



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 05 No. 01. Jan-March 2026. Page# 4141-4154

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21353894>

Exploring the Strengths and Challenges of Teaching English as Foreign Language in Elementary Classrooms Level

Sumaira Asghar

Ph. D Scholar, Department of Education, University of Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan.

Dr. Sher Zaman

Assistant Professor, HOD, Department of Education, University of Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan.

Author Note

This article is drawn from the qualitative strand of the author's doctoral research, an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study on the alignment of prescribed learning outcomes and English-language classroom practice at the elementary level, completed at the University of Gujrat. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sumaira Asghar, Department of Education, University of Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

Pakistan's Single National Curriculum (2020) specifies clear learning outcomes for English at the elementary level, yet national assessments continue to report weak foundational English attainment among primary-grade learners. Large-scale surveys can establish that such a gap exists, but they cannot explain, in teachers' own terms, why some classrooms manage to translate prescribed outcomes into practice while others do not. This qualitative study addressed that gap by examining how elementary-level teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Tehsil Gujrat, Punjab, described the strengths that supported, and the challenges that hindered, this alignment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Grade-V English teachers purposively drawn from public elementary schools: four discussed the strengths underlying successful alignment, and four discussed the challenges underlying its absence. Transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. Three themes captured enabling strengths: teachers' personal attributes (motivation, subject knowledge, planning, rapport), professional support structures (training, subject specialists, instructional leadership, technology), and a classroom environment that was largely, though not uniformly, described as conducive. Three parallel themes captured challenges: personal constraints (low motivation, limited confidence in spoken English, competing workload), gaps in professional support (infrequent or poorly designed training, weak supervision, absent mentoring), and structural barriers (overcrowded classrooms, scarce resources, time pressure, limited parental involvement). The personal and professional themes mirrored one another closely across the two groups, while the environmental theme was more a symmetrical: even some teachers whose practice showed stronger alignment described crowded, under-resourced classrooms, suggesting that personal motivation and professional preparation carried more of the weight in sustaining alignment than favorable surroundings did. Overall, the findings suggest that alignment between outcomes and practice in these classrooms depends less on whether teachers believe in outcome-based instruction than on whether the personal, professional, and environmental conditions around them allow that belief to be acted upon. Implications for teacher development, instructional supervision, and curriculum support are discussed.

Keywords: *EFL Teaching, Elementary Education, Thematic Analysis, Teacher Perceptions, Learning Outcomes, Pakistan*

Introduction

English occupies an unusual position in Pakistan's public schools' system. It is a compulsory subject from the earliest grades, yet for most children enrolled in government schools it is encountered almost nowhere outside the classroom, which makes it a foreign rather than a second language in any functional sense (Warsi, 2004). Since 2020, the Single National Curriculum (SNC) has, for the first time, set out a single unified statement of the learning outcomes that English teachers at each elementary grade are expected to help students reach (National Curriculum Council, 2020). The policy logic is straightforward: if outcomes are stated clearly, classroom practice should follow from them, a relationship that curriculum theorists call constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996). What actually happens at the classroom level is considerably less clear. The Annual Status of Education Report has repeatedly found that a large share of Grade-V students in Punjab cannot read English text written at the Grade-II level, with only partial recovery across subsequent survey rounds (Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi, 2018, 2021). Something is evidently not connecting the outcomes written into the curriculum with what children are able to do by the end of elementary school.

A natural first response to this kind of finding is to look inside the classroom, and a growing body of research has done exactly that, using observation schedules and questionnaires to measure how closely everyday teaching tracks prescribed outcomes. That work is valuable, but it has an important limit: a checklist can tell a researcher that oral communication activities are rarely observed, or that a teacher's stated beliefs and their classroom behavior diverge, without saying anything about why. Two teachers working under the same curriculum, in similar schools, can end up on opposite sides of that gap, and the reasons are unlikely to be visible from an observation schedule alone. Understanding those reasons requires asking teachers directly, in their own words, what makes it possible for them to teach toward the prescribed outcomes, and what gets in the way when they cannot.

This study takes up that task. It reports the qualitative component of a larger doctoral project on the relevance of learning outcomes and classroom practice in Grade-V English teaching, focusing specifically on what teachers said, in semi-structured interviews, about the strengths and challenges shaping their instructional alignment. Two questions guided the analysis:

1. What personal, professional, and environmental factors do elementary-level EFL teachers in District Gujrat identify as strengths that support the alignment of prescribed learning outcomes with classroom practice?
2. What personal, professional, and environmental factors do these teachers identify as challenges that hinder such alignment?

Answering these questions matters for several audiences. For teacher educators and instructional supervisors, knowing which specific supports teachers themselves credit for successful alignment, rather than assuming what those supports must be, offers a more grounded basis for designing professional development. For head teachers, the findings speak directly to the instructional-leadership role that participants repeatedly raised, unprompted, as either present or absent in their schools. For curriculum and textbook developers, hearing how teachers actually talk about the four language domains, oral communication, reading, language focus, and writing, can sharpen how future SNC materials operationalize those domains for the classroom. And for policy makers responsible for class size, teacher deployment, and training schedules in districts such as Gujrat, the findings ground policy discussion in the specific,

recurring language that teachers used to describe their own working conditions, rather than in inference from test scores alone.

Literature Review

Constructive Alignment as a Conceptual Lens

Biggs' (1996) theory of constructive alignment holds that intended learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment tasks function as a system: outcomes are only meaningfully achieved when the activities students actually do, and the way their work is assessed, are deliberately designed to elicit those outcomes rather than left to operate independently of them (Biggs, 2003; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Although the framework originated in higher education, its logic travels well to elementary language teaching, where an SNC learning outcome, for instance, that a Grade-V student should be able to infer meaning from context, is only realized if lessons actually include inferencing tasks and if those tasks are checked rather than bypassed in favor of more familiar recitation and vocabulary drills. Constructive alignment therefore supplies the conceptual backbone for a study concerned with whether, and under what conditions, stated outcomes and classroom practice move together.

The Gap Between What Teachers Believe and What They Do

A long-standing line of research in teacher cognition distinguishes between an educator's espoused theory, what they say they believe and would do, and their theory-in-use, what they actually do once they are in front of a class (Argyris & Schön, 1974). The distinction matters because a teacher's endorsement of a practice does not guarantee its enactment: Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior proposes that a favorable attitude toward a behavior translates into that behavior only when the person also perceives themselves as having sufficient control over performing it. Applied to teaching, this suggests that a teacher who genuinely values communicative, outcome-based instruction may still not deliver it, not because the belief is insincere, but because class size, time, training, or their own language confidence make the behavior feel out of reach. This distinction is central to the present study's design: rather than treating teachers' accounts of strengths and challenges as a simple report of what they do, it treats those accounts as a window onto the conditions that make favorable beliefs actionable or not.

Personal, Professional, and Environmental Influences on Practice

Three further strands of theory help make sense of the kinds of factors teachers are likely to raise when asked what enables or hinders their practice. At the level of the individual teacher, self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) proposes that a teacher's confidence in their own capability shapes how much effort they invest and how readily they persist through difficulty, which offers one account of why motivation, subject-matter confidence, and deliberate planning might function as personal enablers, and their absence as personal barriers. At the level of professional support, research on teacher learning consistently finds that sustained, practice-embedded development changes classroom behavior more reliably than short or purely theoretical training events (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Guskey, 2002), and that durable instructional change generally requires ongoing capacity-building rather than one-off interventions imposed from outside the school (Fullan, 2007). At the level of the environment, a sociocultural view of learning treats the classroom itself, its space, size, and social climate, as an active part of the language-learning process rather than a neutral container for it (Vygotsky, 1978), which is consistent with teachers describing classroom conditions not as background detail but as a direct constraint on, or support for, the kind of interactive, learner-centered teaching that oral-language outcomes in particular require.

Empirical Evidence from Pakistani Elementary Classrooms

Recent Pakistani research reinforces the plausibility of these mechanisms. Imran et al. (2024), using a phenomenological design across elementary schools in central Punjab, found that teachers generally endorsed communicative and learner-centered principles, yet described their actual practice as constrained by insufficient training, overcrowded classrooms, limited technology, and thin parental cooperation, producing instruction that leaned more heavily on textbook-bound methods than either their stated beliefs or the curriculum's outcomes would predict. This pattern, teachers whose stated commitments outrun their classroom behavior, and who attribute the difference to identifiable external constraints rather than to a change of belief, is precisely the pattern that the theory-practice gap literature would predict, and it is the pattern this study set out to examine in greater depth through direct interviews with teachers in a different district.

The Present Gap

What remains comparatively underexamined, at least for Grade-V English teaching specifically, is a close, teacher-voiced account of which particular personal, professional, and environmental conditions accompany successful alignment and which accompany its breakdown, drawn from teachers actually engaged in that instruction rather than inferred from test scores or generic classroom-condition surveys. The present study addresses this gap directly, using semi-structured interviews with elementary EFL teachers in Tehsil Gujrat and an established thematic-analysis procedure to surface those conditions in the teachers' own language.

Method

Research Design

This study used a qualitative, descriptive-exploratory design built around semi-structured interviews, reported here as the qualitative strand of a larger explanatory sequential mixed-methods doctoral project on the alignment of learning outcomes and classroom practice. In the parent project, structured classroom observation and a teacher-perception questionnaire were used first, to identify which of a wider pool of teachers showed comparatively stronger, and which showed comparatively weaker, alignment between the outcomes prescribed for Grade-V English and their observed classroom practice. The present article reports only the interview strand that followed, in which the teachers identified through that earlier phase were invited to describe, in their own words, what supported or undermined that alignment. Framed this way, the design is exploratory rather than confirmatory: interviews were used to surface the reasoning behind a pattern that had already been observed, not to test a predetermined hypothesis about which factors would matter.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in Tehsil Gujrat, District Gujrat, in the Punjab province of Pakistan. District Gujrat has 1,475 public schools, 60% of which enrol girls and 40% boys, staffed by 10,581 teachers in total, of whom a much smaller number teach English specifically to Grade V. From this accessible population, 15 public elementary schools and 15 Grade-V English teachers took part in the wider project, selected through a combination of convenience sampling, at the level of schools willing to participate, and purposive sampling, at the level of teachers responsible for Grade-V English. Across this pool of 15, qualifications ranged from a Master's degree with a Bachelor of Education (MA/B.Ed.) to an M.Phil., and reported classroom experience ranged from roughly 9 to 23 years, all in government elementary and secondary schools across Tehsil Gujrat.

Eight of these fifteen teachers were then purposively selected for interview, on the basis of the classroom-observation and questionnaire data collected in the preceding phase of the parent

project. Four teachers, whose observed practice had shown comparatively stronger alignment with the SNC's prescribed learning outcomes, were interviewed about the strengths underlying that alignment; a different four, whose observed practice had shown comparatively weaker alignment, were interviewed about the challenges underlying its absence. In this article these eight participants are identified as T1 through T8, with T1–T4 corresponding to the strength's interviews and T5–T8 to the challenges interviews. This division is a defining feature of the design: rather than asking a single group of teachers to speculate abstractly about enablers and barriers in general, the study asked teachers whose own practice already exemplified stronger or weaker alignment to reflect on the conditions behind their own case.

Data Collection

Two parallel semi-structured interview protocols were developed for the study, guided by the relevant literature and by the doctoral supervisory team: a ten-item protocol addressed to the strengths group and an eleven-item protocol, covering closely related but not identical ground, addressed to the challenges group. Both protocols opened with questions about how learning outcomes feature in everyday instruction, before moving to questions specifically about oral communication, questioning behavior in the classroom, the balance between grammar and oral or critical-thinking activities, and the personal, professional, and environmental factors the teacher associated with alignment or its absence. Content validity of the observation and questionnaire instruments used in the wider project was established through review by 14 subject-matter experts, using Lawshe's (1975) content validity ratio method, and the interview protocols were developed and refined under the same supervisory guidance.

Interviews were conducted face to face, one participant at a time, at each teacher's own school, over eight consecutive working days. Before data collection began, permission was obtained from the relevant district education authorities, and each participating teacher and head teacher provided informed consent, with assurances of confidentiality and the freedom to withdraw at any point. Responses were recorded in writing during the interview and compiled into participant-wise transcripts, which form the primary data analyzed in this article.

Data Analysis

Transcripts were analyzed following the six-phase approach to thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006), a method chosen for its flexibility with a modest, purposively selected qualitative sample and for the clarity of the audit trail it leaves between raw data and reported themes.

Phase 1: Familiarization with the data. Each of the eight transcripts was read in full multiple times, first for the general sense of what each teacher was saying, and again with attention to language use, repetition, and the specific examples teachers offered from their own classrooms. Brief notes were kept alongside each transcript recording first impressions of recurring ideas, well before any formal coding began.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes. Working systematically through the strength's transcripts (T1–T4) and then the challenges transcripts (T5–T8), short descriptive labels were attached to every segment of text that expressed a distinct idea relevant to the research questions, for example, a teacher explaining why lesson planning mattered, or why large class sizes made oral practice difficult. Coding was inclusive at this stage: overlapping or closely related codes were retained separately rather than collapsed prematurely, so that the full range of language teachers used was preserved for the next phase.

Phase 3: Searching for themes. Codes were then sorted and clustered according to substantive similarity, initially within the strengths data and within the challenges data separately, and organized around the personal, professional, and environmental distinction that had structured

the interview protocols themselves. This produced an initial set of candidate themes and sub-themes for each side of the data set.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes. Candidate themes were checked twice, first against the coded extracts that had been assigned to them, to confirm that each theme held together as a coherent pattern rather than an artificial grouping, and second against the full data set, to check that no substantial pattern relevant to the research questions had been left out of the emerging structure. At this stage, some candidate themes were merged and others split, and the mirrored structure across the strengths and challenges data (the same three domains recurring on both sides) was confirmed as a genuine feature of the data rather than an artefact of how the interview protocols had been worded.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes. Each retained theme and sub-theme was given a working definition, specifying what it captured and, as importantly, what it did not, and a name intended to convey that scope concisely. This produced the six main themes and twenty-four sub-themes reported below.

Phase 6: Producing the report. Illustrative extracts were selected for each theme and sub-theme on the basis of how clearly and specifically they represented the pattern in question, and the analytic narrative presented in the Findings section was written to connect those extracts back to the research questions and to the wider literature discussed above.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Several steps supported the trustworthiness of the analysis, following the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was supported by grounding every theme in participants' own words rather than in the researcher's prior expectations, and by discussing emerging themes with the doctoral supervisory team as an informal form of peer debriefing. Dependability and confirmability were supported by keeping a documented trail from raw transcript, to code, to theme, so that the basis for each reported finding could be traced back to specific interview extracts. Transferability, in line with standard qualitative practice, is left to the reader: the study provides a detailed description of the setting and participants specifically so that readers working in comparable elementary, government-school, EFL contexts can judge for themselves how far the findings might apply to their own settings, rather than claiming statistical generalizability beyond Tehsil Gujrat. On ethics, in addition to the consent and confidentiality procedures described above, participants were free to decline to answer any question, and no information that could identify individual teachers or schools is reported in this article; participants are referred to only by the codes T1–T8.

Findings

The analysis produced six main themes, three describing strengths that participants associated with successful alignment between prescribed learning outcomes and classroom practice, and three parallel themes describing challenges that participants associated with its breakdown. Each theme comprised four sub-themes, twenty-four in total. A notable feature of the analysis, discussed further below, is that both sets of theme's clusters around the same three domains, personal, professional, and environmental, suggesting that these domains function as a shared set of conditions that can either support or undermine alignment depending on their state in a given school.

Strengths Supporting Alignment Between Learning Outcomes and Practice

Theme 1: Teachers' Personal Attributes

Participants in the strengths group repeatedly returned to qualities located in the teacher rather than in the school system around them: motivation, subject knowledge, preparation, and the manner in which a teacher relates to students.

Self-motivation and professional commitment.

Three of the four participants in this group opened their account of personal strengths with the idea that a teacher's own drive to keep learning comes first. T1 explained that a teacher "should be highly motivated to learn new things" and "should update her knowledge according to needs of her students," while T2 held that teachers "should have self-motivated personalities" and "should always get ready to learn and adapt new methodologies and techniques." T3 tied this to character as much as to effort, stating that a teacher "should be self-motivated" and "devoted, honest and loyal to his profession," adding that such a teacher "should serve with proper planning." Read together, these responses treat motivation less as a fixed personality trait than as an ongoing orientation toward the work, one that participants saw as a precondition for the more specific practices, subject knowledge, planning, and rapport, discussed next.

Command of subject matter. A second, closely related quality was simple command of the English content being taught. T4 was direct about this, arguing that a "teacher should be a knowledgeable person" who has "complete grip on their subject content." The implication running through this sub-theme is practical rather than abstract: a teacher who is confident in the material can respond to unexpected student questions and choose activities that fit a lesson's actual outcome, rather than retreating to safer, more mechanical tasks when the subject matter itself feels uncertain.

Deliberate lesson planning. Planning emerged as the mechanism through which the first two qualities become visible in the classroom. T3 described planning almost as a discipline in its own right: "planning of every task in life is very important. Planning is a mind map. When we do not give diary to students, they will feel free hand. So, we also write diary on daily and weekly basis to plan our lessons," adding that a second lesson plan is kept ready in case the first needs to change. T4 connected this practice to formal training, noting that "in our professional training teachers are instructed to present the learning outcome in first warm up activity and to write it on the writing board in the classroom." Both participants agreed, in their own words, that a written plan keeps the outcome for the day visible and organizes the lesson around it, rather than leaving alignment to memory or habit.

Positive, encouraging teacher-student rapport. The final personal strength concerned how teachers relate to students' day to day. T4 summarized the qualities this required as being "a good feedback giver to students" who is "passionate and behave[s] students with affection." T4 connected this rapport directly to classroom questioning, observing that when a student "tries to raise question, teacher taunts him and discourage[s] questioning," implying that students often stay silent for fear of that reaction rather than because they have nothing to ask. T1 and T2 made closely related points about atmosphere: T1 argued that "teachers should provide friendly environment for students" so that they "may feel free for their queries," and T2 agreed that a "friendly environment in the classroom" was what allowed students to "feel free for questioning" rather than fearing that the teacher would react with irritation. Several participants in this group treated that willingness to risk speaking and being wrong in front of classmates as a precondition for oral-language practice in particular.

Theme 2: Professional Support Structures

A second cluster of strengths sat outside the individual teacher, in the training, staffing, and leadership structures surrounding their work.

Continuous, practice-oriented professional development. Every participant in this group raised in-service training unprompted. T1 argued for "a valid in-service professional training program or project which can improve teachers' content as well as pedagogical knowledge and

skills," and T3 called periodic training "mandatory... to be updated knowledge and professional skills." T4 was more specific about frequency, suggesting that administration "arrange professional trainings for teachers on continuous monthly or at-least once in six months" so that "teaching behavior should be updated according to emerging needs of society." The common thread is that training was valued not as a one-time credential but as a recurring mechanism for keeping practice aligned with a curriculum that itself continues to evolve.

Access to subject specialists. Two participants distinguished between a general classroom teacher covering English and a teacher trained specifically in the subject. T2 stated plainly that "each subject should be taught by its subject expert," and T3 extended the point by direct comparison to other subjects: "just like science math's teachers, recruitment English teachers should be recruited." The underlying reasoning was that specialist linguistic and pedagogical knowledge, not goodwill alone, is what allows a teacher to translate an outcome like oral communication into a specific, well-chosen classroom activity.

Instructional leadership from head teachers. Participants also credited school leadership with a direct role in alignment. T2 wanted head teachers "appointed who can provide effective instructional leadership to teachers," while noting that "their teaching and managerial duties hinder them" from giving this the attention it needs. T4 pointed to a cascading effect of leadership training: "head teachers are also not being trained. If head teachers are trained, they may train their whole staff." Read alongside the parallel theme in the challenges data below, where the same role is described as largely absent, this sub-theme suggests that participants saw active instructional leadership, not simply the existence of the position, as a distinct enabling condition.

Integration of technology into instruction. The final professional strength concerned the use of classroom technology to support more interactive teaching. T4 argued that teachers "should be trained in technology, so, that they can use blended instructional approach for students' effective learning," framing technology not as a novelty but as a route toward the kind of engaging, communicative activity that outcome-based instruction calls for.

Theme 3: Classroom and School Environment

The third strength theme concerned the physical and social conditions of the classroom, and it emerged as the most qualified of the three themes in this section: even within the group whose practice had shown stronger alignment, descriptions of the physical environment were not uniformly positive.

A physically comfortable and orderly classroom, in principle. T1 named "proper strength of class students, noise free classrooms and proper temperature of classroom" as the environmental factors that support alignment, describing the kind of conditions needed rather than necessarily their own room at that moment. T3 likewise noted, more generally, that "weather and climate affect our classroom learning environment."

A child-friendly, interactive classroom climate. T4 connected classroom atmosphere directly to student confidence, describing a "friendly classroom environment... needed in which students feel ease in their classroom interaction," and attributing that atmosphere to the teacher's own "positive attitude." Participants linked this climate specifically to English, reasoning that a subject already associated with hesitation and the fear of mistakes depends more than most on students feeling safe enough to attempt to speak.

Use of technology and multimedia. T4 argued simply that "we should use technology for students' interactive classroom," associating multimedia and audio-visual materials with more engaging, communicative lessons and framing resource availability as a support for outcomes, like oral communication, that are otherwise difficult to practice from a textbook alone.

Resource and space constraints even where alignment was stronger. Against these positive accounts, two participants in the same group described conditions that worked against them. T2 pointed to "students ['] strength [that] is so large" relative to available teachers, adding that "classroom[s] are congested" and that "space is not enough to perform different activities." T3 was similarly candid: "in our government school, we lack facilities, classroom size is unfavorable, students' strength is more in congested classrooms." That these observations came from teachers whose classroom practice had otherwise shown comparatively stronger alignment suggests that, for this group, alignment rested more heavily on personal motivation and professional preparation than on consistently favorable surroundings, a point taken up further in the Discussion.

Challenges Hindering Alignment Between Learning Outcomes and Practice

Theme 4: Personal Constraints

Where the strengths group located personal qualities as enablers, the challenges group described much of the same territory, motivation, confidence, competing demands, in terms of what was missing or working against alignment.

Low intrinsic motivation. T5 stated plainly that "low motivation level of teachers may hinder teachers to align the learning outcomes and classroom practices." T6 framed motivation as the root of everything that follows from it: "if we have eagerness to teaching then we will be motivated to update our knowledge and skills," implying that without that eagerness, the updating simply does not happen.

Diminished professional commitment. T6 was unusually direct about what low commitment could look like in practice, describing "unmotivated, dishonest and unloyalty teaching attitude" among colleagues who, in this account, "have not chosen this noble profession by their choice." T8 offered a related but gentler explanation, suggesting that "mostly teachers are part of this educational system accidentally and by chance," a framing that treats weak commitment less as a personal failing than as a consequence of how some teachers arrive in the profession in the first place.

Limited confidence in spoken English. This sub-theme was among the most consistent and specific in the entire data set. T8 explained the underlying language situation directly: "in our scenario English is a third language. Our first language is mother tongue that is Punjabi, second language is our national language that is Urdu. There is a language barrier," adding that teachers "mostly like to present their ideas in Punjabi or Urdu" rather than in English. The same participant linked this hesitation to a fear of "mistakes and others joking behavior." T7 extended the concern into students' home lives, noting that children "could not practice conversational sentences in their homes, especially [as] public sector students' parents are uneducated," so that whatever confidence gap existed at school had little chance of being closed outside it.

Competing personal workload. Finally, T8 pointed to demands entirely outside the classroom: "economical burdens of whole family, managerial duties like dengue activities or other necessary official responsibilities may hinder him to perform his professional responsibilities being a teacher." This sub-theme captures a recurring observation that primary-level teachers, in particular, are frequently pulled into administrative and public-health tasks that leave less time and energy for lesson preparation, regardless of their underlying motivation.

Theme 5: Gaps in Professional Support

Just as the strengths group credited training, specialist staffing, and leadership, the challenges group described the absence or poor design of exactly these supports.

Insufficient and infrequent in-service training. T5 offered perhaps the starkest figure in the data set: "in five years of my career I got just induction training." T7 attributed the shortfall not to a lack of interest among teachers but to "lack of proper facilitation."

A preference for physical over online training. Several participants distinguished sharply between training formats, not only training frequency. T6 argued that "online training is not practicable meanwhile we have to attend our classroom," and T7 stated plainly, "I am not in favor of online training." T8 gave the most developed rationale, explaining that "trainer and teacher interactions are more feasible in physical training" and that "in online training mostly teachers hesitate to enquire about their concerns," concluding that "online training is not an alternative of physical training." The format of training, and not only its quantity, appeared to shape how much teachers felt they gained from it.

Weak instructional leadership and supervision. Where the strengths group described head teachers who monitored and mentored, this group described head teachers pulled away from that role by other duties. T5 put it directly: a head teacher's "foundational responsibility is instructional leadership," yet "their teaching and management duties may affect their instructional leadership duties." T7 made a closely related point in different words, describing heads as "unable to pay proper attention towards instructional leadership due to their hectic teaching and managerial responsibilities," and T8 agreed that, amid competing tasks, head teachers were "ignoring their first and far most duty that is instructional leadership."

Absence of subject-specific mentoring and collaboration. Finally, participants pointed to a lack of structured opportunities to learn from more experienced colleagues. T6 suggested that "subject expert trainers should be hired," and T7 wanted teachers to "engage with each other to discuss and solve their classroom challenges," a suggestion that implies such collaborative problem-solving was not yet happening in any organized way.

Theme 6: Structural and Environmental Barriers

The final theme returned to the physical and social environment, this time almost entirely as a source of obstruction.

Overcrowded classrooms. This was the most forcefully expressed challenge in the data set. T5 linked "pressure from parents, students' strength, class size, large student teacher ratio" directly to weaker alignment, and T8 gave the sharpest concrete figure in the study: "our mostly classes are crowded with eighty students," in which the teacher must simultaneously "maintain discipline, [check] note books and also evaluate the learners." T6 connected large class sizes explicitly to time pressure, listing "congested classrooms and time deficiency" among the conditions "hindering teachers and students to perform effectively."

Scarce instructional resources and technology. T7 drew a direct contrast with better-resourced settings: "if we avail the smart boards like private schools then our classrooms may be more interactive," noting in the same breath that in the actual classroom, "furniture is not according to the needs" and there is "not enough space to manage activities." This sub-theme mirrors Theme 3 almost exactly, but from the opposite side: the same technological and physical resources that the strengths group associated with interactive teaching, this group described as simply unavailable.

Time pressure from a demanding curriculum. Time featured repeatedly alongside class size rather than as a fully separate concern; T6, for instance, named "time deficiency" together with "congested classrooms" among the conditions limiting what teachers and students could accomplish in a lesson. Across this group, the underlying worry was that the syllabus left little room for the slower, more interactive work that oral-communication and critical-thinking

outcomes require, pushing teachers back toward faster, more familiar activities such as grammar drilling.

Limited parental involvement and home support. The final challenge sub-theme extended beyond the school gate. T5 framed this in terms of a three-way relationship: "education is a triangular process," and in these particular schools, "parents are uneducated and they do not bother about their kids learning and well grooming," leaving children with little reinforcement of classroom English once they went home. T7 made a related point about the home environment limiting practice of conversational English specifically. Participants did not present this as a criticism of parents so much as a structural feature of the communities these schools served, one that, in their account, left teachers doing work that in better-resourced settings might be shared with the home.

Summary of Findings

Read side by side, the two sets of themes are largely, though not perfectly, symmetrical. Both groups organized their accounts of alignment around the same three domains, personal, professional, and environmental, and for the personal and professional domains the strengths and challenges groups described what was recognisably the same territory viewed from opposite ends: motivated, subject-confident, well-planned teachers versus unmotivated or reluctantly recruited ones; regular, hands-on training and present instructional leadership versus rare, poorly matched training and absent supervision. The environmental domain was the partial exception. The challenges group described overcrowded, under-resourced classrooms in uniformly negative terms, but two members of the strengths group described comparably difficult conditions, large classes, insufficient space, and still associated their own practice with stronger alignment. This asymmetry is one of the more useful findings of the study in its own right: it suggests that personal motivation and professional preparation were doing more of the work in sustaining alignment than favorable surroundings were, and that even teachers working in imperfect classrooms could achieve stronger alignment when the personal and professional conditions were in place.

Discussion

The clearest pattern in this data set is that teachers on both sides of the alignment divide were reasoning from the same conceptual map. Nobody in either group suggested that outcome-based, communicative English teaching was the wrong goal; the disagreement, if it can be called that, was entirely about whether the conditions for reaching that goal were present. This is consistent with the theory-practice gap literature's central claim that favorable beliefs about teaching do not reliably translate into favorable practice once perceived behavioral control is low (Ajzen, 1991; Argyris & Schön, 1974): the challenges group's teachers were not describing a different theory of good English teaching, they were describing the same theory operating without the personal, professional, and environmental supports that would let it show up in a lesson.

The personal-attribute themes fit comfortably within a self-efficacy account of teaching (Bandura, 1997). Motivation, subject confidence, and planning, the qualities the strengths group emphasized, are exactly the qualities that would be expected to help a teacher persist through a difficult lesson rather than default to a safer routine; their absence, described by the challenges group, is consistent with reduced persistence and a retreat to familiar, lower-effort activity, most visibly in the group's repeated references to grammar drilling as a default when oral or critical-thinking activities felt too demanding to attempt. The particular salience of limited spoken-English confidence among teachers themselves is worth underlining: if a teacher does not feel able to speak English comfortably in the staffroom, let alone in front of

forty or eighty students, it is difficult to see how they would model the oral communication that the SNC's own outcomes call for, independent of how strongly they endorse that outcome in principle.

The professional-support themes align with research suggesting that durable change in classroom behavior depends on sustained, practice-embedded development rather than short or purely theoretical training (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Guskey, 2002; Fullan, 2007). What stood out in this data set was how specific and consistent participants were in rejecting online training as a substitute for in-person sessions, not on grounds of convenience but because they felt unable to raise concerns or receive hands-on modeling in that format. Combined with participants' near-uniform description of instructional leadership as either strongly present or almost entirely absent, depending on the group, this suggests that professional support in this context is less a matter of adding more training hours in the abstract than of getting the format, frequency, and follow-through right, and of freeing head teachers from competing administrative duties long enough to actually observe and mentor classroom practice.

The environmental themes, finally, sit well within a sociocultural view of the classroom as an active participant in language learning rather than a neutral backdrop to it (Vygotsky, 1978). Class size deserves particular attention here: a room of 80 students, the figure one participant gave, is not simply a larger version of a well-functioning classroom of 30; it forecloses entire categories of practice, individualized feedback, pair and group oral work, continuous formative assessment, that the SNC's own outcomes assume will happen. This matches the pattern reported by Imran et al. (2024) in a different part of Punjab, where overcrowding, thin resources, and limited parental cooperation constrained teachers who nonetheless endorsed communicative, learner-centered principles in their stated beliefs. Read alongside the present findings, this points to overcrowded, under-resourced elementary English classrooms as a challenge that is unlikely to be specific to Tehsil Gujrat alone.

At the same time, the environmental theme was the one place where the strengths and challenges groups did not divide cleanly, and this asymmetry is worth taking seriously rather than smoothing over. Two of the four teachers who had shown stronger alignment still described large classes and inadequate space in much the same terms as the challenges group. Self-efficacy theory offers a plausible reading of this: Bandura (1997) argued that efficacy beliefs shape not just whether a person attempts a difficult task but how long they persist when the environment pushes back, which would predict exactly this pattern, teachers with strong personal motivation and solid subject preparation sustaining alignment somewhat independently of classroom conditions, while teachers without those personal and professional resources have little left to draw on once the environment turns difficult. If that reading is correct, it has a direct practical implication: improving classroom conditions alone would likely help, but it may do less for alignment than strengthening teachers' motivation, subject confidence, and professional support would, since it is that combination, more than favorable surroundings on their own, that seemed to carry the stronger-alignment group through comparable constraints.

Taken together, these three discussions point toward the same practical conclusion from three different angles: the shortfall in alignment documented across this data set looks less like a problem of teacher belief and more like a problem of capacity, personal, professional, and environmental, to act on a belief that, on this evidence, most teachers in these schools already share.

Conclusion

This study asked elementary-level EFL teachers in Tehsil Gujrat, District Gujrat, to describe, in their own words, what allowed them to align their classroom practice with prescribed learning outcomes and what stood in the way. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, six themes emerged, three describing personal, professional, and environmental strengths, and three describing the same three domains as sources of challenge. The consistency of this three-domain structure across both groups is the study's central finding: it suggests that alignment between the Single National Curriculum's outcomes and everyday classroom practice in these schools' rests on a fairly small, identifiable set of conditions, rather than on any deficit in what teachers believe good English teaching should look like.

Limitations

Several limitations should be weighed when interpreting these findings. The sample was small and purposively selected from a single tehsil, which was appropriate for the study's exploratory aim but means the findings describe this context in depth rather than supporting statistical generalization to other districts or to private-school settings. The two interview groups were also treated as separate populations, four teachers discussing strengths and four discussing challenges, rather than each teacher being asked about both, a design inherited from the parent mixed-methods study, which limits the ability to compare how the same individual teacher experiences both enabling and hindering conditions at once. Finally, the data consist of teachers' self-reports rather than independent verification of the specific practices they described, so the findings are best read as an account of how these teachers understood and explained their own alignment, or its absence, rather than as a direct measure of classroom behavior.

Recommendations

For teachers, the findings point toward two concrete habits: making prescribed outcomes visible at the start of each lesson, in writing as well as aloud, and treating spoken-English confidence as a skill worth deliberately practicing with colleagues, not only with students. For teacher educators, the clear preference for face-to-face, hands-on training over online delivery suggests that professional development for this population should be planned accordingly, and should target directly the domains, oral communication, higher-order reading, and self- and peer-assessment, that participants themselves identified as hardest to enact. For head teachers and instructional supervisors, the findings argue for protecting time for classroom observation and mentoring from competing administrative demands, since participants treated this leadership function as one of the more decisive differences between the two groups. For curriculum and textbook developers, making the link between each stated outcome and a concrete, ready-to-use classroom activity more explicit in SNC support materials would reduce the planning burden currently falling on individual teachers. For policy makers, the recurring, specific concern with class size, in one account reaching eighty students in a single room, together with the shortage of instructional technology relative to private schools, suggests that resourcing and staffing decisions in districts like Gujrat carry as much weight for outcome alignment as training investment does.

Directions for Future Research

Future work could usefully interview the same teachers about both strengths and challenges, rather than treating the two as separate groups, to see whether individual teachers experience the three domains identified here as a single continuum rather than as two distinct populations. Because teachers' own spoken-English confidence emerged as such a specific and recurring concern, research pairing a language-proficiency measure with classroom observation

would help clarify how directly that confidence shapes oral-communication practice. Finally, replicating this interview design in other districts, at other grade levels, and in private as well as public schools would help establish how much of what was found here is particular to Tehsil Gujrat and how much reflects a broader pattern in elementary EFL teaching under the Single National Curriculum.

References

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T)
- Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1974). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. Jossey-Bass.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.
- Biggs, J. (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment. *Higher Education*, 32(3), 347–364. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00138871>
- Biggs, J. B. (2003). Aligning teaching and assessing to course objectives. *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: New Trends and Innovations*, University of Aveiro, 13–17.
- Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does* (4th ed.). McGraw-Hill & Open University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Richardson, N. (2009). Teacher learning: What matters? *Educational Leadership*, 66(5), 46–53.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching*, 8(3), 381–391. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135406002100000512>
- Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi. (2018). *Annual status of education report: ASER-Pakistan 2018 (Punjab provincial report)*. ASER Pakistan.
- Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi. (2021). *Annual status of education report: ASER-Pakistan 2021*. ASER Pakistan.
- Imran, M., Almusharraf, N., Abdellatif, M. S., & Ghaffar, A. (2024). Teachers' perspectives on effective English language teaching practices at the elementary level: A phenomenological study. *Heliyon*, 10(8), Article e29175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e29175>
- Lawshe, C. H. (1975). A quantitative approach to content validity. *Personnel Psychology*, 28(4), 563–575. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1975.tb01393.x>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.
- National Curriculum Council. (2020). *Single National Curriculum: English, Grade I–V, 2020*. Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Government of Pakistan.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Warsi, J. (2004). Conditions under which English is taught in Pakistan: An applied linguistic perspective. *SARID Journal*, 1(1), 1–9.