Hence, the successful implementation of change in classrooms hinges upon effective teacher training. Similarly, in many cases, teachers are expected to shift from conventional ways of teaching to the use of communicative pedagogies without equipping them with the essential skills required to implement these changes in their classrooms. In cases where efforts are being made to align teachers' practices with new pedagogies, it is quite common to see teachers attending 'government-directed teacher training programs that are informed by the national policies and educational goals' (Dastaghian & Scull, 2021). As a result, they feel less confident and resort to using the old ways of teaching. A similar concern has been shared by Kennedy (1996) when she says that:

'to cope with change puts teachers under strain where the changes involved present a major shift in beliefs and practice and can threaten successful implementation unless necessary logistic and professional conditions are met'. (p.78)

Karavas Doukas (2013, p.36) identifies a list of features if present in innovation-specific training, will lead to the failure or ineffectiveness of producing sustainable change:

- focus is on quick-fix solutions
- participation is optional
- training is not related to the individual needs of schools and teachers
- training does not take into account the contingencies of classrooms
- training takes place exclusively outside schools with no follow-up in school
- training fails to take into account the characteristics of change and how teachers change.

In case the new methodology is much different from the existing one, teachers need to learn new skills and knowledge through training and this is why INSET makes an integral part of the curriculum implementation process (Carless, 1997). The aim of such training is usually to make

changes in the beliefs and attitudes of the teachers and The purpose of the training is usually to bring about changes in beliefs and attitudes, in teachers' classroom practices — by transforming their knowledge into classroom practice — (Avalos, 2011) and in students' learning outcomes (Guskey, 1986). Training and professional support are crucial to establishing and improving necessary skills and knowledge, especially in the case of unqualified and underqualified teachers (Morris, 1985; Suzuki, 2011).

3. Research Methodology

i. Data Collection

The study employed a qualitative research design wherein the data was collected through the semi-structured interviews conducted with the English teachers. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), define an interview as an activity in which “knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee” (p. 4) whereas the interview conducted in qualitative research is described as “attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world” (p. 3). The interviews were semi-structured and provided the flexibility to probe beyond the predefined topics and questions, enabling a deeper understanding of any relevant information that emerged. (Mackey & Gass, 2005; Richards, 2009). A semi-structured interview enables the interviewee more liberty to share their perspective, reducing the potential influence of the interviewer. Hence, as recommended by many researchers (Denscombe, 2017; Dörnyei, 2007; Richards, 2009) semi-structured interview based on an interview schedule was used for this study. The main focus and the sub-themes of the interview questions were guided by the research objective of the study.

ii. Geographical context and participants of the study

The study was conducted in the Bahawalpur district in Punjab (one of the provinces in Pakistan) which has a population of approximately 11 million people (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The primary reason for conducting the study in one region is the qualitative nature of the study, which requires an investigation of a particular phenomenon in depth and keeping the study focused on a particular context, engaging a limited number of participants (Dörnyei, 2007; Mackey & Gass, 2005). Using a purposeful sampling technique, the teachers working in the government schools at primary, elementary and secondary levels in Bahawalpur district made the sample population for the current study. The purposeful sampling technique is commonly used in qualitative research. This means that the researcher selects individuals and sites for study because ‘they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study’ (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selection of schools for this study was not guided by particular criteria, except for the willingness of school administrations to allow their teachers to participate in the interviews. Hence, the schools varied in their location; some were situated in the main city and others on the outskirts, which represented semi-rural conditions. It is significant to note that the study did not aim to compare the perceptions of teachers from urban and rural areas, therefore, the geographic variation was not intentional. Hence, convenience sampling was used for the final selection of the schools. The demographic information of the primary school teachers who participated in the study is given in the table below:

Table 1 Demographic information of the interviewees

No.	Teaching level	Gender	Job Scale	Qualification	Teaching experience
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					(including ELT)
1.	Primary	Male	Primary school teacher (PST)	Master in English Literature and B.Ed.	7 years
2.	Primary	Female	Primary school teacher (PST)	Master in Physics and B.Ed	7 years
3.	Primary	Female ² (8 teachers)	Primary school teacher (PST)	M.phil. in Linguistics and B.Ed	7 years

As shown in Table 1, the total number of teachers was 10. After getting approval from the school administration, 7 interviews were conducted on the schools' premises whereas three teachers were interviewed online on the Zoom app. At the beginning of the interview, the participant teachers were informed about the main purpose of the study, the expected time needed to complete the interview, their right to withdraw from the study and the confidentiality regarding the use of the results from the interview. Each interview was 20-30 minutes long. The interviews were conducted in a conversational style. The teachers were given the choice to give interviews in English or Urdu (The national language of Pakistan). Only two out of 10 teachers chose Urdu. Giving this sort of flexibility to the respondents enhanced both the quality and quantity of the data (Mackey & Gass, 2005). All the interviews were audio recorded.

iii. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis technique was used to analyse the qualitative data. The first stage of data analysis was comprised of two main tasks; organizing the data and developing familiarity with it. Firstly, the recorded data was transcribed using 'Turboscribe' a software powered by Artificial intelligence (AI) for speech-to-text transcription. The interviews conducted in Urdu language were translated into English before transcription. The second stage started with the coding process or code-labelling; labelling the identified data extracts using appropriate codes (Dörnyei, 2007). Both, the deductive (top-down) approach and inductive (bottom-up) approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) were used while analyzing and coding the data. The computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software package, MAXQDA, was used for coding. A list of the codes and sub-codes and the themes that emerged from the interview data were compiled. The final stage of data analysis involved three major tasks; identifying themes and patterns in the data, making interpretations and then drawing conclusions. Hence, the patterns that emerged in the interview data were identified.

4. Findings

The findings present the perceptions of Primary School Teachers (PSTs) teaching English in government schools. The thematic analysis of qualitative data obtained through the semi-structured interviews with the PSTs reveals an interplay of several themes regarding the teacher training they received particularly in the context of implementing the Single National Curriculum (SNC) 2020 in primary schools. In addition, the key themes that emerged mainly address the issues related to the training and practical challenges encountered by the PSTs while

² These primary school teachers were recruited in the same year (2017) and had same educational and professional qualifications

teaching the SNC-based textbooks. The situation is found to be worse in the government schools in rural areas. It is also to be noted that the SNC training was conducted online due to the COVID-19 restrictions on physical classes or face-to-face training sessions.

i. Issues with the online mode

The most frequent comment received from the respondents regarding the SNC training was its inefficacy because of its online mode. Seven out of ten PSTs expressed their dissatisfaction with the training in imparting the information about the new curriculum. Consequently, multiple issues were found to affect teachers' learning. Firstly, as reported by PST 1, the majority of teachers did not take it seriously because it was online training:

“I know many teachers joined the online session and muted their microphones. They did not pay any attention to the content. They were there just for the attendance. Some of them even went to sleep after joining the session.”

Similarly, PST 4 considered online mode to be the major reason behind the teachers' lack of motivation to learn from the training:

“They [teachers] did not learn many things from it [training] because it was online.”

A similar sentiment resonated in the response of PST 2 when she shared:

“I got the training from the district education department but it was online and I didn't get much knowledge on how to teach the single national curriculum”

ii. Preference for face-to-face training

In contrast, all N=10 PSTs expressed their preference for face-to-face training and thought they would have learned better if it was on-site, physical training. PST 7 commented:

“In my view, if SNC was to be implemented, they should have arranged face-to-face training sessions.”

The teachers particularly emphasized the significance of face-to-face training over online sessions, for demonstrating teaching methodologies and strategies to deal with real classroom challenges. They also mentioned the advantages of the face-to-face training session, including better engagement with the learning resources, interaction with the trainer, a sense of responsibility to learn while being physically present during the session and in case of ambiguity, on-the-spot clarification, or additional explanation by the resource person. PST 4 expressed a preference for in-person training too:

“I think they did not conduct the online trainings. There should be training in our schools so that teachers can learn in their [trainers'] presence.”

Closely related to the advocacy of face-to-face training is the need for practical demonstration and direct interaction with the master trainer:

“Master Trainers should have demonstrated how to conduct activities in classroom. How to teach concepts given in the textbooks.”

iii. Planning and delivery of the training

Another significant issue reported by the PSTs related to the orientation/training of the Single National Curriculum is ineffective planning. It seemed the training was conducted without preparation. The curriculum was introduced to the teachers without sufficient prior knowledge

and materials to understand and implement it effectively. PST 1 highlighted this issue by stating:

“We were introduced to the SNC in an online session after the launch of the curriculum. But I think it was too early to know about the curriculum at that time because we had no idea about it. The things that were shown were practically not yet implemented by us.”

In addition, the teachers were not provided with the curriculum or textbooks before the training thereby hindering their ability to grasp the content and prepare for its implementation. PST 1 extended her remark:

“It is very important for teachers to see [curriculum] that before the training, when the training was done, we didn't have the books, so we didn't know the course outline inside the books or the level of the material inside the books.”

Moreover, teachers expressed their concerns about teaching the SNC textbooks without any teacher guides or any other teacher support material. It is to be noted that the training was presented online and the only resource for teachers' learning was the PowerPoint slides. The trainers were also inexperienced and relied on reading the content from the slides and documents displayed on the screen. PST 2 indicated a similar problem:

When I personally attended the training, there were many trainers who were fulfilling the formalities. They were talking in an ordinary way. They did not give any valuable information because they themselves were not acquainted with the content they presented.

iv. Inadequate learning

The teachers lamented their inadequate learning experience by attending the online training of the SNC. They perceived the session to be a waste of time as they learned nothing significant to teach the new curriculum. PST 2 described the online session as ineffective:

“I attended [SNC]training but that was not as beneficial as it should have been. It was just a formality and I didn't get much in that training. It didn't help me as much as it should.”

PST 5 also shared a similar experience when she commented:

They [trainers] just showed us documents. They didn't guide us about how to teach the new curriculum to our students. So, it was not helpful.

In light of the issues reported and discussed above, there seem to be two major reasons behind the lack of learning on the part of teachers. Firstly, the training was conducted online and therefore teachers lacked the motivation to engage with the training content. Moreover, the format of the training was not interactive, henceforth teachers were not required to interact with the trainers either. Secondly, teachers were not provided with learning resources (handouts, booklets, etc.) besides the slides. As a result, they remained passive during the sessions and could not develop interest in the training.

v. The disparity between the curriculum, training and the realities

While discussing the SNC-specific training, the teachers provided insight into the challenges they are facing while teaching it. 50% of PSTs indicated a gap between the curriculum and the teaching-learning context. It is to be noted that the context-specific challenges have been shared by the PSTs (N=5) teaching in the government schools which are located in the outskirts of the Bahawalpur city. These areas can be considered semi-rural and therefore may have

infrastructure similar to the rural areas. The first concern expressed by the teachers is the government's inability to consider the actual classroom environment, availability of learning resources for students, schools' infrastructure, students' linguistic and socio-economic background and teachers' expertise. Hence, the teachers find themselves in an exigent situation while they teach the SNC-based textbooks. The issue is highlighted in the statement of PST 1:

“The authorities [Ministry of Education] have not considered the ground realities. There are many problems in primary schools. Someone who is teaching the English language in primary schools, especially in rural areas, faces many challenges. Teachers are trying so hard to teach the children.”

Similarly, PST 1, 3,4 and 5 found the textbook content to be quite overwhelming for the learners of primary schools. The PSTs teaching in the schools in urban areas echoed the same concern. As shared by the teachers, there is a sudden shift to a communicative curriculum and the textbooks developed according to the SNC are too complex and demanding. The children they teach lack the linguistic proficiency to grasp the content of the textbook. One of the PSTs even acknowledged that the communicative tasks and activities are quite challenging for teachers too. She mentioned how she consults the dictionary to know the meaning of the vocabulary given in the text and the practice exercises:

“Believe me, I use a dictionary to find simple words to explain the concepts given in the book. I also use websites to find easy examples to teach grammar. The examples given in the books are very difficult. If teachers find the book difficult to teach, how can children learn these tough concepts? We can't achieve the targets[learning objectives].”

Referring to the unnecessary inclusion of extended practice, PST 2 remarked:

“As far as [the] single national curriculum is concerned, I felt that the books have too many details. What you can teach in a few minutes or in a few lines is covered in multiple pages in the books. It is a lengthy syllabus. If you are teaching seven or eight pages or ten pages to give a single concept, then students get bored. It is tiresome.”

Another pressing issue is the dearth of facilities and poor infrastructure of government schools. The teachers working in government schools in rural areas identified several problems related to the low socio-economic background of the students and the lack of facilities in the schools. PST 1 and 4 lamented that the children they teach are too poor to buy uniforms or notebooks. Some of them come barefoot to the school. The teacher sometimes buys them notebooks and other stationery. In addition, there is a lack of support from the parents as a majority are uneducated. Above all, the school authorities do not provide support to the teacher with regard to instructional and or supplementary materials such as charts and worksheets. So, this is also a burden on teachers' pockets and not all teachers can afford it. What is embedded in the remarks is the teachers' inability to meet the ambitious expectations of the SNC in the current realities of the classrooms, schools and the social background of the students. The comment by PST 1 presents a precise description of the teachers' dilemma discussed above:

“In SNC training we were not told about the place we teach, the children we teach and how to deal with the problems we have. They did not tell us that facilities will not be available in schools and you will not be provided with any helping material but you will still have to teach. They should guide us about how to arrange low-cost [learning] materials to teach the children. They should teach us how to help our students who do not have notebooks. But such things are not mentioned in the training. They [trainers]

show the document on screen. They just share the slides and read from them. The training [content] has nothing to do with the realities in schools.”

However, the PSTs did mention the better conditions of the secondary and higher secondary schools. In their opinion, the government pays more attention to the secondary schools as compared to the primary schools.

vi. Suggestions for improvement

As shared by the teachers, several measures can be taken by the concerned authorities to facilitate the implementation of the SNC and the achievement of its objectives. A particular emphasis is laid on enhancing the quality of teacher training programme to equip teachers with the pedagogical knowledge and skills to teach the revised curriculum productively. Here is a brief description of the suggestions put forward by the respondents:

- Enhancing the quality of the teacher training programme by focusing on its timing, content and mode.
- Conducting face-to-face training sessions in the proximity of the schools to increase teachers' participation.
- Designing interactive training sessions to maximize the participants' engagement and focus and to address their queries synchronously.
- Development and provision of learning materials such as teacher guides and handouts to facilitate teachers' learning.
- Consideration of the diversity of teaching-learning context in the planning and development of the national curriculum
- Recruiting and training competent trainers who ensure the achievement of training objectives by using diverse strategies
- Improving the infrastructure of schools and the provision of area-specific (such as rural or urban) support to the teachers to implement the new curriculum

5. Discussion

The process of introducing the new educational policy plays a crucial role in its successful uptake. One of the fundamental phases of this process is familiarizing teachers, the agent of change with the educational reforms and the expected outcomes. There are different terms used in the relevant literature referring to this process as ‘diffusion’ ‘communication’ and ‘dissemination’ of educational innovations. This is achieved through many professionals such as orientation sessions, conferences, teacher training, short courses and published materials (teacher guides, infographics, introduction sections in the textbooks, etc.). An all-inclusive term encompassing the above-mentioned professional activities can be referred to as ‘Innovation-specific training and I use this term in this study for the same purpose.

Teachers' understanding of the curriculum reforms is essential because ultimately, they are the ones who implement the policy at the micro-level; in the classrooms. Hence, innovation-specific training is an integral part of macro-level policy and planning. The present study examined the pivotal phase of curricular innovation by assessing the extent to which innovation-specific training equipped English teachers with pedagogical knowledge and skills to teach Single National Curriculum (2020). The findings of the interviews with the English teachers present a picture shown in many other studies of limited implementation of

communicative-based curricular reforms. Karim (2020) in his doctoral study identified a lack of innovation-specific training as one of the major reasons behind the limited implementation of the national curriculum for English (2006) in the secondary schools of Punjab, Pakistan. Teachers were found to be unfamiliar with the pedagogical practices stipulated in the curriculum on account of lack of training. The significance of familiarizing teachers with the features of innovations is highlighted by Carless(1999) who states that teachers' thorough understanding of the philosophy and pedagogical practices of the proposed reforms is essential for the successful implementation of the innovation. However, the primary school teachers in the study shared that the online training session to introduce the SNC did not help them understand and implement the new curriculum. A similar issue is reported in the study by Orafi & Borg (2009) who share the accounts of three secondary school teachers implementing CLT-based curriculum in Libyan schools. The teachers were found to have a limited understanding of the curriculum because they had limited training when the curriculum was introduced. Waters & Vilches (2008) also found teachers' lack of thorough understanding of the proposed reforms in The Philippines Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) prevented them from implementing the BEC approach.

Another closely linked issue is how the curricular reforms are communicated to the teachers. As reported in the findings of interviews with English teachers at the primary level, the Single National Curriculum (2020) was introduced to them through online sessions conducted by the master trainers. In teachers' opinion, the session failed to impart significant knowledge and skills to understand and teach the new curriculum due to several reasons such as inexperienced trainers, the online mode, the lack of engaging and interactive content of the training, absence of practical strategies to demonstrate the application of pedagogical practices stipulated in the curriculum and teachers' readiness, willingness and motivation. The ineffective dissemination of curricular innovation is reported in many studies on ELT reforms across the world. The study by Water & Vilches (2008) identifies inadequate teacher orientation as one of the reasons behind the significant failure in implementing the BEC at the classroom level. Moreover, the study also resonates with the findings of the current study in terms of the use of the cascade model which is 'transmissive' rather than 'reinterpretative' (Hayes, 2000; Borg, 2022) hence, explaining the teachers' limited understanding of the philosophy and pedagogical principles of the SNC (2020). Similarly, Karavas-Doukas (1998) identifies the inefficacy of the innovation-specific training offered as 'one-off workshops and conferences in which the participation was optional, as a major factor behind the unsuccessful implementation of EFL reforms in Greece. In the same vein, Kirkgöz (2008) finds insufficient teacher training negatively affecting the teachers' implementation of the Communicative Oriented Curriculum (COC) initiative in the context of a major curriculum innovation in teaching English to young learners in Turkish state schools. The studies by Mukherjee (2018) and Tran (2018) depict similar dilemmas with regard to the ELT reforms in India and Vietnam respectively.

The provision of teachers' support material, such as teachers' guides to understand the features, theoretical underpinning and pedagogical practices of the curricular reforms, is part of the process of training teachers for the effective implementation of the new curriculum. However, the teachers interviewed in this study lament the absence of support materials that could help them to comprehend the SNC. They were not even provided with the textbooks before, during and immediately after the SNC-related online training to familiarize themselves with its content before they start teaching in the classroom. As a result, they could not develop clarity about the changes introduced in the new curriculum and the effective instructional strategies to teach new textbooks. The lack of or limited teachers' support materials or learning resources is also reported in studies like Water & Vilches (2008), Kirkgöz (2008), Tran (2018)

The crucial role of innovation-specific training in the complex process of implementing ELT reforms is underscored in the studies reporting the positive impact of well-planned teacher training on successful implementation. One such study by Padwad & Dixit (2018) shares how an English teacher in Maharashtra, India, made sense of the new textbook by attending teacher training which enabled him to have clearer ideas of what changes were made and how he could handle them in the classroom. Similarly, many other studies report the role of impactful teacher training in supporting successful curriculum change: Lee (2018), Vilches (2018) and Karavas (2014).

6. Pedagogical Implications

The catalytic role of teacher training in innovation implementation is highlighted in many studies: Karim (2020), Orafi & Borg (2009), Karavas-Doukas (2013), Karavas (2014), Padwad & Dixit (2018), Li (2018). The successful implementation of innovations relies not only on teachers' theoretical understanding of the innovations but also needs an equal understanding of the application of theoretical principles in the classroom (Carless, 2001; Wedell, 2009). However, the findings of the current study reveal that English teachers lack a clear understanding of innovation features and are unfamiliar with the pedagogical principles stipulated in the SNC (2020) underscore critical pedagogical implications for innovation-specific training. The teachers who participated in the study found the training to be ineffective because it was conducted online and followed a transmission model focusing on theoretical aspects only. Moreover, there were no follow-up sessions to address the context-specific queries of the teachers. The success of pedagogical innovation depends on teacher training and 'its contextualization to local needs and constraints' (Karava, 2014, p.250)

One of the major pedagogical implications is the need for training programmes to incorporate practical, hands-on experiences based on the theoretical principles of the curriculum. As reported in many studies (Karim, 2020; Karavas Doukas, 2013; Tran 2018; Orafi & Borg, 2009) one-off training sessions are inadequate to foster an in-depth understanding of new curricular innovations. Therefore, ongoing and sustained professional development is necessary for reinforcing learning and supporting teachers as they implement new practices in their classrooms.

The study also highlights the need for the development and provision of learning materials, including teacher guides and handouts, which are critical for facilitating teachers' professional growth and enhancing their instructional capabilities. These resources serve as foundational tools that guide teachers in implementing instructional strategies effectively. In addition, it is also essential to acknowledge the diversity of teaching and learning contexts when planning and developing a national curriculum, making sure that the educational framework is inclusive and adaptable to varied educational environments. Based on the teachers' feedback, recruiting and training competent trainers is equally important, as they play a crucial role in achieving training objectives by communicating the features of curriculum change and demonstrating practical ways to employ new pedagogical practices in the classrooms. Furthermore, improving school infrastructure and providing targeted support, especially in rural or urban areas, are important steps to empower teachers in effectively delivering the curriculum. These components collectively underscore the significance of a holistic approach in educational planning and development, emphasizing the need for resources, inclusivity, expertise, and contextual support.

7. Conclusion

The paper reports the perceptions of English language teachers about the impact of in-service innovation-specific training in preparing teachers to adeptly implement the national curriculum for English (2020) and in developing their pedagogical knowledge and skills more broadly.

Despite the pivotal role of English in the country's sociolinguistic and socioeconomic contexts, the study identifies significant gaps in teacher training and curriculum implementation. The findings indicate that online training sessions were largely ineffective, with teachers expressing a strong preference for face-to-face training that offers practical, hands-on experiences. Additionally, issues such as inadequate planning, lack of learning resources, and the disparities between the curriculum and the realities of classroom environments, particularly in rural areas, were highlighted. The study emphasizes the need 'to improve teacher training programmes to ensure they are contextually relevant and practically oriented. Recommendations include enhancing the quality and delivery of training sessions, providing comprehensive learning materials, and improving school infrastructure. The research also highlights the importance of ongoing professional development to support teachers in effectively implementing new curricular innovations. In order to achieve the broader goals of ELE in Pakistan, it is essential to address these issues. Eventually, the successful implementation of educational reforms relies heavily on equipping teachers with the necessary skills and resources to translate policy into practice effectively.

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