

Examining Teachers' Understanding and Implementation of the English Curriculum: A Study in the Syrian Context

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Abstract:

This paper explores high school teachers' perceptions and implementation of the English curriculum, crucial for assessing its impact on students transitioning to university-level English majors. The study adopts the mixed-method approach, and data, collected through semi-structured interviews and checklists from 10 high school teachers in Latakia, Syria, revealed disparities between theoretical aspects of the curriculum, its organization, and teachers' understanding of it. Factors such as test pressures, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate training contributed to these gaps, potentially affecting students' competence in English at the university level. To address these disparities, several key solutions are proposed. First, a comprehensive curriculum review is needed to align theory with classroom practices. Providing regular professional development workshops can enhance teachers' understanding and equip them with effective strategies. Also, mentorship programs and support systems along with revised assessment practices can address implementation challenges. Collaboration between high schools and universities offering English majors ensures smoother student transitions. Policy makers at regional or national levels can prioritize English education, supporting comprehensive reforms. These measures aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice, ultimately enhancing students' readiness for higher education in English.

Keywords: Curriculum implementation; educational reform; EFL; teacher training

الملخص:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة تصورات معلمي المدارس الثانوية وطائق تدریسهم لمنهج اللغة الإنكليزية، وهو أمر بالغ الأهمية لتقدير تأثيرهم على الطلاب الذين ينتقلون إلى تخصصات اللغة الإنكليزية في المرحلة الجامعية. تتبني الدراسة النهج المختلط للبحث العلمي وکشفت البيانات التي تم جمعها من خلال مقابلات واستبيانات من 10 معلمين في المدارس الثانوية في اللاذقية، سوريا عن تفاوتات بين الجوانب النظرية لمنهج وتنظيمه وفهم المعلمين له. ساهمت عوامل عدة مثل ضغوط الامتحانات وانتظار الصدف الدراسي وعدم كفاية التدريب في خلق هذه الفجوات مما قد يؤثر على كفاءة الطلاب في اللغة الإنكليزية في المرحلة الجامعية. ولمعالجة هذه التفاوتات، تقترح الدراسة العديد من الحلول الرئيسية. أولاً، هناك حاجة إلى مراجعة شاملة للمناهج الدراسية لموامة الجانب النظري مع طائق التدريس الحقيقية في المدارس. ومن الضروري أيضاً أن يتم تنظيم حلقات عمل دورية للتطوير المهني لتعزيز فهم المعلمين لطائق التدريس المثالية وتجهيزهم باستراتيجيات فعالة. كما أن برامج الإرشاد وأنظمة الدعم إضافةً إلى مراجعة طرق تقييم كفاءة الطلاب من شأنها أن تعالج التحديات التي تعيق التطبيق الأمثل لمنهج اللغة الإنكليزية في المدارس. يضمن التعاون بين المدارس الثانوية والجامعات التي تقدم تخصصات اللغة الإنكليزية انتقالاً أكثر سلاسة للطلاب؛ ويمكن لمقربي السياسات على الصعيدين الإقليمي والوطني إعطاء الأولوية لتعليم اللغة الإنكليزية ودعم الإصلاحات الشاملة للمناهج. تهدف هذه التدابير إلى سد الفجوة بين الجانب النظري والتطبيق العملي، مما يعزز في النهاية استعداد الطلاب للتعليم العالي باللغة الإنكليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تطبيق المنهج التعليمي؛ الإصلاح التعليمي؛ تدريس اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ تدريب المعلمين

پوخته:

ئەم توپىزىنەمەھە لىكۆلىئەھە لەسەر تىپروانىنى مامۆستايىنى ئامادەبى و چۈنۈتى جىيەجىيەردىنى مەنھەجى ئىنگلەزى دەكەت، كە گىرنگە بۇ ھەلسەنگاندى كارىگەر يەكانى لەسەر ئەو خۇيىندىكارانەى كە بۇ پېرۇگەر امەكانى ئىنگلەزى لەسەر ئاستى زانكۇ دەبزۇپىن. توپىزىنەمەھە كە رىيگاى چاۋپىنەكەمۇتىنى نىمچە-پېرەوبەندو و لېستى پېشىن لە ۱۰ مامۆستاي ئامادەبى لە لازقىيى سورىيا كۆكراونەتەھە، جىاوازى و كەلىن لە نىوان لايەنە تىۋىرەكەنلى مەنھەجى ئىنگلەزى و چۈنۈتى رېكخىستى و تىكەشىتى مامۆستايىن لەبار بىھە دەرەدەخەن. ھۆكەرگەلى جىاوازى وەك فشارى تاقىكەردنەمەكەن، پۇلى قەرەبالۇغ و كەمىي راھىنەن بەشدارن لە درووست بۇونى ئەم كەلىنەنە و ئەگەر يان ھەمە كارىگەرلى لەسەر توانستى خۇيىندىكارى زانكۇ لە بەشى ئىنگلەزى درووست بکەن. بەمەبەستى چارەسەر كەنلى ئەم كەلىن و جىاوازىيان، چەند چارەسەر ئىكى سەرەكى پېشىنار دەكىن. يەكمەم، پېداچوونەھە گشتگىر لە مەنھەجدا پېۋىستە بۇ ئەھەن تىۋىرى و اېستەمە لايەنە پەراكەتىكەنلى پۇلدا بەكىتىت. پېشىمەشىكەنلى وورك شۇپى پەرەپىدانى پېشىمە بەبەر دەۋامى دەتوانىت تىكەشىتى مامۆستايىن بەرز بەكتامو و بە ستراتېتى كارىگەر تەپاريان بىكەت. ھەروەھا، بەرnamەكانى راھىنەر اېتى و سىستەمە پېشىوانى لەكەمەل پېداچوونەھە بە كەلتۈرۈ ھەلسەنگاندىدا دەتوانىن چارەسەر ئاستەنگ و ئالەنگارىيەكانى بەردم چىيەجىيەردىن بکەن.

كىلە وشە: جىيەجىيەردىنى مەنھەج، چاكسازى پەرەردەبى، ئىنگلەزى وەك زمانى بىيانى، راھىنەن ئامۆستايىان.

1. Introduction

Since English serves as a lingua franca, the majority of individuals, whether native or non-native speakers, utilize it as their primary means of communication in business contexts or within business entities. It has witnessed rapid expansion in the modern era, gaining prominence as a commercial language that bridges the gap between different regions of the world (Rao, 2019). English has dominated nearly every sector, including science, engineering, technology, medicine, trade, commerce, research, education, tourism, the Internet, among others. The predominance of English has grown to such an extent that its influence resembles a snowball effect, making it exceedingly challenging to impede. Also, many countries around the world have incorporated English into their educational systems, which in turn magnified the need for highly skilled English teachers (Faez, Karas, & Uchihara, 2019). For this reason, effective English language education has been given priority in the Syrian education system. Teaching English as a foreign language started in Syria in the 1950s, and since then the state of English language teaching has gone through various changes and developments.

The Syrian Ministry of Education (MoE) holds the responsibility for crafting and executing educational curricula within the country. Shalash and Hanna (2009) noted that in 2004, the MoE collaborated with British and American experts to overhaul the existing English curriculum, transitioning from the structural approach to the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach. This initiative led to the creation of a series of textbooks, which not only adopts the principles of CLT but also incorporates global culture alongside content tailored specifically for Syrian students learning English as a foreign language. These textbooks feature materials highlighting notable Syrian figures, their achievements, as well as local cultural and social values. Furthermore, the MoE initiated a two-week teacher-training program to equip educators with the necessary skills to implement the new curriculum effectively.

The purpose of this research is to investigate teachers' perceptions of the revised English textbooks and their impact on teaching practices. Additionally, it explores teachers' opinions regarding the importance of aligning their teaching methods to facilitate a seamless transition for secondary students from school to university, particularly those pursuing English majors. The significance of the study lies in its potential to shed light on the efficacy of the English curriculum implementation in high schools in Latakia, Syria, and its impact on students' readiness for university-level English majors. Understanding high school teachers' perceptions of such transitions is crucial for identifying areas of improvement in the curriculum and teaching practices. Moreover, by uncovering the challenges faced by teachers in delivering the English curriculum effectively, this study can inform the development of targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address these issues. Ultimately, enhancing the alignment between high school education and university expectations can contribute to better outcomes for students pursuing English majors, thus positively impacting their academic and professional trajectories.

2. Research Questions

- 1- How do high school teachers perceive the current English curriculum, and what are their experiences in implementing it?
- 2- What specific challenges do high school teachers in Latakia, Syria face in effectively delivering the English curriculum?
- 3- How do factors such as test pressures, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate training impact teachers' implementation of the English curriculum?
- 4- What are the perceptions of high school teachers in Latakia, Syria regarding the readiness of their students as they transition to pursuing English majors at the university level?

3. Review of Literature

Numerous studies related to teachers' understanding of curriculum innovation and its effects on their classroom practices have been reviewed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue and identify possible areas of research, such as (Hsieh & Wang, 2019; Pratiwi, 2020; Yusuf & Novita, 2020).

3.1 Difficulties of Implementing Reforms

While curricular reforms and innovations are typically well-planned and driven by essential needs for change, numerous studies have indicated that implementing these changes as intended by designers can pose significant challenges (Djafar et al., 2023; Park & Sung, 2013; Wolters, 2015). In contexts where English is taught as a foreign language, both the curriculum materials and the teachers serve as the primary sources of English exposure (Wangdi & Shimray, 2022). Therefore, the success of curricular changes depends largely on teachers' ability to translate theory into effective pedagogical practice.

Orafi (2008) conducted a study on the implementation of curricular reforms in Libya, which involved replacing old textbooks with new ones based on the CLT approach. He discovered that teachers were not fully embracing the suggested changes, as classrooms remained highly teacher-centered, with minimal pair work and a predominant use of Arabic over English. Orafi attributed

these practices to the complex interplay between teachers' beliefs, teaching methods, recent curricular innovations, and educational contexts. Many teachers favored traditional teaching methods based on their own learning experiences, deeming them more suitable than the CLT approach advocated by the new curriculum.

Moreover, Jacobs et al. (2006) and Morgan and Xu (2011) argued that curricular changes often coincided with short training programs that failed to provide adequate opportunities or resources for teacher preparation. As a result, the principles and methods of reform may be distorted or disregarded, hindering genuine change and perpetuating old teaching practices. Therefore, many advocated for viewing reform as a gradual, continuous process, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive teacher-training workshops that integrated theory and practice within the teachers' working environment (Fullan, 2005; Yan & He, 2012).

However, this does not imply disregarding teachers' beliefs and practices. Jaworski (2007) contended that achieving desired changes in pedagogical practices necessitated concerted efforts involving teachers in researching teaching methods and practices, or allowing them to share their insights based on their teaching experiences with educational researchers. Similarly, Addai-Mununkum and Setordzi (2023) highlighted the importance of involving teachers in the change process and leveraging their contextual knowledge to facilitate meaningful reforms.

3.2. Curriculum Implementation in Syria

The situation in Syria mirrors similar challenges seen elsewhere. As mentioned earlier, in 2004, the MoE introduced a new English curriculum rooted in the CLT approach, replacing the previous structural approach that emphasized form over language use (Shalash & Hanna, 2009). Under the old curriculum, English was taught using Arabic, focusing on translation and deductive grammar instruction. Recognizing the drawbacks of this approach, the MoE mandated the new communicative-based curriculum from the early years of schooling, aiming to break the cycle of textbook reliance (Rajab, 2013).

To assess the implementation of the new curriculum, Khoja and Mohapatra (2017) conducted a study in Latakia, Syria, comprising two parts. To begin with, they analyzed textbooks for Grades 11 and 12, crucial for students transitioning to university. Next, they conducted classroom observations, both structured and unstructured, to gauge how teachers were integrating the new curriculum. The results revealed that the new materials emphasized task-based learning, minimizing the use of Arabic and translation. Interactive pair/group work was favored, aiming to engage individual students. Moreover, teaching of lexical items and grammatical rules adopted a discovery approach, rather than the traditional deductive one. Writing instruction focused on the process approach, encouraging collaborative work and exposure to various genres and styles. Specifically, Grade 12 students were to be prepared for essay writing, emphasizing argument development, coherence, and cohesion, aiming to facilitate their transition to higher education with an English major (Khoja & Mohapatra, 2017).

However, classroom observations indicated a gap between the intended curriculum and its implementation. Many teachers focused on formulaic rather than functional aspects of English and continued to rely on translation, despite recommendations to the contrary. Writing instruction was neglected in favor of grammar explanation, and ready-made samples were often provided instead of engaging students in the writing process. Despite the introduction of new textbooks, teaching practices remained largely unchanged. As a result, the study aims to explore the reasons behind this discrepancy by examining teachers' perspectives on the new curriculum.

4. Methodology

The study was based on the data collected from a group of 10 teachers of English working in seven secondary schools located in the city center and suburban areas around Latakia City, Syria. By engaging with 10 participants, it was observed that data saturation was achieved. That is, subsequent to interviewing these 10 teachers, no further themes, patterns, or perspectives surfaced, and the collected data offered a thorough understanding of the research problem. Consequently, the decision to maintain the participant count at 10 was made.

4.1. Participants

In this study, ten teachers of both genders participated. They were teachers at private and public schools in different parts of Latakia, Syria with different years of experience. The details of the participants are shown in the below table;

Table 1, Participants

Teacher	Gender	School			Years of Experience
		Type	Location	Gender	
1	Female	Public	City-center	All-girls	16
2	Female	Public	City-center	All-girls	19
3	Male	Public	City-center	All-boys	33
4	Female	Public	Suburban	All-boys	16
5	Female	Public	Suburban	All-girls	34
6	Male	Public	Suburban	All-girls	30
7	Male	Public	Suburban	Mixed	18
8	Male	Public	Suburban	Mixed	35
9	Female	Public	City-center	Mixed	25
10	Male	Private	Suburban	Mixed	46

Suburban schools, situated in the outskirts surrounding the city center, typically cater to students from homogeneous ethnic and social backgrounds, unlike their counterparts in the city center, where both students and educators come from diverse social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds.

Regarding teacher training, Shalash and Hanna (2009) noted that in 2004, Syria launched the National Training Program in collaboration with the American Cultural Center, the British Council in Damascus, the Syrian Educational Publishers, and local senior supervisors appointed by the MoE. All practicing teachers and those undergoing teacher preparation were required to partake in training

workshops designed to equip them with the necessary skills for implementing the CLT English curriculum. These workshops focused on employing appropriate teaching strategies and techniques, covering various aspects such as lesson planning, classroom management, language skill development and integration, effective teaching methods, autonomous learning, assessment, and teacher training. Some of the trained educators may later transition into roles as teacher trainers.

Evaluation criteria for teacher trainers at the conclusion of the training program encompassed their ability to establish training objectives, develop lesson plans, effectively employ diverse training techniques, assess the impact of training programs, conduct needs assessments, and provide support to practicing teachers.

4.2. Instruments

The study employed a mixed-method approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews and two evaluative checklists developed by Keban, Muhtar, and Zen (2012) and Williams (1983) to gather data on teachers' perceptions of the curriculum, its impact on their teaching practices, and their perspectives on bridging school education with higher education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with English teachers within the school premises, with the permission of both the school principals and the teachers themselves. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes, providing ample opportunity for participants to express their ideas. A predefined set of questions related to the research topic guided the interviews, allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their responses. The interviews were structured into three parts: the first part explored the teachers' educational backgrounds, the second part focused on their teaching methods, and the third part delved into their approaches to writing instruction and facilitating the transition from school-level writing to academic writing at the university level. All teachers expressed a preference for conducting the interviews in English, viewing it as an opportunity to practice their conversational English skills, which they felt had been neglected for some time.

Following the interviews, the same teachers completed two checklists designed to evaluate their perceptions of the appropriateness of the learning materials featured in the new series of textbooks. Despite their busy schedules, all teachers returned the checklists fully completed within a few days. The first checklist, derived from the work of Keban et al. (2012), was crafted based on the textbook evaluation and analysis methodologies outlined by Cummingsworth (1995) and Litz (2005). This checklist comprised six key categories: 1. curriculum objectives, 2. Curriculum design and organization, 3. language skills, 4. language content, 5. topics, and 6. practical elements. Each category included 3 to 5 specific elements for assessment. Ratings were assigned on a 100-point scale, with scores ranging from 0 to 25 indicating poor, 26 to 50 indicating fair, 51 to 75 indicating good, and 76 to 100 indicating excellent suitability.

The second checklist, as described by Williams (1983), was grounded in four assumptions concerning the teaching of second languages. It evaluated: 1. teaching methods, 2. guidance for non-native teachers, 3. learner needs, and 4. learners' sociocultural environment. Evaluating these aspects was done by looking into pedagogical and linguistic variables, such as grammar, speaking skills, writing skills, and vocabulary. The items were evaluated based on a five-point scale (0–4), where 4 = very high, 3 = high, 2 = to average, 1 = barely, and 0 = not at all. Alharbi (2015) noted that both

checklists featured clear terminologies and variables, ensuring that all participants would interpret the assessment scale and assessed items consistently.

5. Data Analysis

Belotto (2018) proposed that the process of analyzing qualitative data is more cyclical than linear. In this study, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed, followed by a two-cycle coding process. In the initial cycle, descriptive coding was employed, whereby each passage in the transcribed data was assigned a code corresponding to its main topic (refer to Table 2 below). For instance, the code "linking levels" was applied to sections discussing the connection between school and university education. Saldaña (2021) suggested that descriptive coding was applicable across all qualitative studies, proving particularly beneficial when dealing with multiple data sources, as is the case in this study.

The next cycle of coding adopted in this study was pattern coding, characterized by its explanatory nature. This approach identifies emerging themes and seeks to uncover their underlying causes within the dataset (Dawadi, 2020). For example, throughout the interviews, several teachers highlighted the challenges arising from large class sizes and the pressures associated with the Grade 12 national examination.

Table 2, Descriptive Coding of Interviews

Teacher	Transcribed Text	Emerging Theme	Code Assigned
Teacher 1	What do you want to hear, dear? Is it that I don't do writing in class? It's true. I do not. How can I do it when there are 45 girls in the class ¹ ? Or you know what? Why would I do it if it isn't even important for the exam ² ? I only give them a sample they can memorize or copy in the test to get a great score.	Overcrowded classrooms	1 BIG NUMBER
Teacher 4	I think I will be more beneficial for my students when I focus on what is necessary for the exam. Speaking or writing practices push students to complain because the two skills do not to be mastered for the exam ² .	The effects of examination on teaching	2 TEST EFFECT

Regarding the evaluative checklists, descriptive statistics was employed to analyze them. This involved measuring frequency and central tendency by calculating the mean and critical values for each feature included in both checklists. Utilizing measures of central tendency, alongside frequency, facilitated the provision of precise insights into teachers' perspectives and stances regarding the current curriculum.

5.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

The teaching methods employed by the majority of the teachers exhibited similar patterns, resulting in comparable perspectives on teaching practices and shared experiences. Notably, the teaching experience of the educators ranged from 16 to 46 years, with all possessing English degrees, and 80% holding Diplomas in Education. While many participated in post-service training workshops for the new curriculum, teachers commonly remarked that these sessions primarily consisted of passive listening without meaningful interaction between trainers and trainees, or among the participants themselves. For instance, Teacher 4 expressed:

Frankly, I attended numerous training workshops, but the atmosphere was incredibly dull, reminiscent of my school days. We, the trainees, were all seated in rows, merely listening to instructions without any opportunities for engaging discussions with the trainer or amongst ourselves. Some of my colleagues opted to drop out of the workshop altogether due to the lack of any tangible benefits.

Furthermore, the teachers encountered obstacles in implementing the methods and strategies associated with communicative language teaching for various reasons. Among those who did not participate in any workshops, there was a prevailing negative sentiment, exemplified by Teacher 1, who opted out of workshops entirely, stating, "I am sure I didn't miss anything of importance there. Plus, I am very confident I am a skilled teacher, and I have been doing it for 16 years."

In addition to this self-assurance, many teachers harbored doubts about the applicability of what they had learned during training in the classroom. Only one teacher mentioned consulting the Teachers' Book for guidance, while the rest either did not utilize it or did not have access to a copy. Despite recognizing the valuable ideas, suggestions, plans, and sample tests provided in the teacher's guide, they found it exceedingly challenging to implement these suggestions or effectively teach English while minimizing the use of Arabic and emphasizing the development of English language skills as advocated in the textbooks. The challenges identified included overcrowded classrooms, with student numbers sometimes reaching 50-60, the pressure of examinations, societal expectations to cover the curriculum swiftly and ensure high student achievement, and economic pressures. In fact, 90% of the teachers juggled additional jobs due to inadequate salaries, further diverting their time, focus, and energy away from lesson planning and exacerbating work-related stress.

Teacher 3 recounted a conversation with an American expert involved in developing the new curriculum alongside the MoE. The expert emphasized the need to change assessment methods for any meaningful reform to occur, highlighting a prevalent focus on exam scores among teachers, students, and parents. Additionally, Teacher 3 admitted to prioritizing exam-oriented teaching even with his own children at home. Teacher 8, who also worked as a private English tutor, spoke about the financial struggles faced by educators, particularly in light of ongoing Syrian crises and rising living expenses.

While all teachers shared the common goal of effectively teaching English, 40% expressed concerns about the curriculum's lack of emphasis on grammar depth and value, arguing for more substantial grammar teaching. Regarding language skills, 90% of teachers confessed to skipping listening and speaking exercises due to inadequate resources and large class sizes. They noted that

student scores in these areas were not considered in the final Grade 12 examination. Teacher 9 acknowledged a personal preference for speaking practice but deemed it impractical for Grade 12 students due to exam focus.

Teachers stressed the importance of grammar and vocabulary, often taught in Arabic, and dismissed alternative teaching methods like the discovery approach or inductive methods. They justified their reliance on translation, citing constraints such as large class sizes, lack of equipment, and student proficiency levels. Additionally, they questioned the utility of discussing reading passages since speaking skills weren't assessed. Teacher 2 expressed frustration with the pressure to cover the curriculum quickly, dismissing suggestions like using dictionaries or engaging in group work as impractical given the classroom realities.

Regarding writing instruction, teachers mentioned they lacked time to regularly assign writing tasks due to teaching multiple sections of Grades 11 and 12. Consequently, they often provided pre-written samples of tasks, and some even omitted writing altogether since answers were readily available for purchase. Teacher 1 bluntly stated that with large class sizes and no test emphasis on writing, she focused solely on giving students samples to memorize and get good test scores. As for Supplementary Books, teachers typically covered them in Grade 12, deeming them important for the final test, but considered them unnecessary in Grade 11 since test content was determined by school teachers. Despite containing valuable information on literature and academic writing, teachers saw no benefit in teaching them, expressing disdain for their content. In addition, teachers acknowledged designing tests modeled after the national examination but admitted the scores didn't reflect true competence, as students could pass through memorization. Teacher 9 pondered on the matter, expressing frustration:

When you really think about it, you come to see how dire the situation is. I am deeply passionate about my profession, yet I find myself unable to teach it in the manner I desire. My focus is solely on the test. Consequently, students aren't truly learning English for the language itself. Do you understand what I'm getting at? They view it merely as a means to achieve high scores, which are then aggregated with scores from other subjects. Our exam, however, fails to accurately reflect their actual proficiency levels. Instead, it merely showcases their skills in memorization.

Teachers seemed unaware of preparing students for university, lacking knowledge of academic writing requirements. They were unsure if they would teach differently for university-bound students. Teacher 5, for instance, suggested sharing his personal university experiences with students but doubted its relevance. None of the teachers saw school English as vital preparation for university English studies. Teacher 10 firmly stated, "School education ends at school and has no bearing on the future."

5.2. Results of Checklists

Table 3 below presents the results of the checklist developed by Keban et al. (2012)

Table 3, Teachers' Responses to Items in the Checklist Created by Keban et al. (2012)

Item No.	Items	Score			
		Poor 0-25	Fair 26-50	Good 51-75	Excellent 76-100
Curriculum Objectives					
1	The objectives of the textbook closely align with those outlined in the teaching curriculum.	0%	0%	70%	30%
2	Both teachers and students have a clear understanding of the objectives set forth by the materials.	0%	10%	50%	40%
3	The objectives are structured in a systematic manner.	0%	20%	50%	30%
4	The textbooks accommodate various teaching and learning styles.	0%	20%	50%	30%
Curriculum Design and Organization					
1	The layout and design, including the use of pictures and color, are suitable and easy to understand.	0%	20%	30%	50%
2	The textbooks are effectively organized, with content arranged by topics and skills for efficient learning.	0%	20%	20%	60%
3	The students' books provide guidance on how they can be utilized effectively.	20%	10%	30%	40%
4	The textbooks are supplemented by additional teaching and learning materials such as the Teacher's Book and CDs.	10%	20%	20%	50%
5	The textbooks featured review sections and included vocabulary lists or glossaries for reference.	0%	0%	30%	70%
Language Skills					
1	All language skills, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing, are harmoniously integrated within each unit of the textbooks.	0%	20%	30%	50%
2	The listening activities is suitable for learners.	10%	20%	50%	20%
3	The speaking activities is suitable for learners.	0%	40%	40%	20%
4	The reading passages are adequate and suitable for the learners' level and ability.	0%	30%	50%	20%
5	The writing activities are tailored to the learner's proficiency level.	0%	30%	50%	20%
Language Content					
1	The language used in the textbook is authentic, resembling real-life English.	10%	0%	60%	30%
2	The grammar items are suitable for young learners.	0%	10%	50%	40%
3	The vocabulary items are suitable for the young learners.	0%	10%	40%	50%
Topics					
1	The topics covered in the textbook are relevant to the needs of young learners as English language learners.	10%	30%	30%	30%
2	The topics covered in the textbook are engaging, stimulating, and motivating for students.	0%	50%	20%	30%
3	The textbook offers a diverse range of topics to maintain student interest and engagement.	0%	20%	50%	30%
Practical Elements					
1	The textbooks are affordable.	10%	30%	20%	40%
2	The textbooks are durable.	10%	30%	20%	40%
3	The textbooks are readily available and were published recently.	0%	20%	20%	60%

Table 4, Teachers' Assessment of the Sub-Categories in the Checklist Created by Keban et al. (2012)

Items	Mean	Critical Value	Result	Score Range
Curriculum objectives	12.8	10	Positive	Good (51 – 75)
Curriculum design and organization	16.4	12.5	Positive	Excellent (76 – 100)
Language skills	14.7	12.5	Positive	Good (51 – 75)
Language content	9.8	7.5	Positive	Good (51 – 75)
Topics	8.7	7.5	Positive	Good (51 – 75) + Fair (26 – 50)
Practical elements	9.2	7.5	Positive	Excellent (76 – 100)
Overall score	Mean	Critical value	Result	
	71.6	57.5	Positive*	

*Since the sample mean= 71.6 \geq theoretical mean= 57.5, the evaluation is positive.

Table 5, Teachers' Responses to Items in the Checklist Created by Williams (1983)

Item No.	Items	Score				
		Very high	High	Average	Barely at all	0
4	3	2	1	0		
General Features						
1	It adopts modern teaching methods.	0%	40%	60%	0%	0%
2	It offers advice to English instructors who are not native speakers.	20%	50%	20%	10%	0%
3	It caters to individual differences in language background.	0%	10%	80%	10%	0%
4	It addresses variations in language background among individuals.	20%	60%	20%	0%	0%
Speaking Skills						
1	It relies on the comparison of the phonetic structures of English and Arabic.	10%	0%	30%	60%	0%
2	It proposes methods for illustrating and rehearsing speech elements.	10%	50%	20%	20%	0%
3	It includes speech situations relevant to the students' background.	10%	50%	20%	10%	10%
4	It accommodates different accents among non-native English speakers.	10%	10%	40%	20%	20%
Grammar						
1	It emphasizes the importance of communication skills when teaching structural elements.	10%	30%	60%	0%	0%
2	Sufficient examples of the structures to be taught are provided.	20%	50%	20%	10%	0%
3	It clearly illustrates the types of responses expected in exercises.	20%	20%	50%	10%	0%

4	It chooses structures that highlight differences between the first language (L1) and second language (L2) cultures.	0%	20%	30%	40%	10%
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Vocabulary

1	It chooses vocabulary based on factors such as frequency of use and functional relevance.	50%	20%	20%	10%	0%
2	It differentiates between the skills of understanding and using vocabulary in teaching.	20%	50%	30%	0%	0%
3	It introduces vocabulary within suitable contexts and scenarios.	30%	40%	30%	0%	0%
4	It concentrates on issues of usage linked to social context or background.	0%	20%	60%	10%	10%

Reading Skills

1	It provides exercises designed to help grasp both explicit and implicit meanings.	20%	60%	10%	10%	0%
2	It connects reading passages with the learners' prior knowledge and experiences.	0%	80%	20%	0%	0%
3	It selects passages within the vocabulary range of the students.	0%	90%	10%	0%	0%
4	It chooses passages that fall within the vocabulary range of the students.	20%	50%	30%	0%	0%

Writing Skills

1	It connects written assignments with the oral structures and vocabulary that have been practiced.	10%	50%	30%	10%	0%
2	It provides exercises for controlled and guided composition during the initial stages.	10%	60%	20%	10%	0%
3	It connects written assignments to the students' age, interests, and surroundings.	10%	50%	30%	10%	0%
4	It illustrates techniques for teaching various aspects of writing.	10%	40%	20%	30%	0%

Technical Aspects

1	The textbooks are up-to-date and have modern designs.	30%	10%	50%	10%	0%
2	The textbooks have high quality editing and publishing.	20%	50%	10%	20%	0%
3	The textbooks are durable and affordable.	30%	40%	20%	0%	10%
4	The contents are authentic.	10%	60%	30%	0%	0%

Table 6, Teachers' Assessment of the Sub-Categories in the Checklist Created by Williams (1983)

Items	Mean	Critical value	Result	Score range
General features	19	12	Positive	Average
Speaking skills	12.2	12	Positive	Average
Grammar	13.4	12	Positive	Average
Vocabulary	14.9	12	Positive	Average
Reading skills	15.5	12	Positive	Very high
Writing skills	14.2	12	Positive	Very high
Technical aspects	14.9	12	Positive	Very high
Overall score	Mean 104.1	Critical value 84	Result Positive*	

*Since the sample mean= 104.1 \geq theoretical mean= 84, the evaluation is positive.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this study shed light on the significant imbalance between the theoretical aspects of the English curriculum and its implementation in high school classrooms. Despite the importance of a well-designed and strong English curriculum in preparing students for university-level English majors, several challenges were identified. One key issue highlighted by the study is the inconsistency between the theoretical framework of the curriculum and its practical application in classrooms. High school teachers reported difficulties in implementing the curriculum effectively, citing factors such as test pressures, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate training as major barriers. These challenges not only affect the quality of English education but also have implications for students' readiness for university-level English majors.

The study also emphasizes the importance of addressing these challenges from different sides. One proposed solution is the need for a comprehensive review of the English curriculum to ensure alignment between theory and practice. This review should take into account the specific needs and challenges faced by high school English teachers, with the aim of improving the overall quality of English education. In addition to curriculum reform, the study recommends providing regular professional development workshops for high school teachers. These workshops can help enhance teachers' understanding of the curriculum and equip them with effective teaching strategies. Furthermore, mentorship programs and support systems can provide teachers with the guidance and assistance they need to overcome implementation challenges. Another important recommendation is the revision of assessment practices to better align with the goals of the English curriculum. By reevaluating assessment methods and criteria, high schools can ensure that students are adequately prepared for university-level English majors. Moreover, collaboration between high schools and universities offering English majors is essential to facilitate smoother transitions for students. By establishing closer ties between high schools and universities, teachers can better understand the expectations and requirements of university-level English programs, thus better preparing students for higher education.

By addressing issues such as test pressures, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate training, stakeholders can improve the quality of English education and better prepare students for higher education. Recommendations such as curriculum review, professional development workshops, mentorship programs, and policy advocacy offer practical solutions for addressing these challenges.

Ultimately, the goal of these reforms is to enhance students' readiness for university-level English majors and ensure a smoother transition from high school to higher education. By implementing these recommendations, educators and policymakers can work together to improve the overall quality of English education in Latakia and beyond. The challenges identified during this research are summarized in the below table.

Table 7, Challenges Encountered by English Teachers and Their Impact on Teaching Methods

Challenges	Results
The washback effect of the Grade 12 national test	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Teachers focus on what is important for the test.They neglect skills not included in the test.They focus on the product rather than the process of learning, especially in writing.
Lack of trained staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Teachers select what they deem as appropriate methods of teaching.They neglect the importance of covering all parts of the curriculum.Teachers are unable to handle challenging situations, such as crowded classes.They fail to consult the Teacher's Book to assist them in planning lessons.Teacher-centered classroom.
Overcrowded classrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Hinders effective teaching and understanding.Noise.Exhausting and boring classroom.
Lack of audio-visual aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Depending on translation.Boring lessons.Absence of interaction and group/ pair work.
Curriculum design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Loaded with materials.The design does not consider the time available.Tendency to rely on translation.Formulating everything in L1.Affects pronunciation and fluency of speech.Affects writing skills.Students become afraid of speaking.
Depending on L1	
Working additional jobs due to weak economic conditions of teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Finding other jobs.No time is available for lesson planning.Teachers lack enthusiasm and motivation.

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