

English Language Curriculum Implementation in Non-Native Settings: the Case of Pakistan

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Abstract

The implementation of national curricula of English language in non-native settings is commonly frustrated by various challenges and thus national academic and communicative competence targets remain unachieved. With such consciousness, this study was carried out to assess the rate of implementation of the English Language National Curriculum of Pakistan 2006 and identify the challenges facing the teachers. For gathering the required information, a questionnaire and an achievement test were employed by the researchers. The English Textbook for grade 6, developed in line with the curriculum, was taken as a focused area of the curriculum for research. It was found that the achievement of the curriculum implementation amounted to one-tenth of the required level. For addressing this failure, the steps like changing teachers' attitude towards methodology of teaching, amendment of examination demands, provision of effective teachers' training, etc., have been suggested with this view that these changes can occur only in an environment generated by strategic initiatives like establishing academic teaching communities, and learning organizations in the institutions equipped with digital spaces where teachers can share their problems, solutions, and thus be competent and competitive.

Keywords: Curriculum goals, curriculum implementation, textbook, teachers' attitudes, teachers' training, strategic initiatives.

Introduction

The progress of a country depends a lot upon the information and the communicative power of its citizens. Reinforcing this Chinese point of view Dello-Iacovo (2009) terms such citizens 'high quality' persons. When these citizens are seen from the Western point of view, their characteristics are self-expression and creativity. In the era of globalization and paradigm of communicative competence, this consciousness has gone even more intense and the goal to achieve it more cherished. This consciousness of leveraging the skills of citizens has brought into focus the reformation of education policies and curricula which according to Lie (2007) furnish the context and specific expectation that mediate students learning and achievement for ensuring a sustainable future. Gorozidis and Papaioannou (2014), drawing attention to current worldwide innovations and reformation specifically, say that countries are

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making attempts to improve education through switching from traditional pedagogies to student centered approaches i.e. cooperative, project-based learning, etc. Al-Jardani (2012) says that countries all over the world are trying to upgrade their curricula either through their own curriculum officers or different publishers. In both the cases the need to evaluate the curricula is being attended to so that methodology, the content and other curriculum features can become more substantial and updated. In the context of English language learning, Wedell (2003) reports that since 1990s for the development of communicative competence through the medium of English, proficiency in English has become a highly aspired goal throughout the non-English speaking world. Keeping in view the instrumental benefits that proficiency in English brings, the countries have reformed their English language curricula to improve language skills of their school leavers.

Considering the trend briefed above, the government of Pakistan reformulated her national curriculum from grade I to 12 in 2006 which came to be known as the National Curriculum of Pakistan 2006. Keeping in view the vital role that English is playing at global and local level communication, the developers of this curriculum have laid special emphasis on the teaching and learning of English language use. In this respect, determining the features of curriculum, the Education Policy of Pakistan 2009 in its section 6.2 prescribes: “Curriculum development shall be objective driven and outcome based. It shall focus on learning outcomes rather than content.” The Curriculum 2006 has been enforced in the form of the textbooks from grade I to X. All this indicates that the National Curriculum of Pakistan 2006 per se is a well-developed document. However, the fruit of a curriculum could only be achieved through its successful implementation.

Concepts and Issues related to Curriculum Implementation

The curriculum, textbook and teacher are generally accepted as three main pillars of any education system. Of course, the role of examination system cannot be neglected. For bringing about required change in a society, above mentioned levers are required to be reformed and updated and at times manipulated.

Implementation of Curriculum

Curriculum implementation is inherently a difficult task. Corresponding to this position, Altinyelken (2010) says that mostly policies are well framed and curricula well-designed and carry enviable aims. However, to realize their aims is not frequently possible. Currently, a lot is being written on this issue and acknowledged as well that policy makers should not simply frame or give policy aims but they should also give plan for the implementation stage of the reforms. This is necessary because policy aims and their translation into reality are interdependent. However, in the case of national curriculum of Pakistan, implementation aspect has not been attended to fully. In this respect Khalid (2007) in his review of basic points and policy recommendations contained in “the White Paper on the Education in Pakistan” highlights serious gaps in

curriculum reform and implementation. She emphasizes that some arrangement should have been made for proper evaluation through the provision of a review after every five years and these arrangements should also have constitutional cover so that the individuals, following their whims, may not make arbitrary changes.

Necessity of Accepting Changes in Teaching

Currently, paradigm of classroom learning has shifted from teacher-centeredness to the learner-centeredness. In other words, now active learning classrooms are considered the basic need for education (Betts & Liow, 1993). Traditional teaching methods are not beneficial for tactile learning because for such learning students require firsthand experience and manipulation of learning materials (Kolb, 1984). Another drawback of traditional classroom is that it is not possible for teachers to transfer knowledge to the students who are in the classroom but unengaged and uninvolved (Domin 2007). Therefore, for meaningful learning to take place, learners require to experience an event. Hull (1999) noted rightly that “the majority of students in our schools are unable to make connections between what they are learning and how that knowledge will be used”. If, for the provision of these needs, teaching approaches and practices are changed, the teachers should accept them willingly.

Strategic Initiatives for Invigorating the Teachers and their Institutions

On the front of curriculum implementation, the non-native teachers of English are generally found intuitive, lethargic, and averse to innovations. On the other hand educational institutions are not able to provide environment as well as leadership for enabling their teachers to be capable and competitive. This gap can be filled only through some strategic initiatives which have already been suggested by experts. One of such initiatives i.e., the establishment of academic teaching communities in institutions has been proposed by Laurillard (2008). She says that learning and teaching should be turned into research activities through problematizing them as it is done in academic research and thus discoveries can become possible. In the same line Bell, et al. (2017) say that keeping in view the role of the trainees, training context, and learning that occurs in the field of practice, theory-driven training research in institutions is necessary. Further, Kirwan (2016) high lights the crucial importance of capable people, for the success of some venture, whose capabilities can be promoted through learning and development initiatives. From all this, it can be said that through this initiative the institutions’ and teachers’ knowledge and understanding related to curriculum implementation will be enhanced and the state of inertia will vanish. The concept of another strategic initiative i.e. the establishment of learning organization comes from Senge (1990 in Khasawneh 2011). According to Senge, the learning organization is such a platform where people continuously remain engaged for maturing their thinking patterns, expanding capacity for the creation of their desired results, enjoy an environment where collective aspirations are fulfilled, and they learn how to learning together.

Strategic Approaches for Success in Curriculum Implementation

A number of strategic approaches can also be followed for the achievement of the required targets related to curriculum implementation. One of these approaches is learning orientation of teachers and managers. Khedhaouria and Jamal (2015) say that team members' learning orientation plays a critical role in the success of knowledge related activities, creative climate, and helps increase knowledge reuse with the help of group knowledge sourcing and repositories. Cirella, et al. (2016) found that the organizational learning mechanisms i.e., cognitive, structural, and procedural mechanisms add to the creative climate. Another approach is enhancing motivation through providing sense of purpose. Black and Venture (2017), highlighting the significance of the sense of purpose provided by an organization for its members, say that the sense of purpose can be provided only when the culture in an organization is people centered. Albrecht, et al. (2015) provides guidance on how to facilitate engagement of employees that can produce positive results. Still another approach is cultivation of flexibility and adaptation. Khasawneh (2011) says that actually, in the present day competitive world, ability to adapt is very important for survival. Therefore, learning new skills, accepting new ideas and embracing ongoing change are highly necessary. Jundt, et al. (2015) emphasizing the importance of adaptive performance, say that employees can succeed if they have capacity to accept alteration in their tasks. One more approach is enhancing capability of teachers and their organizations. According to Mallen, et al. (2016) opting for an organic organizational structure is not basic as far as organizational performance is concerned. The basic element is the learning capability of the organization. All these approaches are very vital and viable and if followed competently, can prove as a game changer.

A Conceptual Framework for Curriculum Implementation

From the review of the strategic concepts given above, a framework can be developed for the reorientation, resiliency, flexibility and capability of teachers that can result in the successful implementation of curriculum. First, there should be academic teaching communities in educational institutions. The teachers as members of these communities will research and generate, share and enhance knowledge related to the curriculum implementation issues. Further, these communities can work as learning organizations where teachers can remain continuously busy in gathering, sharing, analyzing, constructing, disseminating, and reposing knowledge with the help of digital spaces. These initiatives will generate collective aspirations; provide necessary orientation, readiness for accepting new ideas, motivation through purposeful engagement and adaptation for the teachers, creative climate, and organic organizational structure.

The Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was to investigate the challenges facing curriculum implementation and to assess how much success has been achieved in implementing the

National Curriculum of Pakistan 2006. In the light of this aim, related concepts and conceptual framework, following research questions were framed.

Study Questions

1. What are the common challenges that are facing the implementation of the curriculum?
2. To what extent do the teachers implement the curriculum in their actual classrooms?
3. How can the teachers' intuitive, non-resilient and disowning approach to curriculum implementation be changed to a proactive one?

Methodology

For answering the research questions, first survey method and later a conceptual framework were used. For gathering the required information, a questionnaire and an achievement test were employed by the researchers. The responses of teachers regarding curriculum implementation were gleaned through the questionnaire part one and that of students through part two. The sampled students were given an achievement test also to assess the success of the teachers' effort related to the implementation of the curriculum. The test was based on Students Learning Outcomes (SLOs) indicated in the Textbook (TB). For the purpose of the validity of the questionnaire, its copies were distributed among five university teachers of the education department and in the light of their opinion a number of items were modified in terms of their language and prompts. The reliability of the questionnaire was ascertained through its piloting to 10 teachers and 20 students and coefficient of reliability was found 0.781. As far as the test is concerned it was constructed using mostly the exercises and parts of the textbook concerned. Therefore, it was considered valid and reliable.

An important thing about the framework is that it is based on cross-disciplinary approach because the studies that were examined for the purpose of developing the framework belonged to human resource development discipline.

Informants

The population for this research consisted of the 96 Elementary School Teachers (EST) who taught English to grade 6 and the students of grade 6 in the public-sector schools of Pakistan. For the purpose of gathering data, forty eight public-sector Elementary Schools of Bahawalpur district were sampled. Twenty four of them were rural and twenty four urban. Then from rural and urban categories half of the schools were for girls and others for boys. Sampled teachers and students belonged to rural and urban schools in even number of district Bahawalpur. On the whole, the researchers gathered information from 96 Elementary School Teachers (ESTs), male and female teachers who were equal in number. The number of students who completed the questionnaire was 190. These 190 students were selected randomly from the groups that

were administered the test. As far as the test was concerned it was administered to 48 groups available in the sampled schools.

Data Collection

In order to determine the implementation level of the Curriculum 2006, twelve elements of the curriculum implementation were selected for data collection: seven general areas (questionnaire) and five specific areas (test). The general areas included: giving instructions; using English as medium of instruction; achievement of the SLOs specified in the TB; teaching through the activities and strategies incorporated in the textbook; preparation of the written lesson plans; following the instructions and guidelines for the teachers detailed in the textbook; using the Teacher's Guide; and teachers' familiarity with the framework of the Curriculum 2006. The specific areas included five competencies specified by the Curriculum 2006 and observed in the TB. These were: vocabulary teaching using thesaurus, dictionary, synonyms, antonyms, etc.; reading and thinking skills; writing skills; oral communication; and grammatical and structural aspects of the language. The data collected through the two-part questionnaire have been presented in the Table 1.

Table 1
Broader areas of curriculum implementation

Areas	Questionnaire for 96 Teachers results %	Questionnaire for 190 Students results %	Mean
Use of English in the classroom as medium of instruction.	17	07	12
Effort for the achievement of the SLOs.	17	13	15
Employing the activities and strategies given in the textbook.	24	10	17
Preparation of the written L.P.	02	00	01
Following the guidelines, given in the T.B, for the teacher.	09	04	6.5
Use of teacher guide.	03	00	03
Familiarity with the frame work of curriculum.	06	00	06
Total	11.10 %	3.50%	8.64

Table 1 indicates that the level of the activities and strategies the teachers employed was the highest one. The levels of the teachers input to achieve SLOs and the use of English as a medium of instruction were second from top. Following this the levels of guidelines given in the textbook and familiarity with the curriculum framework were towards the lower edge of implementation whereas the preparation and use of lesson plan and use of the teacher guide were the lowest ones in their level.

Table 2

Outcome-areas of curriculum implementation

Skills	Students test results %
Vocabulary knowledge	3.31
Reading and thinking skill	10.77
Writing skill	4.19
Oral communication skill	2.15
Grammar and structure	9.83
Total	6.50%

Table 2 demonstrates that the area of grammar and structure skills was, though not good one, the 2nd highest in the level of implementation. Next to this area, the areas of reading and thinking skills and writing skills were present at middle level. On the other side, vocabulary knowledge and oral communication skills were the lowest in level.

Data Analysis

Results of General Areas

Teachers' use of English as medium of instruction: Very few teachers used English in the classroom whereas the dominant majority of teachers used Urdu or local languages for communication in the classrooms. Most of them justified them by saying that their learners weren't able to understand English language. Hence, they avoided the use of English language in the classrooms. However, a few accepted that they themselves weren't fluent in English and felt shy to speak it in front of the learners.

Achievement of SLOs: Roughly one sixth of teachers tried to achieve SLOs whereas others were teaching in traditional style which aimed at making students cram selected pieces of texts for qualifying their examinations. The reason was, as some teachers indicated, that the teacher was all in all in his/her class. No one ever reviewed his/her teaching work. Further, SLOs based teaching and learning were quite new concepts in the Pakistani system of education and the teachers did not understand SLO's worth and thus considered this aspect of teaching futile and fruitless.

The use of techniques, and activities provided in the textbook: It was found that only 17% of the teachers were using the techniques and activities provided in the TB to some extent. Most of the teachers facilitated their students to attempt and understand a few selected problems/questions from the TB and skipped the rest. Actually, these techniques and activities were alien to the teachers therefore they could not employ them on account of their deficient training and capability. In addition, according to most of the teachers, examination system in Pakistan promotes rote learning which frustrated the use of these techniques and activities.

Preparation and use of lesson plan: Only 1% teachers prepared lesson plans. The teachers informed the researchers that there was no follow up of the training nor were the teachers convinced of the utility of the lesson plans. They argued that they did not prepare lesson plans because they were so busy in other tasks assigned by the provincial government. There was a problem of fossilization as well. For example some teachers considered themselves so much experienced in teaching that they needed not prepare LPs.

Following the guidelines provided in the textbook: Every unit of the textbook provided the teacher with guidelines, illustrating what he/she was supposed to do. It was found that only 6.5% teachers tried to follow these guidelines either wholly or partially. Most of the teachers thought that to follow these guidelines and techniques was time consuming; they had to finish their syllabus within the prescribed time; and make their students pass the public examination. Actually most of them, as the head teachers disclosed, were not competent enough to follow them.

The use of teacher's guide: Teacher's Guide was available at most of the schools. Only 3% teachers claimed to use it partially. Most of the teachers felt it difficult to understand and use it as it was written in English. Some did not consider it worthwhile, as in their opinion, it was irrelevant to the syllabus and TB. A few complained that their school environment was not conducive to their effort to follow the techniques and activities mentioned in the TB.

The Teachers' familiarity with the framework of the curriculum: Only 6% teachers were familiar with the framework of the curriculum to some extent. The discussion with the teachers reflected that the teachers considered curriculum to be something irrelevant, having nothing to do with the teacher and his teaching. They considered the curriculum to be the guidelines for the syllabus designer and TB developer.

Results of Specific Areas

Vocabulary: Most of the learners could not perform well on the test items related to the competency of vocabulary building because these items were focused to the use of dictionary, thesaurus, synonyms and antonyms and did not deal with words-meanings directly. Therefore, the students could score only 3.31% in the written test. The learners' responses in the questionnaire reflected that there was not a single teacher in the sampled teachers who was making the students use dictionary, thesaurus, synonyms, antonyms, etc., for the purpose of teaching vocabulary.

Reading and Thinking Skills: Reading and thinking skills were an important competency which included conceptual understanding and analysis of the text, distinguishing facts from opinions, implied meanings, figurative language, describing places and people, analyzing, chronological order, effects and story elements, etc. The implementation and achievement in this competency was also very low. The reason

might be that the teachers were not either familiar with or competent in these aspects of teaching and learning.

Writing Skills: These skills included, paragraph writing, describing objects and past events, story writing using elements of story, informal letters, making predictions about future, locating places in the school, essay writing, etc. The overall performance in the writing skills was also found very low. Most of the teachers were making their learners copy from the textbook or help books, especially as homework and making them cram the material from here and there and put it in the answers to examination questions for getting good grades. As far as the activities and the techniques, which were focused in the TB to be adopted by the teachers, were totally neglected.

Oral Communication: The competency of oral communication at this level included: ask and answer simple questions of personal relevance, show and accept apology, get personal needs met, give and follow instructions, expressing reasons for likes and dislikes, expressing viewpoints/agree/disagree politely etc. The achievement in this area was almost zero. The reason was that the most of the teachers were either not competent in oral communication or they considered these activities not useful for the purpose of examinations.

Grammar and Structure: The achievement in the area of grammar and structure was 23.27%, comparatively highest score among all the competencies tested. But still the level of achievement was low, perhaps because the teacher laid emphasis on the learning of definitions of grammatical terms and rules, instead of their practical use in context. Although the TB provides contextualized exercises on particular grammatical items to encourage the students to apply their knowledge of grammar rules which was based on understanding and using the principles of pronunciation, grammar, punctuation and syntax for developing accuracy in their spoken and written communication, yet the teachers focused on memorization of the rules of grammar to make the learners pass the examinations.

Discussion

In the light of the results of the study, an answer to the first research question is that the teachers of Pakistan have negative attitude towards the provisions of the curriculum. They think that the teacher's guide, techniques and activities, SLOs, footnotes and the long exercises provided in the prescribed textbook are the wastage of time. Consequently, they remain stuck to traditional methodology of teaching language simply for making their students obtain high percentage of marks in the annual examinations.

In answer to the second research question, it can be said that level of the curriculum implementation is roughly one tenth of the target. One cause of this failure may be the inappropriate methodology used by the teachers. Another cause may be that the teachers have not owned this curriculum. The teachers working in the system

generally do not accept the newly introduced changes because of their beliefs and views about the curriculum (El-Okdaf, 2005; Wang, (2006). The reason of this lack of ownership may be that the curriculum 2006 is top-down one in whose designing and development the teachers were neither taken on board in real sense nor were they allowed to use bottom-up approach in any part of the curriculum implementation. The Education Policy of Pakistan 2009 confirms that teachers, administrators, educationists, curriculum experts and students were consulted during the process of curriculum development. These people were those who could be accessed conveniently. It means common teachers who are responsible for implementing curriculum were not consulted meaningfully. They were simply asked to give feedback regarding the existing materials. The negative impact of this paradigm is that textbook becomes the centre of the teaching learning activity. This is what Song and Sardegna (2014) highlight when they refer to language instruction in secondary schools in Korea. They say that teachers strictly adhere to the language textbook and no opportunity of extensive reading is furnished for the students. Hasan (2007) expresses the same complaint when he says that in implementing curriculum, in Pakistan, the textbook is at the center instead of the teacher and, on account of this, assessments are based on textbook instead of curriculum (section 6.2.1, p.18).

A few more seeds of this failure are also there in the constitution of the curriculum because it is an outcome-based curriculum and lacks humanistic and content aspect. On account of this students do not take the responsibility of their learning. Mashori (2003) says when a curriculum is humanistic; it emphasizes thinking, feeling, and action and thus relates content to the needs and lives of the learners. When students' self is at the centre, they carry integrative motivation and take the responsibility of learning. However, this element of self is absent on account of the 2006 curriculum's outcome-based nature. Synchronizing with the position of Mahhori, Superfine (2002) stresses the learning that takes place through investigations, creativity or problem solving can help learners to feel that their learning is purposeful and hence becomes the cause of their involvement which is not possible when the curriculum is outcome-based instead of being content based. Another consequence of an outcome-based curriculum, according to Silver, et al. (n.d., 11) is that teachers dominate instructional discourse in the classroom for the purpose of transmitting knowledge and skills through didactic way and students are supposed to receive knowledge and skills through passive listening. Taking this position more forward, Dello-Iacovo (2009) says that thus examination comes in between formal education and practical life and as a result the students depend upon rote learning while totally neglecting the cultivation of initiative and responsibility.

In order to bring about the desired change in the teachers, training regarding the Curriculum 2006 was imparted to the teachers. According to the Pakistan Educational Statistics 2008-2009 (Academy of Educational Planning and Management, 2009),

above 90 percent of teachers working in public-sector schools in Pakistan were formally trained. However, the impact of teacher training was not reflected by the students' performance. During informal discussions with the teachers it was revealed that the training imparted to the teachers was not effective; most of the trainers were incompetent. The trainees also showed least interest in this training as they thought it to be useless and irrelevant as well. In addition to the languishing pedagogical skills, the results reveal the feebleness of teachers' language literacy which results in teachers' failure in their pursuit of curriculum implementation. Highlighting the importance of comprehensive language literacy, Svalberg (2007) says that language literacy should not only incorporate knowledge of grammar but teachers need a broader range of explicit knowledge and sensitivities.

It is apparent from the results and the discussion that the teachers, who are responsible for implementing curriculum, are mostly intuitive and have negative attitude towards the provisions of curriculum implementation. The examination system comes in the way of the teachers if and when they think of implementing curriculum productively. The training of the teachers is also deficient therefore they are not well prepared to utilize the new curricular materials and to follow quality pedagogical practice e.g., contextualizing teaching/learning process. At this point, research question three can be answered positing that successful curriculum implementation will never be possible unless the mindset of the teacher is changed; further, until the teachers are provided with the environment in which they can follow the principles of collaboration, self-learning, knowledge sharing and knowledge construction. This all can be done through the strategic platforms mentioned in the conceptual frame work give above.

Suggestions for Further Research

As it has been found that teachers are intuitive, non-resilient and mostly not competent, and marks in the examination are the sole focus of the teachers and students, it is suggested that research should be carried out how a culture of competitiveness and ownership among teachers can be generated. Further, research should also be made to bring curriculum aims into focus in place of textbook and examination

Conclusion

The results of the study do not paint a good picture. A number of factors have played the negative role in this failure. These factors are the teachers' negative attitude towards the textbooks and new methodology of teaching. Further, examination system hinders the implementation of the curriculum. Next, the teachers' training level is also not sustaining. On the whole, it can be said that the required level of implementation can be achieved through a wholesome change in all the factors that contribute to the implementation. For example, teachers are required to be competent and competitive which can be achieved through strategic platforms like teachers academic communities and learning organizations in the institutions; examinations should be there to measure both the achievement and performance of the students; and a very effective and vigilant

training system as well as on-going evaluation and periodical review arrangement should be in place. Still another aspect of the required change is the introduction of some periodical mandatory literacy tests for the teachers on the pattern of the mandatory Literacy Test for Primary Teachers introduced in UK in 2001.

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