



English as a foreign language teachers' perspectives on new curriculum reform at Algerian middle schools

Azzeddine Boudouaia ^{a*}

^a School of Education, Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China

Abstract

This study investigates teachers' perspectives on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum reform in Algeria. The specific objectives of the inquiry are to examine teachers' views about EFL curriculum reform relevance and procedures and draw a conclusion from their perspectives. 176 EFL teachers from middle schools in Algeria are chosen to serve as respondents in this research. The requisite data collected through a survey and semi-structured interview. The SPSS (22) programme is used to analyse quantitative data, whereas content analysis is subjected to qualitative data. The study establishes that the majority of teachers consider reform as not relevant to them. The findings also show negative perspectives about procedures undertaken by the government. Hence, the study implies that Algerian teachers' views about the new EFL reform are not in the same boat with the government's intentions and actions. This study recommends that efforts have to be made by the government and other decision-makers to rethink the reform and teachers' needs and motivation.

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1. Introduction

This study is premised in the area of research, which suggests that understanding the teachers' perspectives is one of the prominent ways to get better hindsight of curriculum reform effectiveness. The reason for this is that teachers are well familiar with curriculum elements and key actors in a curriculum implementation process (Rea-Dickens & Germaine, 1998). So, it is not easy to think that the curriculum implementation process and learning can be improved without the involvement of the teachers' commitment (McKernan, 2008). Teachers are the key players and main

* Corresponding author's name: Azzeddine Boudouaia.
E-mail address: azzeddine-saida@hotmail.com

decision-makers in the classroom; they are filters through which the planned curriculum can be applied. Their voice and perspectives may glaringly represent an image of reform value and effectiveness.

Recently, a significant volume of research has been witnessed in the field of teachers' perspectives about curriculum reform (Bailey, 2000; Altinyelken, 2010; Park and Sung, 2013; Uztosun and Troudi, 2015; Ostovar-Namaghi, 2017 and Mbarushimana and Allida, 2017; Canaran and Mirici, 2020). For example, Ostovar-Namaghi (2017) recognised the incompatibility between teachers and policymakers' interests. Teachers focus only on the classroom present environment. They ignore the curriculum, as its components are not relevant. In contrast, policymakers concentrate on broader issues that go beyond the immediate classroom walls as they serve the uniformity, convergent practice, and efficiency and covert privatization. In the same vein, Uztosun and Troudi (2015) investigated teachers' perspectives about curriculum change at departments of the English language in Turkey. They found that the change process neglects some essential steps of the curriculum development process, for instance, needs analysis, training programmes, and evaluation. Furthermore, in another study about Korean perspectives about reform and its implementation, Park and Sung (2013) recognised negative feelings among the participants, which in return influence their commitment to the implementation process. Similarly, in his study, Bailey (2000) claimed that although EFL teachers have prominent roles in the curriculum implementation, their voices, perspectives, and feelings are snubbed. In addition, Mbarushimana and Allida (2017) studied curriculum reform in Rwanda and teachers' involvement in programmes of technical training (TVET). They focused on four variables: Significance, preparedness, participation, and implementation. The authors showed that practitioners are satisfied and comfortable with the modalities of curriculum change. Altinyelken, also, (2010) identified some hindrances related to curriculum and its implementation despite the enthusiasm from teachers toward the new-reformed curriculum. The obstacles are the length of the curriculum, the absence of suitable teaching and learning materials, large classes with a significant number of students, and inappropriate teacher training courses.

It can be pointed out that the research studies reviewed above have successfully exemplified teachers' perspectives on curriculum reform since different results and various contexts are presented. However, our close examination of the literature pertaining to the subject in question made us realize that teachers' views about the new EFL curriculum reform in Algeria have not yet been undertaken. Several years have passed since started implementing the new curriculum in Algerian middle schools, and evidence that if teachers have positive views about it is not clear yet. No published papers have been found reporting on this issue, except for few Algerian studies, instead, were conducted about the first reform (Bellalem, 2014; Gherzouli, 2018). For instance,

Gherzouli (2018) studied English language teachers' attitudes, perspectives, and views about the previous reform and its implementation. She found that all participants have dim and poor views about it. She confirmed that training programmes and support offered by the government left a small impact on teachers' practices in the classrooms. Bellalem (2014), on the other hand, explored English and French language teachers' beliefs about curriculum innovation in Algeria. He identified negative beliefs among the participants regarding the innovation due to a mismatch between their beliefs and reform.

It has also been noticed that despite the interest offered by the Algerian government to improve the educational curriculum, teachers had not been involved in the planning process. They are forced to accept and apply the curriculum content. At Algerian schools, teachers are required and strictly enforced to comply with the national curricula as well as the ministerial instructions (Law N° 08-04 of January 23, 2008, Article 20). In this regard, the present work is designed to hover around EFL teachers' perspectives on new curriculum reform regarding the Algerian context to bridge the gap in the literature and give tutors a chance to comment on the new curriculum. It is hoped that this research will have a significant contribution to literature as it addresses Algeria as a new context of an investigation.

The following questions guide this study:

1. Do teachers find the new reform relevant to them? Why?
2. How do teachers perceive the process of curriculum reform made in 2016?
3. What conclusion can we draw for EFL teachers' views about the new EFL reform?

2. Method

2.1. Research design

In an attempt to answer the above-stated research questions, a mixed research methodology was followed. This design helps a researcher use different sources to gather the required data (Creswell, 2002). Adopting a mixed method can prove the validity of data collected from a single approach (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). This study employed two research methods in data collection: A survey and semi-structured interview.

2.2. Survey

A survey was adopted to collect relevant data for this study; it can be employed successfully with many individuals in different situations targeting various issues (Dörnyei, 2003, p.10). The authors developed the survey to be given to Algerian

EFL teachers to investigate their perspectives on the new EFL curriculum reform relevance and procedures. The researchers separate three sections for the survey. The first section includes demographic information, gender, educational qualifications and teaching experience. The second section revolves around curriculum reform relevance, and the last section tackles curriculum reform process procedures. The survey consists of some items from Kopweh's (2014) survey and some previous studies (Altinyelken, 2010; Uztosun and Troudi, 2015; Gherzouli, 2018) because the belief is that they are necessary to be examined for the Algerian context, the items are the following:

1. Proper management of curriculum reform enables the intended educational goals of a country to be attained. (Kopweh, 2014)
2. My school/college received sufficient funding to procure enough books for the new curriculum (Kopweh, 2014)
3. Funding for obtaining ICT Materials was supplemented on time (Uztosun and Troudi, 2015)
4. In my school/college, sufficient training was done prior to the implementation of the new curriculum (Kopweh, 2014)
5. My district has difficult terrain that makes it difficult to reach from the Ministry.
6. My school was able to procure sufficient non-textual materials for the new curriculum (Kopweh, 2014)
7. In reforming curriculum, communication between the various levels of the education system is crucial (Kopweh, 2014)
8. The policymakers took into considerations the needs of your school to facilitate the implementation process (Altinyelken, 2010)
9. The implementation of the curriculum was regularly and consistently monitored by the responsible authorities/inspectors (Gherzouli, 2018)

5-point Likert scale was used (“Strongly disagree”, “Disagree”, “Neutral”, “Agree” and “Strongly agree”). Cohen et al. (2009) advise the rating scale in inquiries that look for views and perspectives.

Since the reform was introduced in 2016, the participants were selected based on their teaching experience, i.e., those who have six years of teaching experience and more were called to participate in the study. After the instrument was made ready, it was sent via e-mails to 130 teachers in order to make sure that the questionnaire items meet the necessary standards. Cronbach's test was employed to test its reliability. Results showed that the scale has a score of 0.76, which is acceptable. The survey was sent again via e-mails to 560 teachers working at different schools in Algeria. The collaboration rate was unsatisfactory in that only 176 teachers answered positively. The, the results were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.

To detect the validity of the survey confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using principal component analysis was used. The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) generated three factors, which explains 42.2% of the total variance. The factor loadings of item 1 (Proper management of curriculum reform enables the intended educational goals of a country to be attained), item 5(My district has difficult terrain that makes it difficult to reach from the Ministry), and item 6(My school was able to procure sufficient non-textual materials for the new curriculum) are lower than .40. Based on EFA results, confirmatory factor analysis using LISREL 8.53 was used to examine the construct validity of the items.

Table 1: the CFA results for the examination.

Items	Original Factor ^a	Revised Factor ^b
1. Proper management of curriculum reform enables the intended educational goals of a country to be attained.	.23	–
2. My school/college received sufficient funding to procure enough books for the new curriculum	.69	.73
3. Funding for obtaining ICT Materials was supplemented on time	.78	.67
4. In my school/college, sufficient training was done prior to the implementation of the new curriculum	.53	.49
5. My district has difficult terrain that makes it difficult to reach from the Ministry	.28	–
6. My school was able to procure sufficient non-textual materials for the new curriculum	.30	–
7. In reforming curriculum, communication between the various levels of the education system is crucial	.66	.64
8. The policymakers took into considerations the needs of your school to facilitate the implementation process	.71	.74
9. The implementation of the curriculum was regularly and consistently monitored by the responsible authorities/inspectors	.59	.63

^a $X^2 = 287.27$, $df = 33$, $p = .00$, $RMSEA = .077$, $NNFI = .85$ and $GFI = .85$

^b $X^2 = 94.57$, $df = 20$, $p = .00$, $RMSEA = .057$, $NNFI = .94$ and $GFI = .98$

Based on the table above, it was found that the indices of Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) were lower than .90 ($X^2 = 287.27$, $df = 33$, $p = .00$, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .075, $NNFI = .86$, $CFI = .89$ and Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .96); and the factor loadings of the items 1, 6, and 8 were less than .40. In addition, after deleting the three items, the goodness of fit indices appeared much better ($X^2 = 94.57$, $df = 20$, $p = .00$, $RMSEA = .056$, $NNFI = .96$ and $GFI = .98$) and the factor loadings of all six factors were higher than .40. The reliability score was tested again, and the general analysis for the survey shows that Cronbach's Alpha is 0.74, which means that the scale items are reliable.

2.3. Semi-structured interview

The interview was used in this study. The essence of this tool is that it yields rich comprehension of participants' experiences, views, needs, attitudes and reactions

to the problem (Cohen et al., *ibid*). The type of interview adopted in this enquiry is linked to the purpose of fulfilment. The semi-structured interview is preferred as it provides access to perceptions, opinions, and practices to gain more clarification of provided answers. The instrument was developed based on reviewing some previous studies. Its validity was checked by consulting university English language teachers, six EFL middle school teachers having a good experience in teaching, and two EFL supervisors of middle schools whose responsibility is to train English language teachers. From the survey's participants, ten EFL teachers were selected to be interviewed to thoroughly investigate their perspectives. A tape recorder was implemented to ensure participants' expressions and words during the analysis stage. A thematic content analysis method was used to interpret the collected data.

3. Results

3.1. Background information

This study included full-time public middle school English language teachers who were randomly chosen from different regions in Algeria. Statistical data about their demographics in terms of gender, educational qualifications, and teaching experience are addressed in the first section of the survey. The following table illustrates the results:

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Description	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	36	20.5
	Female	140	79.5
	Total	176	100.0
Educational Qualifications	License	105	59.7
	Master	55	31.1
	Doctorate	16	9.1
	Total	176	100.0
Teaching Experience	6-11 Years	85	48.3
	12-16 Years	41	23.3
	17-21 Years	30	17
	22 Years and more	20	11.4
	Total	176	100.0

The table shows that this study consists of 79.5 % of females and 20.5% of males. 59.7% have the License degree and 31.1% have Master degree, whereas 9.1% have a Doctorate. Besides, 48.3% of the participants have 6 to 11 years of teaching experience, whereas 23.3% have 12 to 16 years of teaching experience. 17% have 17-21% years of

teaching experience, and 11.4% have 22 years and more teaching experience.

3.2. Curriculum reform relevance

3.2.1. Survey Results

The first aim of this study is to find out whether the new reform is relevant for teachers or not. The second section of the survey included a dichotomous question about whether teachers find the new change pertinent to them. The results are the following:

Table 3: Teachers' Viewpoints on Curriculum Relevance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	34	19.3	19.3	19.3
	No	142	80.7	80.7	100.0
	Total	176	100.0	100.0	

Frequency distributions for answers about participants' views on curriculum reform relevance show that 80.7% find the reform not relevant; whereas only 19.3% indicate that it is suitable to them.

3.2.2. Interview Results

To support the survey results, two groups of participants were selected from the participants of the survey. The first group includes four teachers who answered "Yes" to curriculum reform relevance, whereas the second group involves six teachers who respond by "No." Such grouping aims to explore the teachers' perspectives in-depth and offer study findings more confidence. Teachers were asked to clarify the reasons behind the relevance and non-relevance of the curriculum. The questions are open-ended to allow the participants to explain them. Their answers revolve around the following themes:

3.2.2.1. Curriculum reform relevance reason: Assessment of learners' learning progress

As far as the first group of participants is concerned, the participants showed that the reform is effective and suitable to assess learners' progress. Teacher A declared: 'the content of the current curriculum is based on mastering competencies and skills that help me know my learners' strengths and weaknesses.' Teacher D also contended: "This curriculum helps me to get a clear image of my learners' potentials; it facilitates the

process of assessment to know if I can go further in my course.” Put in plainer wording, the new reform is competency-based, which has appeared, paving the way for teachers to identify the learners’ potentials. It helps teachers to denote whether learners have got the requisite competencies, which propels them to keep step with knowledge supplication. O’sullivan and Burce (2014) explicitly reported that the featuring characteristic of competency-based education is it measures learning rather than time, and students’ progress by demonstrating their competencies. It means they prove that they have mastered the knowledge and skills -called competencies- required for a particular course, regardless of how long it takes.

3.2.2.2. Curriculum reform non-relevance reasons

The second group of participants who confirmed the unsuitability of the new reform to their teaching based their answers on some background issues, such as inability to involve learners in the learning process, difficulty of getting real discovery learning, and forcing teachers to follow the curriculum contents. The following sections explore these reasons in details.

3.2.2.2.1. Inability to involve learners in learning

Some participants contended that learners are still passive receivers of knowledge rather than being active participants who take charge of their own learning. For instance, teacher B said: “So far I think this reform is not suitable to me because it is not clear and many lessons are so complicated... I consider this reform as passive in which learners’ participation in constructing the lesson is absent, so I am the one who is responsible for knowledge supplication.” Teacher E declared: “The new curriculum reform has not met my needs yet... What we need as teachers is to boost learners' engagement and participation by providing as much as many opportunities for discovery learning.” When these two excerpts are examined, it seems that the sole focus of this new reform is total reliance on supplying new skills rather than engaging learners to construct knowledge by themselves. It appears that the change is evocative of the undeniable truth because of its content, learners become passive, and knowledge construction results just from the teachers’ part. However, in a competency-based curriculum, it is vital to involve students in tasks that enable them to gain hands-on experiences that have a far-reaching impact as far as their comprehension of the taught content is concerned (Wangeleja, 2010). This finding might not flow together with Sudsomboon’s assumption (2010) of teachers’ roles within a competency-based language teaching framework. He affirmed that in general assumptions of competency-based curriculum implementation, teachers are expected to change their role as knowledge transmitters and take the role of coaches and designers of instruction.

3.2.2.2. Difficulty of getting real discovery learning

The study confirms that the new reform lacks providing ample opportunities to have real discovery play, thereby influencing teachers' instruction. Teacher C shared her perspectives as follow: "Based on the comparison I made between the new reform content and my teaching in the classroom, the learning process is still traditional, i.e., my role is to supply information and learners just receive"; whereas teacher F avowed: "Because of curriculum content and learners' level, the teaching process is based only on providing knowledge in a very traditional way, and without having any opportunities for discovery learning." Teachers seem confused and astonished at the reform as discovery learning has lacked in the classrooms. This result can be bound up with the assumption that curriculum planners have been erected on, which is learners get into the classroom already mastering communication skills that would enable them to interact with tutors comfortably. Admittedly, a glance at learners' communication skills may prove that their English proficiency is very low. Having this reality which curriculum planners and policymakers reject may trigger teachers and learners to not fully and truly perform their roles. Bobbit (1913) considered the first activity and target of curriculum development is to "discover the activities which ought to make up the lives of students alongside with the abilities and personal qualities necessary for proper performance."

3.2.2.3. Forcing teachers to follow the curriculum contents

The findings show that teachers found themselves obliged to follow the curriculum contents and having little freedom and autonomy to adjust to the content. Teacher C declared: "Developing communicative competence cannot be accomplished by following only the content of the curriculum because the aim is very difficult for learners; rather, having the freedom to adjust to the content to suit learners' abilities is required." Besides, teacher B added: "I can say that autonomy is absent in teaching; I cannot follow the content as it is because it does not suit my learners' level and my aims." Nevertheless, given this result, it is essential to note that constructing a cadre of competent learners requires sustaining freedom for teachers to select the most suitable teaching methods for pupils. Autonomy may probably ensure teachers' commitment to realize their learners' potentials and attain reform objectives. Kelly (2009) clarifies that there is a wide gap between the idea of a project held by its central planners and the realities of its implementation, if that is even the word, in the classroom by the teachers. The teacher, like the artist, the philosopher, and the man of letters, can only perform his work adequately if he feels himself to be an individual directed by an inner creative impulse, not dominated and fettered by an outside authority" (Russell, 1950, p.159, cited in Lamie, 2005).

3.3. Curriculum Reform Process Procedures

3.3.1. Survey Results

Another aim this research attempts to investigate is teachers' perspectives about curriculum reform process procedures. The following statements are included in the second section of the survey: My school/college received sufficient funding to procure enough books for the new curriculum, funding for obtaining ICT Materials was supplemented on time, in my school/college, sufficient training was done prior to the implementation of the new curriculum, in reforming curriculum, communication between the various levels of the education system existed, the policymakers took into consideration the needs of your school to facilitate the implementation process, and the implementation of the curriculum was regularly and consistently monitored by the responsible authorities/inspectors. The results are as following:

Table 4. Teachers' Perspectives on Curriculum Reform Process Procedures

Statements 1-6	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. My school/college received sufficient funding to procure enough books for the new curriculum	56	31.8	64	36.4	12	6.8	27	15.3	17	9.7
2. Funding for obtaining ICT Materials was supplemented on time	91	51.7	56	31.8	23	13.1	2	1.1	4	2.3
3. In my school/college, sufficient training was done prior to the implementation of the new curriculum	69	39.2	64	36.4	2	1.1	26	14.8	15	8.5
4. In reforming curriculum, communication between the various levels of the education system existed	51	29	61	34.7	21	11.9	18	10.2	25	14.2
5. The policymakers took into considerations the needs of your school to facilitate the implementation process	89	50.6	67	38.1	4	2.3	9	5.1	7	4
6. The implementation of the curriculum was regularly and consistently monitored by the responsible authorities/inspectors	40	22.7	61	34.7	30	17	33	18.8	12	6.8

As it is patent from the table above, teachers were not satisfied with curriculum reform process procedures. For instance, 36.4% disagreed with the statement of sufficient funding to obtain books was provided. Teachers demonstrated the same views of ICT materials funding 51.7%. Teachers were asked too about policymakers and schools administration intervention. For example, 34.7% reported their disagreement about the existence of communication with the government and schools administration; whereas 34.7% declared that the Ministry of National Education did not monitor their

implementation of the curriculum. The results also implied that 50.6% strongly disagreed that the Ministry of National Education took into consideration the schools' needs to facilitate the curriculum implementation process. In comparison, 39.2% strongly disagreed that the Ministry of National Education provided sufficient training before implementing the new curriculum.

3.3.2. Interview Results

During the interview, negative views about reform process procedures are also remarked. The participants' answers revolve around two main issues, which are the unavailability of ICT materials and unproductivity of training materials. The following sections explore these themes in details.

3.3.2.1. Unavailability of ICT materials supplication

All teachers agreed that the government's procedures through the Ministry of National Education were not valid, and employing adjustments are necessary. Teacher C declared: "While in some schools, some modern technology tools, including interactive whiteboards, are available, whereas in my school, we do not have even CD-players." Teacher D also said: "Whenever my school's administration asked for more funds to cover supplication of ICT tools in the classrooms, a response from responsible authorities is always too late." These comments indicate that non- supplication of ICT materials led to poor management. Such comments reveal that ICT materials may be necessary for implementation survival and needed as essential elements to set the preconditions for real change in practice. However, Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) stressed the need to render teachers with more support to sense the real meaning of change. They stated: "curriculum designers must provide the necessary support for their recommended curricular innovations or modifications." If the new reform aim is to get high-quality learning, teachers must be supported over time so that facilitation can be sensed.

3.3.2.2. Unproductivity of training programs

All teachers confirmed that training programmes offered by inspectors were passive. Teacher A said: "The inspectors forced teachers to take part in the training programmes they organised, but they are useless since they do not address teachers' needs and expectations. Most of these programmes are not practical. In other words, inspectors' intention is to show to the official authorities they have finished with training programmes." Parallel to this, teacher C affirmed: "All the training programmes organised by my inspectors were theory-based without any tangible illustrations. What we need are practice-based programmes. These latter may give me a good command and

understanding of how to deal with my learners.” When translating these excerpts, it can be averred that the training programmes were no more its aim as they functioned in a void. Although the training programmes constitute a vital aspect in the implementation of the new reform, their effectiveness was not valid, which have a hand in fracturing teachers’ performance. Nevertheless, several researchers have considered the importance of teacher training effectiveness for implementing a good competency curriculum in the Algerian context (Ameziane & Guendouzi, 2005; Guemide & Benachaiba, 2012; Boudouda & Khelkhal, 2016).

4. Conclusion

It is worth mentioning that this study is exploratory; it is designed to investigate Algerian teachers' perspectives on new EFL curriculum reform of middle schools by tackling two main points: the new reform relevance and process procedures. The perspectives presented in this research show worryingly facts. The results conspicuously demonstrate that some teachers find the new reform relevant to assess learner’s learning progress whereas others consider it as not suitable for involving learners in learning, getting real discovery learning, and applying autonomy in teaching. The study also reveals that teachers have negative perspectives about procedures undertook by the government. To this point, the conclusion that can be drawn for this research is that Algerian teachers’ views about the new EFL reform and the government's intentions and actions are not in the same boat. The teachers’ perspectives presented in this research are considered as a warning call directed to the government, that this reform divorced from transparency reality. In this regard, it is clear that the Ministry of National Education has to look again at this reform and try to develop it based on teachers’ participation and viewpoints because their ideas and values, which by the end concretized the teaching process. By doing so, teachers will get a good command of dealing with reform faults and weaknesses. Besides, there is a need to conduct regular analysis of teachers' needs and expectations to enable them to be fully involved in the teaching process. Additionally, the Ministry of National Education and other agents, like schools' administration and inspectors, should support, guide, and train teachers and build their willingness and hopes regarding the reform policy application.

This research presents a preliminary investigation of the teachers' perspectives on the new curriculum reform. Our hopes are that this research may stand as a contribution to the literature of education in general and that of curriculum in particular. As far as there are different perspectives, the study provides further scientific evidence that there are critical problems in the curriculum and reform process procedures. This, in turn, can encourage other researchers to delve more into them and provide newly tested results and solutions. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, this

study is the first of its kind that investigated Algerian English language teachers' perspectives of the new curriculum reform since its first implementation in middle schools in 2016. Hence, taking the current study results into account may help the Algerian government and instructional stakeholders improve the understanding of the topic find better ways to change and improve it positively.

As a last word, a number of research suggestions on the topic could be made for the researchers. First, this study aimed to explore EFL teachers' perspectives on the new curriculum reform in Algerian middle schools using both survey and semi-structured interview. A classroom observation could be a good research tool to gain more insights on the topic. Next, the participants of this study are EFL teachers from different middle schools in Algeria; a similar research could be designed for school principals or learners at middle schools to identify their perspectives on the curriculum reform.

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