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A STUDY ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW CURRICULUM POLICY IN COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN WEINAN, SHAANXI, CHINA

BY

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Abstract

This study takes the English teaching in the compulsory education stage of Weinan as the research context, focusing on the policy practice and policy implementation of the first-line English teachers as well as the other policy implementers, including principals and inspectors, explore the implementation of the English curriculum in the compulsory education stage. It attempts to investigate the difficulties encountered by the English teachers in implementing the new curriculum, explore the factors that hinder the English teachers in implementing the new curriculum. In this study, qualitative research was used, and semi-structured interviews were conducted among four administrative inspectors, six school principals, and twelve English teachers.

The study also found that the main difficulties faced by English teachers in implementing the new curriculum were: the implementation of content and language-integrated learning, the implementation of competency-based approach, and classroom management. In addition, this study revealed the factors affecting the implementation of the new curriculum from four aspects, teacher-related factors, learner-related factors, curriculum-related factors, and factors related to management. The evidence of this study indicates that the government should not only pay attention to top-level design when formulating the new curriculum, but also to the operability and implementation of the curriculum, and provide English teachers with more specific implementing methods and skills. To help English teachers better understand the concept of the curriculum and better promote the implementation of the curriculum policy.

Keywords: *English language teachers, implementation, new curriculum, compulsory education stage*

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Teachers' efforts in and out of the classroom are critical to the success of foreign language curriculum implementation. The problem of achieving educational goals does not rely entirely on the curriculum but also on the teachers' knowledge who enacted it in school (Ahyuni et al., 2024). Teachers strive to maintain classroom interaction, which is the most important mirror in the curriculum implementation process because it happens every day and in countless numbers (Jones & Dindia, 2004). When Ellis (2000, 2009) emphasized by saying that "learning does not develop through interaction but in interaction." Therefore, English classroom interaction needs to give a true picture of classroom practice and learning goals (Huth, 2011).

Several studies have explored the factors that hinder or promote teacher-student contact. Accessibility, interests, and tendencies of teacher interaction (Cotten and Wilson, 2006; Hurtado et al., 2011; Claudia et al., 2019), the sense of urgency expressed by teachers in the classroom (Cotten & Wilson, 2006), the large classroom (Hurtado et al., 2011; Claudia et al., 2019) and temperament (Keogh, 2003) influence the frequency and quality of interactions. Teacher belief (Li and Walsh, 2011; Chen, 2021), meaningful negotiation (Schaap et al., 2016), scaffolding, student engagement

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and motivation (Pianta et al., 2012; Quintuplets,2017; Xerri et al., 2018) and students' sense of belonging to institutions (Dwyer, 2017) have all been examined in other studies.

RESEARCH PROBLEMS

Personal and national development is one of the targeted purposes of any country. To this end, the curriculum should be credited to experts and scientists as the first useful channel through which knowledge and skills of different kinds and resources are incorporated. As such, it is designed with an emphasis on answering and meeting the needs and expectations of stakeholders. Simultaneously, its implementation is the basis of explaining its application in the real context. With this principle in mind, curriculum implementation is a concern for educators and is considered indispensable. The literature shows that curriculum implementation is one of the most important issues in education (Celik & Kasapoglu, 2014; Gobingea et al., 2017; Chien, 2020).

The English curriculum implementation has become the most common concern of educational stakeholders and scholars (Okoth, 2016; Rahimi & Alavi, 2017; Rahman et al., 2018; Muhammad, 2020; Deng, 2021). It is increasingly being recognized as a new scope that needs development (Borko & Klingner, 2013; Hussein, 2018; Chien, 2020; Thi Thanh, T. D., Sellars & Le, 2022). Most of the studies tackled focused on exploring it in English and Western countries context (Romero et al., 2014; De las Nieves Pereira et al., 2016; Kim Dao, 2017; Watanabe, 2018; Miguel & Izquierdo, 2023). Furthermore, a close examination of the literature pertaining to the subject in question enables the researcher to realize that curriculum implementation in the context of English has received a lot of attention in China in recent years, and at present, no academic experts have conducted any research on the implementation of English curriculum in the researcher's region. In addition, because the new compulsory education curriculum standards has been used for the first time since 2022, there are few studies on the implementation of this version of English curriculum in the schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To carry out this study and achieve the aims mentioned above, the following research questions are formulated:

Q1: What difficulties do English teachers encounter while implementing the current curriculum in the basic education schools in Weinan?
Q2: What major factors hinder English teachers from implementing the current curriculum in the basic education schools in Weinan?

RESEARCH METHODS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted among inspectors, school principals, and teachers. In terms of interview design, Patton's (2002) interview guide approach points out that interview guides contain topics or areas to be investigated, explored, and interrogated in order to explain and highlight the specific issues being studied. In this case, Adams (2015) notes, "You must develop an agenda for the interview guide, an outline of the planned topics, and questions to be addressed, in preliminary order." This guide provides the axis on which questions arise, the order of those questions, and the structure for determining further information (Patton, 2002). The researcher first used the research questions as research guide to determine the main points of the interview. This paper mainly puts forward two themes, namely, the difficulties in the implementation of English curriculum and the factors affecting the implementation of English curriculum. The first includes questions about teachers' perceptions of the difficulty of curriculum implementation. The second aspect of the interview, from the perspective of inspectors, school principals, and teachers, addresses the factors that influence the implementation of the English curriculum.

The researcher has started interviewing inspectors, principals, and teachers. Some participants put off the interview. The researcher has adjusted the date of the interview according to the time of the participants. All interviews were conducted at a location of their choice. The reason is the desire to create an atmosphere in which participants did not feel anxiety or other external fears. However, the length of the interview was different for each participant, with some taking about 20 minutes and the rest about 15 minutes. As the English level is not high, the interviews with principals were conducted in Chinese. Besides, some other participants used part of Chinese in their interviews, because English was used as a foreign language, and they were not very fluent, so using their mother tongue could let them freely share all their ideas. Since the interview could be written and recorded, it seemed impossible for me to get all the points on record. So after they agreed, I recorded the interview.

The interviewees are English course inspectors, principals, and English teachers. These participants were all from Weinan, including urban and rural areas. The criteria for selecting inspectors are the years of inspecting experience, while the criteria for selecting principals and teachers are the location of the school and teaching experiences. Four inspectors, six principals, and twelve teachers participated in the interview. The codes used for the participants were: "WNI" for inspectors, "WNP" for principals, and "WNT" for teachers. The following table lists the participants in the semi-structured interview.

Participant	Job	Location	Working experience	Gender
WNI-01	Inspector	Urban	09 years	female
WNI-02	Inspector	Urban	13 years	male
WNI-03	Inspector	Rural	10years	female
WNI-04	Inspector	Rural	07 years	female
WNP-01	Principal	Urban	09 years	male
WNP-02	Principal	Urban	10 years	male
WNP-03	Principal	Urban	11 years	female
WNP-04	Principal	Rural	10 years	male

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WNP-05	Principal	Rural	06 years	male
WNP-06	Principal	Rural	05 years	male
WNT-01	Teacher	Urban	04 years	Female
WNT-02	Teacher	Urban	09 years	Female
WNT-03	Teacher	Urban	05 years	Female
WNT-04	Teacher	Urban	10 years	Male
WNT-05	Teacher	Urban	08 years	Female
WNT-06	Teacher	Urban	17 years	Male
WNT-07	Teacher	Rural	10 years	Female
WNT-08	Teacher	Rural	05 years	Female
WNT-09	Teacher	Rural	12 years	Male
WNT-10	Teacher	Rural	15 years	Female
WNT-11	Teacher	Rural	08 years	Female
WNT-12	Teacher	Rural	11 years	Female

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Q1: What difficulties do English teachers encounter while implementing the current curriculum in the basic education schools in Weinan?

The analysis revealed four main difficulties faced by teachers in the compulsory stage in Weinan in implementing English curriculum: the implementation of competency-based approach, the implementation of content and language integration learning, and classroom management.

1. COMTEPETENCY BASED APPROACH

The data analysis highlighted how difficult it was for teachers to apply competency-based approach in the classroom. It can be seen from the data analysis that the competency-based approach was not fully implemented. Teaching was still teacher-based, and students became passive stakeholders with little involvement. For example, in the ninth grade English class of WNT-05, the teacher reviewed the "passive voice" in English based on the content of the textbook. The teacher began by asking the students if they knew the general rules of the passive voice. The students answered "yes". The teacher wrote a sentence on the blackboard and asked one student to change it into the passive voice. The teacher was surprised that the student could not do the task. The teacher then asked another student to do the same task but with the same result. After trying it out with five students, the teacher realized that not all of the students were familiar with the passive voice, even though they had learned it previously in their seventh and eighth grades. After that, the teacher used the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) teaching method to teach passive voice sentences. The teacher started with the demonstration phase, in which she gave clear instructions. However, this section lacked the participation of students, and the teacher was the only source of knowledge. Then the teacher came to the practice stage. Here, the teacher provided constructive feedback on the students' performance to encourage them to complete the task successfully. This stage, in which students were able to complete the task with the help of the teacher, seemed acceptable. However, the production stage was different from the practice stage. Many learners could not handle these activities without the teacher and her guidance; they could not change sentences from active voice to passive voice. The teacher tried her best to pass on knowledge to the students. However, this process did not seem to be ideal. When the teacher was asked about this, she put it down to the students' low level and lack of interest. She commented:

While the competency-based approach is recommended in teaching, most students are unable to handle activities. I am surprised that they can't do the task alone and still rely on the teacher. Although I have made great efforts in the presentation stage and deviated from my role in the practice stage, in the production stage, students still like to be the recipient.

2. CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING

The application of content and language integration learning has also become a challenging process. For example, WNT-03 taught the reading section of Unit 2 of Module 9, Book 2, Grade 8. She told the students the title of the text and asked them to open their textbook to page 75. Then she looked at the reading and wrote the questions on the board. She divided the students into two groups of two students, or pairs of assignments. She read the first question and asked the students to answer it within seven minutes. The students couldn't finish the task on time. Therefore, some students attended, while others remained silent. Then the teacher began to answer the next question. The process continued in the same way, with little student participation and no completion of the task. This problem could seem challenging because not all students participated and time was limited. When the teacher was asked about this, she explained:

As you can see, the application of content and language integration learning makes little sense. Because not all students were involved and not all questions were completed, so the implementation of the content and language integration learning was inadequate. The essence of integration is to allow students to use language in different situations and contexts, including listening, grammar, vocabulary, writing, etc. The first problem is about time. The implementation of content and language integration learning needs to give both teachers and students much longer time, which seems impossible, and the English course itself has so much content that I cannot devote too much time to just one reading material. The second problem is the low level of students. Although these questions were related to the previous lessons of the unit they had been exposed to before, they were unable to answer them. Here, the problem has to do with their language background. They don't learn the language well from the very beginning and can't use it freely.

The difficulty of application content and language integration learning was also noted in the classroom observations of another

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teacher (WNT-12). The teacher was dealing with the Unit 3 Language in Use of Module 9 in Volume 1, Grade 7. The teacher began to divide the class into ten groups of five students each. Then, according to the prompts in the textbook, she asked students to combine what they had learned and use the text information at hand to introduce different places and people's activities in different worlds. She suggested that students use English-Chinese dictionaries when necessary. The students collaborated to begin the work. However, this process took a long time, the students all needed to use the dictionary, and the teacher could not complete the task in one class. It was pointed out that although students used dictionaries, they could not make correct sentences, except for few of students. This problem seemed very challenging to the teacher. Her attention was focused on the correct use of words, pronunciation, and the structure of words in a sentence, the relevance of the sentence to the issue under discussion, and the participation of keywords learned. When asked, she asserted:

Content and language integration learning is hard to implement. I know it is very effective, but it is not easy to apply for students who are not good at English. The purpose of allowing them to use dictionaries to translate unfamiliar words from English to Chinese is that I realize dictionaries can help students reduce the time they need to complete each task.

3. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Classroom management is an integral part of any classroom and teaching process and can be a challenge for teachers. WNT-01 manages her class according to the learners' ability, and each student with a good level of English was asked to join a group of three students with lower level of English. Of the 44 students in the class, only 13 are at a good level, and the rest are not. However, this method was considered ineffective because all the work was done by students who had a better level of English. They did approach and correct activities on their own with little, if not none, collaboration with students with lower English proficiency. In the eyes of the teacher, classroom management would seem impossible if relying solely on the work of individuals: the classes are heterogeneous, involving different abilities, and a small number of students were at a high level. He stated:

I find the classroom management of this class not easy. There are 44 students of different abilities. The way I managed them (group work) affected their learning, and those with low levels were hardly involved in activities. Here, the balance between high and low-level learners in the task does not exist. If I also managed them based on individual work, I would find that they take a long time to complete tasks and understand lessons.

In addition, it was noted that WNT-08 also chose to students' working-groups. The sixth-grade teacher was teaching the reading section of Unit 3 of the textbook. At the beginning, the students were asked to read the text silently, pick out the difficult words, and answer the first two questions. The process was a bit noisy, causing the teacher to stop group work and rely on individual work. Unexpectedly, the individual work were characterized by small chatting among students. The problem was more serious, indicating difficulties in managing the classroom. When asked, the teacher admitted, "*I did my best to get students to work collaboratively on the task and then individually, but that approach didn't work with noisy learners. Classroom management of low level students is a big challenge to me and not easy to control*" (WNT-08).

Based on classroom observations and interviews, the above discussion revolves around class management. From the researcher's own eyes, the reasons why classroom management is not successful include the large size of the class and the low proficiency of the language learners.

Q2: What major factors hinder English teachers from implementing the current curriculum in the basic education schools in Weinan?

In order to provide a holistic picture of the issue, the researcher explored the perspectives and practices of the participants. The results show that the implementation of the new English curriculum is inefficient, as the analysis raises some challenges and issues.

1. TEACHER-RELATED FACTORS

Some categories related to teachers become the factors that affect the implementation of the new English curriculum in the compulsory stage in Weinan. Participants highlighted their understanding, beliefs, and trust in colleagues as the main standout factors.

A. Teachers Understanding

The interview analysis proved an important fact related to teachers' understanding of the new English curriculum. Inspectors, school leaders and teachers themselves agreed that teachers misunderstood the main principles and content of the curriculum (WNI-01, WNI-02, WNI-03, WNI-04, WNP-01, WNP-02, WNP-03, WNP-04, WNP-05, WNP-06, WNT-01, WNT-04 , WNT-07, WNT-08, WNT-10).

One inspector concluded that "teachers are far from forming good and consistent plans of the curriculum because they do not align their sights with the intentions of policy-makers" (WNP-03). The same view was confirmed by another inspector, who attributed the misunderstanding to the teachers' negative perception of the curriculum (WNP-01, WNP-03). These inspectors further elaborated that this misunderstanding was due to "too much focus on belief" (WNP-01, WNP-03), and that teachers' negative perceptions of the new English curriculum were at the root of the problem. Two school principals also expressed their concern about teachers' implementation of the English curriculum. For example, one principal reported "*lack of knowledge to use speaking activities in the textbooks because teachers felt that speaking activities did not do much to improve students' English proficiency and achievement*" (WNP-03). The principal explained that teachers should show much concern with teaching oral interactive activities in the classroom to help learners improve their English. The leader described completing the curriculum implementation process as "a

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disaster", linking curriculum misconceptions directly to teachers' beliefs about intent and practice. In this regard, it can be admitted that the issue is more about the relationship between beliefs and understanding. In addition, the second principal affirmed the same problem without mentioning the teachers' beliefs. He reported that teachers' lack of understanding of the curriculum led them to be more willing to ask other teachers about lesson plans in order to avoid being embarrassed by misunderstandings about the curriculum" (WNP-05).

B. Teachers Beliefs

The data show that teachers' belief is a focal factor. Although belief is invisible, it affects the teachers' stance and attitude towards the curriculum. Some teachers may be influenced by their prior knowledge of previous curriculum. WNT-04 confirms this:

In some of the teaching courses I have attended, I have noticed that some teachers always refer to the previous curriculum while adopting the new curriculum. The examination system has not changed, and the teaching objectives has not changed much. Both adopt CBA at the basis and the main teaching method used in teaching. Most of the contradictions between the objectives and principles of the curriculum are here. The teachers' perception that the previous curriculum is similar to the new curriculum takes the teacher in a different and wrong direction, which does nothing to help the implementation of the new curriculum.

WNT-06 also stated:

Another issue that needs to be emphasized is the belief of teachers. This is crucial because it affects the way the implementation is carried out. Many teachers rely on previous curriculum when choosing activities. This is not acceptable because the new curriculum is different from the previous one. The curriculum is based on teaching learners' core literacy through the use of new methods that have not been used before.

Some teachers stick with the previous curriculum because they think it will help them implement the current curriculum. The view was expressed that implementation might run the risk of appearing inefficient and aimless. Similarly, teachers have expressed the same concerns. One teacher pointed out:

In order for teachers to correctly follow the curriculum principles and curriculum content, teachers must have a clear belief in the curriculum. Some teachers, usually, if not always, display negative beliefs about the curriculum, which leads them to lack confidence in the curriculum and therefore not to adhere to the principles of the curriculum. (WNT-09)

C. Trust in Colleagues

Teachers held a consensus that the impact of trust on their implementation of the new curriculum. They expressed the trust put peer pressure on them and they felt unsafe and unease throughout the co-op lesson planning. WNT-08 stated:

I don't have a high level of trust with my colleagues. Everyone doesn't ask for help with lesson planning. Everyone thinks others will be jealous of his/her lesson plan. Therefore, I feel that everyone is working alone and not trying to improve the level. This ultimately moves the teacher away from the usual standard of having a satisfactory initiative in the implementation of the curriculum.

Another teacher commented, "*The other thing is trust in colleagues. High trust is the guarantee of success of the curriculum implementation. I confirm that the level of trust has decreased, which makes it difficult to get excellent lesson planning*" (WNT-06).

Both teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their level of trust in their colleagues. Because they had lost trust, the teachers thought the lesson plans were ineffective. One of the teachers cited low trust as a factor preventing teachers from implementing English curriculum. Similarly, another teacher declared:

Unfortunately, trust among teachers is largely unsatisfactory. Every teacher has negative feelings and attitudes toward others. Each thought the other was using him or her to get what he wanted. This bad situation destroyed the rapport between them, each working for his own benefit and forgetting to create an environment suitable for educational learners (WNT-01).

The teacher confirmed that their attitude towards each other was negative. Teachers have no sense or willingness to interact. Therefore, it is not surprising that teachers do not have a good school environment that is most suitable for the implementation of English curriculum.

2. *CURRICULUM-RELATED FACTORS*

A. English Curriculum Complexity

Another key factor highlighted by participants was the complexity of the curriculum. Most participants were negative about the claim that the new curriculum would boost teaching ability. Instead, they mentioned that they tried to simplify the process to get a higher success score. They believe that curriculum content is the primary factor hindering its application. The following extract expresses this concern:

In my experience, this curriculum is difficult to implement with high demands for teachers; it takes a lot of effort to communicate its content. The content is complex and exceeds expectations to meet student needs, especially most of my students are not so good at English. It takes them more time and energy to study English, but obviously it is impossible for them (WNT-05).

As I said before, many of the contents related to linguistics and pedagogy, etc., are not so simple and easy to put into practice. For example, teachers are unable to use some writing tasks because they find learners bored, unable to practice to their liking (writing activities), and it is demanding to learners (WNT-09).

Participants felt that the content of the curriculum was complex and needed to be adjusted. They refer to the complexity of some tasks, from the demanding requirements to completing them. For example, when looking at "Evaluation Suggestions, Teaching Suggestions, Teaching Tips" in the curriculum, one can realize that it contains a wide range of standards, indicators, and requirements

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that are more difficult for teachers to achieve in their teaching. In addition, another teacher linked this difficulty to the vagueness of curriculum principles and guidelines. She confirmed that the curriculum principles and guidelines do not provide a clear explanation of how teaching and learning must be conducted: I have faith in the curriculum principles and guidelines but they do not explain how students should specifically learn (WNT-08).

When WNT-08 was asked what she meant by "unclear principles and guidelines", she declared that "the seven recommendations for guidance in the English curriculum" was a serious factor that needed to be well explained. This includes important guidelines that define how teachers should approach the teaching practice.

Participants also saw that the complexity of the new English curriculum existed in the development of students' cultural awareness and thinking capacity as required in the English curriculum (WNT-05). One inspector found that the neglect of thinking capacity was widespread in the classrooms of most English teachers (WNI-01). Another inspector identified teachers' ignorance of language and culture in classroom teaching as "a challenge that hinders teachers' ability to communicate in English and makes students lose interest in the English class" (WNI-04). Their claim stems from their awareness of the importance of thinking skills and cultural awareness in accelerating the success rate of language communicative competence and language learning. In addition, the three inspectors agreed that the root cause of this problem lies in the fact that policymakers have recognized the importance of thinking ability and cultural awareness in cultivating the core literacy of the English subject, and clearly pointed out in the curriculum that cultural awareness is the value orientation of students' core literacy, and thinking capacity reflects the mental characteristics of the core literacy. However, it is not clear how to concretely cultivate students' thinking capacity and cultural awareness in practical teaching (WNI-04, WNI-05), which is why many teachers blame the curriculum and textbooks (WNI-01).

In addition, some teachers also believe that students should focus on the cultivation of English language culture and thinking capacity to improve their English competence, but the actual operation is more challenging. For example, WNT-06 declares: "*This course is tiring for both teachers and learners. To learn a language, we need to learn the culture behind the language, including the aspects that learners need to understand, and we should constantly improve students' thinking and cognitive ability in the learning process, but it is still difficult in practice, and often I don't know how to do it in teaching so as to cultivate students' thinking capacity better.*"

B. Textbook Content

Another factor restricting the implementation of the curriculum is the content of the textbook. Teachers are experienced in teaching content and showing much dissatisfaction with the textbooks used.

A teacher said:
The content of the textbooks is too rich, and all kinds of activities are following one from another. However, the difficulty of these activities varies greatly. Some activities are too simple for students, and most students feel that they are naive and not interested in them, but some activities are too difficult for students, and only a few students with good language skills and good educational background can complete them (MNT-06).

Another teacher echoed the sentiment:
There are too many contents in the textbook. Sometimes, I feel lost in the textbook. I teach for the purpose of completing the content of the textbook, completely ignoring the literacy cultivation mentioned in the curriculum behind the textbook. Students are busy with various activities in the whole class, but neglect knowledge learning, and understanding, which can be easily seen from their active response in class but poor academic performance in work after class (MNT-09).

MNT-03 also expressed the imbalance of the textbook between the various sections in the textbooks, and this imbalance left him exhausted. He believes that some sections are not well organized, that is, some have too many grammar items and others have none at all. To put it more bluntly, what are talking about here is the requirements of grammar in the various sections of the textbooks. There exists lack of integrated understanding of the overall curriculum to obtain a unified curriculum.

In the analysis of interviews, the researcher recognized that another barrier associated with textbooks is the involvement of irrelevant and passive teaching topics. This is what WNT-03 showed when interviewed: "Some topics are also simple and boring, and related to uninteresting subjects."

C. Time Restriction

Since time is a necessary condition for teaching, participants identified this as an issue in the implementation of the English curriculum. Inspectors, principals, and teachers agree that the new English curriculum will take a significant amount of time to fully implement. They agreed that the time devoted to teaching was not enough (MNI-01, MNI-03, MNI-04, MNP-02, MNP-03, MNP-05, MNT-06.MNT-07, MNT-09, MNT-10). For example, one inspector noted that "*teachers are limited to four hours of instruction per week, which is not enough to complete the overall curriculum requirements*" (MNI-02). One teacher added: "*The time allocated to teaching is simply not enough; four hours a week, but a rich course*" (MNT-06). Inspectors and teachers are often unsatisfied with the limited teaching time. Suppose teachers consider these four hours of assigned lessons each week, in this case, they tend to teach selectively, which often leads to the neglect of some necessary aspects and activities in the curriculum and teaching principles. For this problem, both teachers and principals testified that "tutorial lessons are the only solution" (WNP-05, WNT-09). The teacher supported her view that she used the tutorials as other extra classes to make progress. "*Another important factor," she urges, "is that there are tutorials that promote group work among students, and I use them to make any*

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possible progress in the implementation of the curriculum" (WNP-09). In a sense, it is worth noting that teachers associate limited time with the quantity and quality of implementation. Teachers find themselves having to get rid of the tasks of tutorials and instead bring them into the class instruction, thereby creating rejection of the overall teaching and implementation situation. It is at this point that teachers feel the pressure of work, leading them to seek extra time. Some participants also noted that "extra time is needed to support curriculum implementation" (MNI-01, WNI-03, WNP-02, WNT-02). One of the participants reported that the extra time helped to "*strongly reinforce the completion of all necessary tasks and projects to improve the learners' level, but it to some extent makes teachers feel exhausted*" (WNI-01).

In addition, in the classroom observation, all teachers divide a lesson into two or three sessions. For example, WNT-02 will divide one entire teaching period into two sections: one for presenting input, and the other for task-doing and practice. One teaching hour is not enough to cover all the requirements and stages of the lesson. However, she focuses on practice and spends most of her class hours verifying students' use of knowledge. WNT-07 also divided the lesson "Language in use" into three parts. Each is dedicated to teaching certain elements. However, this shows that teachers are overburdened with obligations in the classroom and that the established hours are usually not enough.

D. LEARNER-RELATED FACTORS

It can be concluded from the qualitative data analysis that two main factors affecting the implementation of new English curriculum are related to learners: English level of learners and learner's motivation.

I. Learners' English Level

The influence of learners on the English curriculum implementation is huge, and learners may promote or break the rules of the teaching process. The results reveal the importance of learners to curriculum implementation. Some of the key reasons are long-standing in learners. For example, WNT-03 stated: "*In fact, I have a problem with the understanding of learners. In most of the time, they don't understand my English, and sometimes even if they do, they can't express themselves in at least a few simple sentences.*" The teacher's comments indicated two main factors related to learners: low English comprehension and inability to use English. As a result, teachers' classroom teaching has become complex and challenging.

Similarly, WNT-12 makes the same perspective:
Students have very limited knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. For example, they are unable to accurately identify and use singular and plural pronouns, nouns and verbs, synonyms and antonyms, and so on. I often ask them to preview the lessons in advance, but unfortunately, they still don't speak English in class. It didn't help me because I found myself a source of learning.

II. Learners' Learning Motivation

Although the researcher did not ask participants about the affection of their learners, they all saw it as an important component in helping to achieve English curriculum implementation. Most participants were eager to see their students hold a positive impact and feeling on English language learning. WNT-07 states:

In addition, learners' disinterest is another factor affecting the English curriculum implementation. The main reasons have to do with the fact that English language learning require more investment of time and effort to reap the benefits, and this is just one of all subjects. This allows learners to shift to focus on other subjects with more energy.

WNT-11 also raised the similar concerns:
I believe I am doing my best to provide learners with a good background of knowledge. However, what holds me back is the lack of interest of learners. Most of my students tell me that English is often time-consuming and inefficient and that they prefer to focus on relatively rewarding subjects to increase their chances of getting high grades in the exams and tests. This put them in a challenging situation where they became disinterested.

The two teachers explained the reason why the students were not interested in learning English. They attribute this to the difficulty of English subjects, which are less effective than other subjects. There is no doubt that learners have the same opinion about English. In fact, because learners attribute the explanation to the difficulty of the English subject, which is indeed more time-consuming compared to other subjects, learners underestimate the subject to the extent that they make it very challenging for teachers to implement the English curriculum.

E. MANAGEMENT-RELATED FACTORS

Qualitative data analysis demonstrates that three factors related to management affecting the English curriculum implementation are: class size, the school principals' collaboration, and the level of inspectors.

1. Large Class Size

Large class sizes are another factor that makes curriculum implementation challenging. WNP-05 confirms: "*Most classrooms are overcrowded; the number of students is 50 to 55. This makes teachers a little anxious about implementing the new curriculum, especially in organizing group work or pair work in classes*". The principal noted that large class sizes do not do a good job of motivating teachers to feel ease in the implementation of the curriculum. This shows that due to the different personality and ability of students, teachers cannot control the learning progress, especially when organizing group activities in English teaching, large class teaching obviously cannot meet the needs of English teaching.

One teacher brought this up because controls are less likely to be packed and valued. "*Classes are overcrowded; I have about 50 learners per class, which makes it impossible for me to control them and ensure their participation*" (WNT-05). Teachers need to ensure the involvement of learners to ensure the knowledge transfer and the achievement of curriculum objectives. This can be achieved through continuous control of the learners' learning process. These roles don't seem to apply to large classes, because

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teachers in large classes are more dissatisfied. Similarly, WNT-03 expresses the same concerns: "*The curriculum is not being implemented as it should be. Most of my classes have about 55 students, and it's hard to control them all.*" In that regard, she stressed the need to reconsider the number of learners in order to have appropriate teaching; She stated: "*The curriculum is designed mainly for certain situations, such as a small number of learners in the class. Give me a class with 30 learners and I will guarantee proper control and good curriculum implementation*" (WNT-01).

Class size seems to have a different impact on teachers' implementation of the new English curriculum. WNT-04 mentions the ineffectiveness of knowledge transfer: "*Crowded classes are a major problem that prevents teachers from effectively communicating information to all learners*". The teacher claims that this daunting problem hinders the guidance and information provided to learners from teachers. WNT-10 emphasizes "the need for a small number of students per class" in order to truly meet the demand of the curriculum and guarantee the quality of teaching.

WNT-11 expounds the influence of large class system on the English curriculum implementation from the perspective of learner cooperation. She asserts:

Overcrowded classes hinder the teaching process. To the competence-based and literacy-oriented curriculum, group cooperation are necessary activities to cultivate the language competence as well as core literacy. However, a large number of learners inside the class do not allow this to be the case. (WNT-11)

2. School Principal Collaboration

Based on school principals' responses, efforts to establish a collaborative school environment were perceived to be lacking. According to them, this is believed to be the result of a lack of effective communication. One principal stated:

Suppose we want the new English curriculum to be successfully implemented, in this case, we must ensure communication and cooperation between school leaders and teachers, as this helps to diagnose and meet the needs of teachers. Unfortunately, there is a lack of communication between us, except in formal meetings where everyone has communication in front of the official authority. If the government believes it exists, it is because of the false image presented by school principals and teachers. Lack of communication is often caused by arrogance. Everyone thinks they are better than others and deserve to be awarded the high position (WNP-04).

WNP-03 also states:

Some school principals and teachers do not understand that cooperation is necessary for teachers to implement the curriculum. This misunderstanding leaves teachers frustrated and reluctant to share mistakes, weaknesses, and demands.

The inspectors noted that there must be communication and cooperation between school leaders and teachers. They blamed the lack of communication on arrogance and a lack of understanding that prevented teachers from showing what was happening in the classroom. MNP-04 added: "*The relationship between school leaders and teachers should change; Otherwise, investment in curriculum implementation will remain a dream. Everyone has to set their sights on communication and redevelop it.*" MNP-01 notes that the implementation of English curriculum is facilitated once stakeholders change their attitudes and realize that communication leads to cooperation. Effective curriculum implementation incentivizes stakeholders to work in networks and invest heavily in communication.

3. Inspectors Level

Although in most cases the inspectors had good experience in teaching and inspecting, some teachers complained about the quality of their inspectors. They noted that the issue appeared to be an obstacle to the implementation of the new English curriculum. For example, WNT-02 and WNT-03 acknowledge that the inability of inspectors to understand the new English curriculum is one of the major barriers preventing teachers from mastering the implementation process. WNT-03 asserts:

I think the inspector's misunderstanding of the curriculum has caused a big gap for the teachers. The curriculum promotes communication skills, core literacy, and some related competencies of the learners. At present, the inspectors seem to underestimate this, because they focus on the basic teaching links of learners and teachers, the fluency of teaching, and the richness and variety of classroom content. They do not mention to implement the new curriculum standards and cultivate learners' core qualities.

WNT-03 also states:

When it comes to the inspectors' pedagogical knowledge and understanding of the curriculum, I'm sure most of them are not very clear. The evidence for this is the low level of training. I have friends who are teachers in other cities who have confirmed that their inspectors are not familiar with the main elements of the new curriculum and have given them inappropriate opinions and advice about the curriculum and its implementation. They always blame the inspectors on their level.

The two teachers declared that the inspectors influenced their curriculum implementation by providing the wrong information about curriculum implementation.

DISCUSSIONS

This study investigated the difficulties encountered by English teachers at the compulsory education stage in Weinan. The qualitative analysis pointed out four main application difficulties: content and language-integrated learning, classroom management, and competency-based approach.

Quantitative results showed the challenges of content and language-integrated learning implementation. Teachers say they are unable to combine language with content and complete the curriculum because of time constraints, poor English proficiency, and large class sizes. In this regard, teachers reported that they were unable to use content and language-integrated learning to achieve curriculum objectives. The learners break the process and

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causes a restriction in time. Therefore, teachers cannot organize the teaching language and content, resulting in the fact that the application of content and language-integrated learning is prone to failure. Bruton (2011, 524) points out that what happens in content and language-integrated learning classrooms may differ from reality. Arno-Macia and Mancho-Bares (2015) confirm this problem, but they find that teachers' language problems are also relevant. They reported that the English proficiency of teachers and learners was poor, making implementation of content and language-integrated learning difficult. Noom-ura (2013) also shows that the main obstacle to content and language-integrated learning implementation lies in the learners' English level, that is, their inability to properly use content and language-integrated learning in conversation and writing both inside and outside the classroom. Tachaiyaphum and Sukying (2017) support these findings in their study that implementation of content and language-integrated learning is a challenging issue due to the low level of learners' English.

Interview analysis confirmed that managing students is not an easy task. On the contrary, the process seems to require effort, especially for the large number of students with poor English proficiency. Teachers experimented with collaborative and group work as well as individual work to facilitate, support, and facilitate learner engagement and learning. However, many students are absent-minded and can't concentrate on their studies. These activities are only for students who have a good command of English, and besides, there is often small talk among students.

In addition, participants affirmed that the English classroom was not managed as well as a relatively orderly class, and that "any disruption or problems that might occur would neither hinder nor support the class" (Crookes, 2003). This results in a lack of flexibility for teachers in implementing the curriculum. While needs to establish a friendly learning atmosphere to minimize disruption and misbehavior (Oliver et al., 2011), participants appear to be dissatisfied with their classrooms and the level of learners. They know that "effective teaching is impossible in a poorly managed classroom" (Marzano et al., 2003). Soleimani and Razmjoo (2016) confirm the same problem, namely that classroom management challenges include learner misbehavior such as chattering and reluctance. Habibi et al. (2018) found difficulties with classroom management due to student misconduct. The students did not remain calm or show respect to their colleagues and teachers. They discuss and joke with their peers without the teachers' permission.

The qualitative findings suggest that implementing competency-based approach in English classrooms is a challenge. The findings suggest some changes in the role of teachers. That said, teachers are not implementing the competency-based approach as fully as expected. Instead, they rely on ignoring some of the roles needed in implementing the competency-based approach.

According to these findings, teachers are not applying the competency-based approach as fully as expected. They find it challenging to play the role of propeller and supporter in the application of competency-based approach (Sturgis & Patrick, 2010). Paul (2008) confirms the role of teachers as facilitators and supporters in competency-based approach by providing learners with necessary and productive materials and tasks. This does not mean that knowledge transfer is not in the teachers' role, but that knowledge should be passed on in various ways (Griffith & Lim, 2014). Egbert and Shahrokni (2019) also identify the roles of teachers as facilitators and supporters in competency-based approach implementation to help learners gain appropriate opportunities in their learning. Teachers are also unable to guide learners in individual assignments and in the application and practice of knowledge. Both are important in determining the results of capacity-building. O'sullivan and Burce (2014) state that students must demonstrate their ability to indicate that they have mastered the knowledge and skills (called competencies) required for a particular course. Griffith & Lim (2014) confirm that the shift from knowing to doing requires teachers to ignore traditional teaching and act as facilitators, learners must take responsibility for learning and they must be proactive.

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