

دراسة استكشافية للعوامل المؤثرة في تدريس منهج القرن الواحد والعشرين

للمغة الإنجليزية في بعض المدارس الابتدائية في ليبيا

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ملخص البحث :

في عام 2018 م ، تم تقديم منهج جديد للمغة الإنجليزية يسمى القرن الحادي والعشرين في ليبيا. وضعت وزارة التربية والتعليم خطة لتدريب المعلمين على تطبيق هذا المنهج . حضر حوالي 100 مدرسا من مناطق مختلفة في ليبيا في العديد من ورش عمل تدريب للمعلمين في تونس التي قدمتها Garnet Education ، وبعد ذلك ، عاد المتدربون إلى ليبيا لتدريب معلمي مدارس اللغة الإنجليزية على استخدام الاستراتيجيات والتقنيات التي تتوافق مع أهداف المنهج. وقد تم استخدام منهج البحث النوعي لجمع البيانات في هذه الدراسة عن طريق مقابلات شبه منظمة مع عشرة معلمين لغة إنجليزية. أظهرت النتائج أن معظم المعلمين الذين شاركوا في الدراسة واجهوا تحديات في تدريس منهج اللغة الإنجليزية الجديد حيث تضمنت هذه التحديات، عدم توفر الوسائل التعليمية، عدد الطلبة الكبير داخل الفصل، وعدم دعم الأساليب الحديثة المتبعة في تدريس المنهج الجديد من قبل إدارات المدارس والمفتشين.

Exploring the Factors Impacting the Implementation of the 21st-Century English Language Curriculum in some Primary Schools in Libya

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1. Introduction

In 2018, a new English language curriculum called the 21st Century was introduced in Libya. The Ministry of Education developed a plan for training teachers to implement this curriculum. About 100 teachers from different regions in Libya attended several teacher trainer workshops in Tunisia offered by Garnet Education. Thereafter, the trainees went back to Libya to train English school teachers on using strategies and techniques that are congruent with the objectives of the new curriculum.

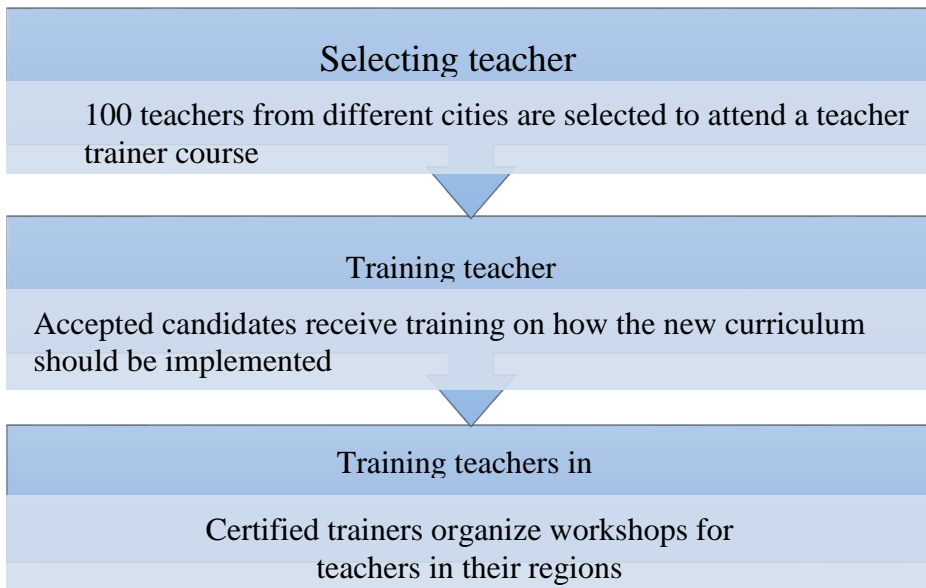




Figure 1: The process of implementing the 21st curriculum

This paper attempts to explore the type of challenges teacher trainees encountered in teaching the 21st curriculum. It aims to answer the following overarching research question:

- What challenges do EFL Libyan primary school teachers encounter in implementing the 21st century English language curriculum?

In addition, this paper seeks to:

- Provide insights for policymakers at the Ministry of Education about the implementation of the new English language curriculum.
- Suggest solutions to overcome the challenges that might have been encountered by teachers in teaching the new curriculum.

In the section that follows, a brief overview of the relevant studies and literature is presented.

Literature Review

This section sheds light on the common factors that influence educational change. First, it discusses how the term curriculum is conceptualized by different scholars. Then, it highlights the different types of factors that affect the process of introducing a new curriculum to educational institutions.

2.1 Defining curriculum

Due to its complex nature, a range of scholars provided different definitions for the term curriculum. According to Tanner (1980) curriculum refers to

“the planned and guided learning experiences and intended outcomes, formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experiences under the auspices of the school, for the

learners' continuous and wilful growth in personal social competence" (p.13).

Pratt (1980) gives a more comprehensive definition of curriculum describing it as a written account that outlines the study outcomes and objectives, the tasks used to achieve these objectives, and the techniques used to assess the knowledge acquired from these tasks.

In the current study, the term "curriculum" is used to refer to the content knowledge in the textbooks, the teaching aids used in the classroom, and the pedagogical techniques employed by teachers.

2.2 Factors influencing curriculum implementation

Michael Fullan who is a world authority in educational reform has identified several factors that are linked with implementing and educational change. In this section, three of these factors are briefly discussed.

Characteristics of change

Characteristics of change describe the features of the innovation which is introduced to the learning context. According to Fullan (2016), it consists of four elements namely, need, clarity, complexity and practicality. Need indicates the importance of educational change. Need becomes an issue when there is a disagreement between stakeholders on the necessity of introducing an innovation. One of the key players whose approval of the educational change need is teachers. Datnow and Castellano (2000) argue that all teachers have equal rights to vote for a new change and the voting mechanism must be genuine and based on evidence.

Another characteristic is clarity which means the objectives of the innovation should be clear and transparent for teachers and other stakeholders. Lack of clarity results in confusion on how to implement the educational reform. Hence, implementing educational reform should be clearly defined and clarified. As Fullan and Pomfret, (1975) put it, implementation refers to "a dynamic construct, which refers to





the process of continuous specification and redefinition of the essential characteristics of an innovation by developers and users during the planning and implementation phases of the planned change process” (p. 71). On the other hand, the new change can be complex and poses challenges for an institution to implement successfully. A change is complex when it targets several aspects in an institution. However, complexity might make reform more comprehensive and effective since more goals have been established (Arnott, 1994).

The last characteristic Fullan highlights is the practicality of the innovation. Guskey (1986) stresses that for the new change to be practical teachers need to be able to apply the new ideas in their teaching practices. This means that support and resources should be provided to make a new educational change feasible.

Local factors

Fullan (2007) defines local factors as, “the social conditions of change; the organization or setting in which people work; the planned and unplanned events and activities that influence whether or not given change attempts will be productive” (p. 93). Local factors include the districts, communities, schools, and teachers.

Districts are responsible for keeping records that manifest how successfully were the previous innovations implemented (Fullan, 2016). These records can be used to inform stakeholders to plan more effective reforms in the future. Schools also play a vital role in the facilitation of implementing innovation. For instance, school principals can support professional development programs by creating collaborative environments for teachers and participating in such programs (Donahoe, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

Another significant local factor is the teacher. As the implementers of new change, teachers should be carefully considered when introducing educational innovations. According to Fullan (2016), “educational change depends on what teachers do and think” (p. 97). Equipping teachers with new skills and knowledge contributes substantially to

implementing a new educational change effectively (Ucan, 2016; Evans, 2011). Research has shown that teachers and school principals should maintain healthy relationships for an educational change to be implemented effectively (Jenkins, 2020).

2.2.1 External factors

External factors are related to governmental bodies where policies are developed. For example, the Ministry of Education and its affiliated departments responsible for training and curriculum planning. The role of policymakers at the Ministry of Education goes beyond the initiation of new change. They also have the responsibility of monitoring its implementation by the agencies effectively (Fullan and Pomfret, 1975). Moreover, lack of funding for schools and teachers might result in failure of curriculum implementation.

After highlighting the influencing factors on educational change, the next section will describe the methodology used to conduct the study.

2. Methodology

Methodology is defined by Wellington & Szczerbinski (2007, p. 33) as “the activity or business of choosing, reflecting upon, evaluating and justifying the methods you use”. Methodology is defined in The Dictionary of Key Social Science Research Concepts as “a set of rules and procedures to guide research and against which its claims can be evaluated”. The main concern of this section is to describe the research methodology adopted in this paper.

Having generally presented the overarching research question of this study, now we will attempt to clarify how this question was addressed.

3.1. Qualitative research paradigm

The history of social sciences research is full of attempts to understand the world; this curiosity has led to the emergence of different paradigms. The way qualitative researchers carry out research depends on certain factors like “their beliefs about the nature of the social world



and what can be known about it (ontology), and the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired (epistemology)” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). Epistemological assumptions entail questions about the sources of knowledge, the ways in which knowledge can be acquired and communicated to others and the relationship between the knower and the known. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1989). Therefore, epistemological assumptions have significant effects on the sorts of data-collecting choices (methods) and the general view of the research process (methodology) (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, pp. 19-20).

We view knowledge as socially constructed and the means of inquiry are “individual perspectives or constructions of reality”. Moreover, we concur that there is no one true meaning of an event, but there is the event that can be experienced and interpreted by different people, hence people have different interpretations of a single event. As the main concern of this study is to explore the challenges Libyan primary EFL teachers encountered in implementing the 21st Century curriculum. Therefore, adopting a qualitative approach to address the relevant research question seems to be the most suitable paradigm to guide this research. There are several reasons for adopting a qualitative research approach in this study. Firstly, as indicated by Miles & Huberman (1994, p. 10) that qualitative data provide “thick descriptions” for the phenomenon under investigation in its real context. Secondly, the collection of participants’ views about a social phenomenon is the most valuable way to generate credibility and gain trustworthiness.

As far as the positionality of the researchers is concerned, the two researchers are considered insiders since they were involved in training school teachers in their regions. Insider researchers have the advantage of understanding the research topic more deeply. In other words, when researchers investigate an issue they are part of, they can gain more insights about it since they have already established a good relationship with the participants (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

In conclusion, in this part, we have tried to give an overview of the research methodology that was adopted in this study and attempted to

provide some of the reasons behind the selection of this kind of methodology. The next section describes the data collection procedures used to gather the relevant data.

3.2. Data collection procedures

In the previous part, we have discussed the proposed overall research methodology design. The main focus of this part is to describe the method used to collect the relevant data.

3.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

According to Wellington (2000, p. 71) “Interviewing allows a researcher to investigate and prompt things that we cannot observe. We can probe interviewees’ thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings and perspectives. Similarly, Smith (1995) highlights that the use of semi-structured interviews enables researchers to “gain a detailed picture of a respondent’s beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of, a particular topic” (p. 9). Thus, semi-structured were conducted to collect participants’ views regarding the new curriculum. 10 primary school teachers were interviewed. The research took place at a training centre where teachers attended an in-service training course under the supervision of the researchers.

3.2.2. Data Analysis

It is one of the commonest approaches to qualitative data analysis is undertaking a search for themes in transcripts or field notes. Consequently, the researchers of this paper realized that using thematic analysis is one of the possible ways to analyse the relevant data. Therefore, the framework provided by Braun & Clarke (2006) guided the analysis process of transcripts. Braun & Clarke (2006) provided six stages with a brief description of each phase, as a result, the researchers found it applicable to generate themes from the transcripts. The following section describes the different themes that were constructed in the data.



3. Results and Discussion

Three main challenges were reported by the participants namely, lack of support from school principals and inspectors, large classroom sizes, and lack of resources.

4.1 Lack of school support

School support here entails assistance from principals and inspectors. One participant reported that the inspector who observed his classes was dissatisfied with how the curriculum was implemented. Commenting on this issue he pointed out:

“we weren’t able to teach the new curriculum using modern techniques since the inspector was unfamiliar with those techniques. For example, the inspector asked me to teach the alphabet through writing without using phonics which he seemed unfamiliar with”.

Support from school administration has been reported to play a key role in making curriculum implementation successful. Fullan (1991) and Donahoe (1993) emphasized the role of school principals in facilitating educational change.

Furthermore, some teachers reported that they received criticism from their inspectors for using new techniques to implement the new curriculum. Inconsistencies between teachers’ perceptions and inspectors’ views have been reported in some previous local studies. Shihiba (2011) found that inspectors in some schools provided no support for EFL teachers in Libya to teach the communicative English curriculum.

One reason why a lack of harmony between teachers and inspectors occurs is that inspectors still have little or no awareness of how the new curriculum should be implemented. That is, they still employ evaluation strategies that are inconsistent with the 21st-century curriculum. Another important factor that could have led to this

situation is that inspectors opposed the new change and kept their old perceptions which are incongruent with the new curriculum. The training sessions organized by the Ministry of Education mostly targeted teachers and excluded other important players such as inspectors and school principals who are key to making new educational changes. Although the Ministry of Education trained some inspectors in some regions, not all of them were involved. As a result, some inspectors continued to use their old knowledge and techniques in assessing teachers.

The findings above are consistent with that of Fullan (2015) who emphasized that clarity is a significant factor for introducing educational change effectively. That is, the innovation should be clarified to everyone involved in the learning process including inspectors and school principals (see 2.2.1).

4.2 Lack of resources

The 21st-century curriculum requires the use of teaching aids and materials to be implemented successfully. The data of this study indicate that several schools failed to provide teachers with the essential resources that are needed to teach the new curriculum. According to one of the participants,

“I wasn’t able to do the listing activities because there was no audio player in the school where I work”.

Moreover, another participant mentioned that,
“power cuts posed challenges for me to use technology in the classroom”.

The new curriculum emphasizes interactive learning and the lack of such basic resources would probably negatively impact the learning process. The results of the study suggest that some schools were not supportive in terms of creating a positive learning environment for teachers (see 2.2.2). For instance, most participants reported encountering problems concerning classroom layout and lack of



resources. Consequently, they struggled to apply new techniques that they have acquired from the training sessions.

4.3 Class size

Large class size is a common issue in public schools in Libya. Teachers could struggle with applying certain techniques in such learning contexts. Commenting on how class size impacted their teaching, one participant reported:

“I couldn’t use the new techniques that are congruent with the new curriculum because the classroom was over-crowded”.

What makes the situation of large class size worse is the fact that some schools still use immovable seats. As a result, teachers could struggle to organize activities that need changing the classroom layout. Al-dabbus (2008) who researched using games in teaching English also found that classroom layouts in some schools were not appropriate to implement game-based activities. On the other hand, Marx et al., (1999) found that classrooms that used the semi-circle layout facilitated interaction between students in the classroom.

The issue of large classrooms is consistent with the characteristic of practicality (see 2.2.1). In other words, for a new change to be applied properly, schools should provide suitable environments and resources for their teachers (see 2.2.2).

The previous section has shown that the 21st Century curriculum posed a number of challenges for some teachers. The nature of the new curriculum necessitates several conditions and requirements to be taught appropriately. The school environment including, class sizes, resources, and staff are important factors that affect how the new change is implemented. Hence, introducing a new curriculum might not lead to positive educational change if such factors are neglected.

4. Conclusion

This section restates the aims of this research, points out the significant results, and finally highlights some implications of the study.

5.1 Restatement of the aims

This paper has explored the challenges encountered by EFL primary school teachers in implementing the 21st Century curriculum which was introduced in 2018. Data was collected through an online mixed questionnaire which consisted of closed-ended and open-ended questions to provide participants with an opportunity to add any comments and information they thought would be useful for this research.

5.2 Summary of the findings

The results of this study revealed that most of the teachers who participated in the survey encountered difficulties in teaching the new curriculum effectively. Overcrowded classes posed big challenges for teachers to implement interactive activities that are based on group work. Besides, the Ministry of Education failed to provide some schools with teaching resources which are essential components for the successful implementation of the new curriculum. Finally, school principals and inspectors posed obstacles for teachers by not offering sufficient support for teachers to teach the 21st curriculum.

5.3 Implications of the study

The findings of this research provide insights for policymakers and stakeholders at the Ministry of Education regarding the English language curriculum change in 2018. Teachers across the country reported similar challenges which means the curriculum implementation process is complicated and needs more support and monitoring to make it successful. First, the English language should be learned in smaller classes to allow teachers to use activities and tasks that serve the objectives of the curriculum. This also includes changing classroom layouts by supplying schools with movable chairs to make the job of teachers in organizing their activities easier. Second, school principals and inspectors should attend professional development courses or workshops to develop their awareness of the new changes in



the new curriculum. Finally, it is worth noting that the new curriculum is accompanied by teaching aids such as posters, audio files, and flashcards. These resources are crucial for designing effective lessons that are interactive and engaging. Without such resources, teachers find themselves in a difficult position where they might skip significant parts of the syllabus. Consequently, the curriculum change will not be successfully implemented.

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