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Policies and practices in the school education system

Martin Nickson and Syeda Nudrat

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The authors would also like to acknowledge the members of Talking Hull (at the University of Hull). Talking Hull is a group of academics, students and learners who teach, learn, talk about and study language learning through a community of practice approach. Practical support from the group has been essential as we have written this report.

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Contents

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Introduction to the series

Across South Asia, English is widely seen as the language of social mobility, educational opportunity, employability, global business and dialogue. Many consider English language skills to be an essential component of economic development and growth – both on an individual and national level. However, the inclusion of English within language-in-education policies that must simultaneously promote other national languages, along with its history as a colonial and/or elite language in most countries in this region, means that it does not always sit easily within education systems. The place of English within school systems in South Asia has fluctuated over time and a number of challenges remain around ensuring equitable, high-quality provision of English language teaching and learning for all who want or need it.

This report is one of a series of five focusing on the policy and practices relating to English language education in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It aims to provide a contemporary snapshot of the role that English currently plays within the lives of school children and the wider community. It explores the current scenario, considering both the private and government school sectors, including reflections on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis. It also looks to the future: how might some of the current challenges be addressed, and what opportunities exist to support the development of this aspect of the school education system?

Across the series, the author teams collaborated in defining the overall focus and structure, and peer-reviewed each other's work to provide feedback and ensure coherence across the reports. The authors have focused primarily on a review of policy documentation, reports and data provided by relevant government departments, academics and international agencies. This is supported by input from a small number of important stakeholders such as teachers, curriculum and textbook writers, and policy officers. Their input is often included verbatim to provide further contextualised insight into the realities of the classroom and wider education system.

Providing a detailed overview of even a single subject like English within any school education system is a significant task, particularly in large, complex and multilingual countries. Coupled with the historical, political and cultural factors that are unique to English in South Asia, we are conscious that these reports have their limitations and can serve mainly as an entry point to this vast and complicated topic. Nevertheless, we hope that readers will find them informative and useful for critical discussion, research and development – particularly those who are involved in English language education implementation in this region.

To access the full series of reports, please visit our TeachingEnglish website: www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/english-language-teaching-learning-assessment-south-asia

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEPAM	Academy of Educational Planning and Management
AKU	Aga Khan University
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BISE	Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EAGLEs	Emerging and Growth Leading Economies
EF	Education First
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
FBISE	Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IBCC	Inter Board Committee of Chairmen
IBO	International Baccalaureate
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IGCSE	International General Certificate of Education
IMF	International Monetary Fund
L1	First language
L2	Second language
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoFEPT	Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NEP	National Education Policy
NEPF	National Education Policy Framework
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NISDG	National Initiative for Sustainable Development Goals
OOSC	Out-of-school children
PAGE	Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education
PEELI	Punjab Education and English Language Initiative
QAED	Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SNC	Single National Curriculum
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USD	United States Dollars

Executive summary

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is a changing and dynamic country. Equally, the field of English language teaching, learning and assessment is vibrant and constantly evolving as new ideas, knowledge, practice and theory emerge. It is therefore not surprising that a theme of complexity emerges in this report, as it has been conducted at a time of change in Pakistan and a time of developments in the theory and practice of English language teaching (ELT). It is equally unsurprising that a theme of challenge runs through this report because the effects of Covid-19 have been unprecedented for everyone across the world.

Despite this complexity and challenge, the evidence we have reviewed suggests that Pakistan is moving in a direction that could lead to real improvements in English education in the country. Pakistan's economy is growing (and recovered well following the initial shocks of the global pandemic) and the teachers, academics and policy makers of Pakistan are resilient, diverse and passionate about education. Because of this, we believe that English language teaching, learning and assessment can contribute to further improvements in individual opportunity and can support wider social and economic improvements for the country as a whole. The following paragraphs summarise where we believe Pakistan can build and, in places, where it may want to consider changes towards further improvement in the teaching, learning and assessment of English language.

The first observation to make is that English language teaching, learning and assessment has to be considered within Pakistan's wider education system. This is because English remains compulsory for children between Grades 1–10 and is taught side by side with other curriculum subjects. Because of this, factors that affect education in Pakistan generally – such as infrastructure, teacher training and the scope of the overall curriculum – will affect the teaching, learning and assessment of English. However, in respect of English language teaching, learning and assessment, a clear philosophy has emerged since 2009. This philosophy provides a rationale for improving English language education that is forward-looking, as it identifies English as a language necessary for global citizenship, sustainable development and individual opportunity.

There is also an emerging clarity (in policy) on the pedagogy of English language education. Since 2009, Pakistan's educational policy has articulated a communicative approach to language teaching and learning through successive policy initiatives, culminating in publication of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) in 2020. The SNC is, effectively, a synthesis of work that has been undertaken since 2009 but it also clearly incorporates a purpose for education. That purpose is to address social and economic inequality. Even though there are debates within Pakistan over the SNC, we suggest that the aim of addressing inequality through education is very positive. Because of this we echo the observations of academics and others who argue that while constructive criticisms of the SNC can be made and while there should be further constructive dialogue among educators and policy makers, the SNC provides a holistic approach from federal government to curriculum.

We believe further dialogue and discussion on the new curriculum is warranted and necessary, particularly on the issue of the speed of introduction of the SNC for English language provision. There are several reasons for this. The first is that while policy has evolved since 2009, the position of English within the curriculum has changed repeatedly even during this time. For example, the issue of medium of instruction and at what grade English-medium teaching and learning should commence has changed repeatedly over time and is still subject to some ambiguity. It is vital to obtain clarity on this issue because the most recent research suggests it takes at least six years of learning (in well-resourced classrooms) before students are proficient enough to be able to study in a second language (L2) as a medium of instruction. Therefore, it would only be under optimal conditions that English could be introduced as a medium of instruction at Grade 6, but the reality is that conditions in Pakistan are not yet optimal.

We also note that despite the gradual evolution of language policy in Pakistan, the philosophy of communicative approaches to language education (well-articulated in policy documents) does not appear to be understood by some teachers. There are a number of reasons for this, including a lack of a coherent national approach to CPD and the lack of congruence between textbooks and curricula, which means the teaching philosophy cannot be embedded into daily practice. We believe the key to solving the philosophical problem starts with initial teacher training and then in the design and effective delivery of extensive CPD for teachers. This is because initial training and CPD are the spaces where educators should have the chance to understand the theory and philosophy of teaching.

There is also a practical issue of English language teachers' general levels of proficiency in English. As we note in the report, English language teachers' levels of proficiency are still low, despite some improvements over time. It is, unfortunately, immaterial how well thought-out an educational policy for language may be if teachers are not proficient in the language they teach. As with the previous point, initial teacher training and an effective national programme of CPD are integral to addressing this problem.

While this report does not include recommendations, a very positive suggestion has emerged during the conduct of this research. We suggest that stakeholders in education in Pakistan explore the possibilities of communities of practice among educators. The PEELI project in Punjab (described in this report) incorporated communities of practice into its methodology and is a good example of how this approach may work in Pakistan. While the establishment of a network of communities of practice for English teachers may not appear to be a 'strong' intervention, communities of practice facilitate dialogue between stakeholders in the field. There is good evidence (from across the world) which shows that effective communities of practice enable professionals in challenging environments to identify, and frequently solve, complex problems in their work.

The question of dialogue between stakeholders leads to the final point we make. This report does not include the perspective of children in education between Grades 1–10. We could not find significant literature that gave voice to people doing the learning of English in Pakistan. We think this is an area which could – and should – be addressed. Children should be included in any dialogue about education because they are the ones experiencing education at present. Their insight, while sometimes challenging to research, is invaluable in informing effective classroom practice. Children are also the future, not only of Pakistan, but of the world. They are the ones who will become not only the English speakers but also the global citizens of tomorrow. This report, ultimately, is about their future and we hope, as authors, it helps the children of Pakistan as much as it helps the stakeholders (policy makers, teachers and academics) who will read it.

1 Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is the fifth most populous country in the world and is among the top 40 countries in geographic size. It is a country of geographic, linguistic and cultural diversity, and includes globally significant historical sites such as the 5,000-year-old Harrapan civilisation (CIA, 2020). But Pakistan is also a very modern nation: it is a nuclear power and in 2015 was identified as one of the world's emerging and growth-leading economies (EAGLEs). EAGLEs are countries whose contribution to global economic growth is predicted to overtake the average contribution of G6 countries within ten years (De Cadenas Santiago et al., 2016). Pakistan therefore occupies a significant place on the world stage and its global significance is likely to increase in the next ten years.

At the same time, Pakistan is also a developing nation in some senses. As a federal state Pakistan is comparatively young and some sectors are not as developed as the government of Pakistan would like. For this reason, Pakistan was the first country to sign up to the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDG2030). By signing up to SDG2030, Pakistan aims to 'join the league of upper middle-class countries by 2030' (NISDG, 2021). One area of focus for SDG2030 is education, which is the focus of this report. In Pakistan, education outcomes lag behind peers mainly, according to the IMF, because of a low level of spending and inefficiencies in Pakistan's education system (Brollo, Hanedar and Walker, 2021:06).

This report specifically reviews English language teaching, learning and assessment in school between Grades 1–10. English plays an important part in Pakistan's education system as part of children's education but additionally the language is identified by Pakistan's government as key to full participation in the global economy for both the country and its citizens. Because of this we hope this report is useful for policy makers, educators and the citizens of Pakistan now and in the future.

The report's objective is to provide information on and some analysis of English language teaching and learning (including assessment) for children in Grades 1–10, which will help inform policy and practice. In Pakistan Grades 1–10 is typically schooling for children between the ages of five to 16. This report primarily focuses on education provided by the state because of Pakistan's constitutional commitment to provide free education for all between Grades 1–10.

The report is divided into five sections:

- **Education system in Pakistan** describes how the education system (for children who may attend Grades 1–10) is structured and administered. This section also discusses where Pakistan may be located in terms of development of its school system as a whole and introduces the issue of out-of-school children (OOSC), which is a systemic problem in education in Pakistan.

- **The role of English in Pakistan** provides context to the report by describing general levels of proficiency in English across the country and discussing some of the relationships between English and individual opportunity in Pakistan. It then explores why English is significant to Pakistan and its educational system.

- **Policy** provides a description of key policies implemented by the government on English language teaching and learning in Pakistan. This section has a particular focus on policy developments since 2009, including the Single National Curriculum (SNC) of 2020.

- **Practice** addresses how the teaching and learning of English, including assessment, occurs in Pakistan 'at the chalk face'. This section includes references to research and commentary on the differences between policy and classroom practice. Practice also discusses the recent challenge posed by the Covid-19 pandemic to both the education system and individual practitioners.

- **Strengths, opportunities and challenges** provides a summary of the main themes that emerged as we conducted this research. This section draws on the whole report to argue that while the teaching, learning and assessment of English faces challenges in Pakistan, there are identifiable opportunities for improvement.

The report was written between November and December 2021. Methodologically the report is a piece of desk-based research supplemented by an online focus group with classroom teachers, as well as individual interviews with teachers, a curriculum developer, an academic and a teacher trainer. Participants were from Sindh, Punjab and Balochistan. We accessed key government policies and documents, academic papers and statistical evidence provided by the government and international organisations to understand Pakistan's educational system and its relationship with English.

Pakistan's education system is complex, featuring multi-layered policy and decision making, differences in practice at federal, provincial and regional level and a large private sector. Additionally, there are some inconsistencies in the available data about education (which is likely to be inevitable given the size of Pakistan and its education system). We have tried to reflect this complexity by providing a balanced mix of overview with specificity. Where there is some inconsistency in available data we have noted this.

2 The role of English in Pakistan

Pakistan is a multilingual country with 72 languages spoken. According to Article 251 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2012), the national language is Urdu. Language diversity is recognised in Pakistan's constitution as provinces may legislate for the 'teaching, promotion and use' of provincial languages in addition to the national language.

Language is a matter of debate in Pakistan, often focused on the question of which language should be the official language (or languages). According to Jawad et al. (2021), claims have been made for Arabic or Bengali to be the official language while other proposals have supported the idea of affording regional languages (Balochi, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Shina and Serakai) equal status with Urdu. Much of this debate has centred on the social, religious or cultural significance of each language.

The role of English in Pakistan has been part of these debates. As English is not recognised as a regional language and is not (statistically) significant as a first language, its role in Pakistan can be viewed somewhat separately. Pakistan was governed by the British Empire from 1848 until 1947 during which time the official language was English. Following independence in 1947, Pakistan retained structural connections with the UK, becoming a member of the British Commonwealth. At this time, English was the joint official language of Pakistan (with Urdu), officially sanctioned for usage in courts, government business, administration, the military and in commerce. However, the 1973 Constitution's Clause 251 required Urdu to be installed as the single official language within 15 years. If Clause 251 had been implemented the situation (whereby there are effectively two official languages) would have been resolved. Urdu would have become the sole official language and English may have gradually become less significant in Pakistan. In practice, Clause 251 was not acted on, as Garcia (2016) notes, and English usage is not in recession but has maintained its importance as a consequence of its status as the language of international communication, science and commerce.

Garcia's reference to the contemporary status of English suggests that Pakistan's relationship with the UK via direct colonialisation is probably not the only reason English is embedded in Pakistan. As an indirect consequence of the duration and spread of the British Empire across the globe, English is one of the planet's 'lingua franca' for business, diplomacy and in many cultural spheres of activity. This is also the case in countries the British Empire did not previously occupy as a colonial power and in contexts that post-date British colonialism. So, the presence of English in Pakistan is not only a consequence of direct local colonialism but also emerging global post-colonial conditions (Crystal, 1997).

English is widely used in Pakistan's education system and is both taught as a subject and employed as a medium of instruction. The National Education Policy 2009 of Pakistan required English be taught as a compulsory subject from Grade 1 and for English be used as the medium of instruction for science and mathematics from Grade 5 in government schools (Channa, 2017). However, there are indications that the role of English in schools may be changing based on an emerging consensus in Pakistan (and globally) about the use of English as a medium of instruction in the post-colonial era (Schweisfurth, 2019; Trudell, 2016). This consensus suggests that the use of a second language (L2) as a medium of instruction does not necessarily have the effects of improving learner competence in that language, particularly in multilingual contexts. Research also suggests that use of English as a medium of instruction can inhibit learning in the core subjects (Asif et al., 2016; Rashid et al., 2016). Recent educational policy has reflected this emerging trend, which is effectively towards teaching English as a subject[1] within the curriculum.

1 Throughout this report, reflecting the wording of policy documents, we refer to 'teaching English as a subject'. By this we mean teaching English as a second (or third or more) language for communicative purposes, and reviews of policy documents suggest that this is also the meaning of the phrase under policy.

2.1 Levels of English language proficiency in Pakistan

There are various estimates for levels of English proficiency in Pakistan but at the time of writing the most recent research conducted by Education First (EF, 2021) suggests Pakistan has relatively 'low proficiency' in English, ranking the country as 63rd out of 112 countries evaluated.

The question of English usage and proficiency is further complicated as English has developed across the world as dialects or varieties (Crystal, 1997). In Pakistan, there is a regional variety of English but like all dialects there are debates in linguistics over its form, distinctiveness and usage, and there is considerable code-switching involving English and other languages (Rahman, 1990). Contemporary linguistics theory views dialects as a resource to be capitalised on, not a problem to be solved, but whether dialect is measured in global proficiency tests of English is unclear.

2.2 The relationship between English and individual status and opportunity

English retains a position in Pakistan whereby it is connected to higher levels of economic capital and, through this, high levels of social, cultural and educational capital (Rahman, 2019:371; Lotbiniere, 2010). The government of Pakistan has recognised this since at least 2009 (MoE, 2009:27), a recognition which underpins the continued presence of English in Pakistan's school curriculum.

2.2.1 English and higher education and employment

Pakistan has a mixture of public and private universities. While the state supports public universities, low enrolment rates in primary and high drop-out in secondary levels among students from lower-income backgrounds means access to university is reduced among low-paid or poorer people (Murtaza, 2021). Additionally, private universities in Pakistan charge fees, which can present a barrier to lower-income students. As English is usually the medium of instruction in private universities and tends to be used in higher-prestige degree courses (such as science and international relations), there is an association between opportunity to learn English at higher levels and social class. In contrast, Urdu is typically the medium of instruction for lower-prestige university courses (particularly the arts and humanities) that lead to lower paid, less prestigious jobs (Shamin and Rashid, 2021; Mansoor, 2010). As high-paid/high-status jobs tend to be dependent on

qualification from education and as higher-status qualifications tend to be associated with English (to the extent the highest-status degrees are taught entirely in English), there is an established and resilient connection between English proficiency and a person's individual life chances (Azhar et al., 2016).

2.2.2 Gender, geography, education and English language

Interactions between English language levels, education, gender and geography are complex. Overall, girls access education less than boys in Pakistan (HRW, 2018). This is connected with geography so that in urban areas there are, on average across Grades, 77 girls enrolled for every 100 boys whereas this drops to 56 girls for every 100 boys in rural areas.

There are identified factors involved in the relative disparity in attendance at schools between girls and boys. These factors are on both the supply and demand sides.[2] On the supply side where schools are girls only, the infrastructure is often poor so that 50 per cent of girls' schools lack toilets, water or electricity. On the demand side, poverty (forcing girls into work early) and parental attitudes towards girls' education are leading causes of girls not attending schools or dropping out (Khan, 2021). As English is compulsory in schools and as girls attend less, particularly in rural areas, there is a structural relationship so that girls, overall, have less access to English language learning and teaching.

2.3 Summary

The English language plays an important role in Pakistan. English is used in commerce, the legal system, tourism and in official business every day. There are historical reasons for this but there are also contemporary reasons for the persistence of English, as it is one of the world's global languages. English plays a role in individual opportunity and, from this, the economy of Pakistan, and so has maintained its importance in the education system of Pakistan. However, there are problems of access and retention in Pakistan's education system such that not all children have access to English language teaching, learning and assessment between Grades 1–10. This, in turn, impacts on further educational progression or outcomes and from there on the career prospects of some individuals, particularly girls and particularly people living in rural areas.

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2 'Supply side' refers to the physical infrastructure provided by the state in which teaching and learning occurs, i.e. school buildings, classrooms, bathroom facilities; 'demand side' refers to the social factors that affect the people accessing education.

3 The education system in Pakistan

Pakistan is a federal republic containing four provinces (Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkwha, Punjab), two autonomous territories (Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir) and a federal territory (Islamabad Capital territory).[3] Table 1 shows key facts for the country's education system, across the geography. The statistics are drawn from the most recent reports by the Academy of Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM) and the Finance Division of the Government of Pakistan.
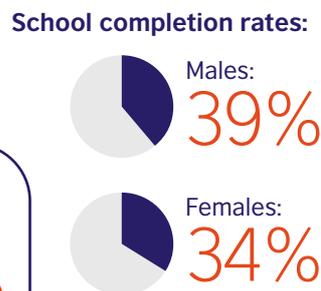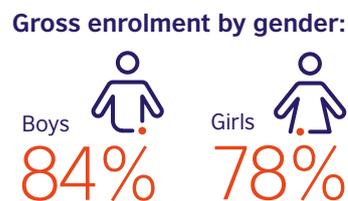
3 Further administrative units are divisions, districts, tehsils and union councils, but for the purpose of this report we have focused on administration at federal and provincial levels.

Key facts about education in Pakistan

Population
212,000,000

Compulsory education
Grade 1–10

Enrolment rates:

Grade 1–5:
80%

Grade 6–8:
50%

Grade 9–10:
30%

Gross enrolment by gender:

Boys
84%

Girls
78%

School completion rates:

Males:
39%

Females:
34%

Adult literacy rate:
60%
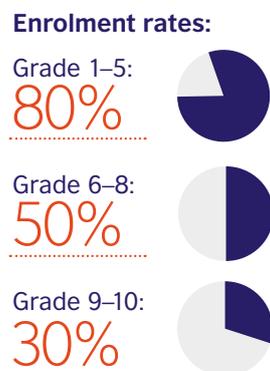
Expenditure on education:
2.3% of GDP

Number of government-funded schools:

Grade 1–5:	Grade 6–8:	Grade 9–10:
187,100 schools	48,300 schools	2,000 schools

Number of private schools:

Grade 1–5:	Grade 6–8:	Grade 9–10:
17,877 schools	30,115 schools	17,944 schools

Number of in-school learners:

Grade 1–5:	Grade 6–8:	Grade 9–10:
18,663,756	7,931,500	4,213,500

Number of teachers:

Grade 1–5:	Grade 6–8:	Grade 9–10:
494,000	488,000	567,000

Number of English subject teachers:[4]
750,000

4 Estimate based on data aggregated from AEPAM (2018) and Finance Division (2020) reports.

3.1 Education provision

In Pakistan, education between Grades 1 and 10 (approximately five to 16 years old) is free and compulsory under the Constitution, which states: 'The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such a manner as may be determined by law' (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2012). Currently, the education system between Grades 1–10 is structured as primary (Grades 1–5), middle (Grades 6–8) and high (Grades 9–10). Based on government statistics, there are approximately 30 million children eligible to attend school between Grade 1 and Grade 10 (AEPAM, 2018; UNICEF, 2020).

3.2 GDP spending on education

Currently, Pakistan's education budget is Rs 83.363 billion (£362.8 million), which is consistent with an average spend (over five years) of approximately 2.2 per cent of GDP (Baloch, Kaye, Koomar & McBurnie, 2020; Finance Division, 2020). About Rs 11 billion of this is allocated to education between Grades 1–10 (PAGE, 2020). Pakistan's aim since 2015 was for an education budget of 7 per cent of GDP but this has not been achieved in a single year. There has been, however, an upward trend in federal spending on education since 2006 and GDP is growing (Asian Development Bank, 2021).

3.3 Qualifications and administration of education

From Grade 1 to Grade 10 children study towards the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) which is taken at the end of Grade 9 (SSC-I) and Grade 10 (SSC-II). Most schools offer curricula which include arts, science, mathematics, social science, computer sciences, religious education and one or more languages as core. English is a compulsory component of the SCC across Pakistan.

At federal level, the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) has national responsibility for administration of Secondary School Certificates (SSC) to pupils in schools which affiliate to FBISE. Additionally, each of the four provinces of Pakistan has education ministries which have power to establish and enact education policy. In each province there are local and community Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) that administer education. There are presently 31 BISE across Pakistan (IBCC, 2021).

However, some children in Pakistan between Grades 1–10 study towards other educational qualifications.[5] For example, Cambridge Assessment (International Education) offer the International GCSE (iGSCE) and Cambridge O-levels, which are recognised in Pakistan as equivalent to the SCC (Cambridge Assessment, 2018). Estimates suggest that 50,000 children take this route to qualification annually (Rizvi, 2021). Other qualifications in the country that children may take include the International Baccalaureate (IBO) and Pearson qualifications. Qualifications such as these are administered by the organisation that delivers the examinations under approval of the Inter Board Committee of Chairman (IBCC, 2021).

3.4 Educational development

The United Nations Education for all Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2011) evaluated countries' education systems under an index of 'educational development' against four development aims:

- Universal Primary Education (UPE)

- Adult literacy

- Quality of education

- Gender

Each country was placed on the index of educational development under one of three categories: high, medium and low. In 2011, Pakistan was ranked as 'low'. As the UN notes, caution should be applied to any index (or ranking system) of education because 'any index that takes a complex and multifaceted reality and compresses it into something much simpler will always do injustice to the original' (UNESCO, 2011). The complexity of Pakistan's educational system should be acknowledged and change has happened since 2011, but research suggests that Pakistan remains 'low' on the index of educational development (Hunter, 2020). For example, literacy rates are low by global standards with adult literacy rates 'stagnant' at around 60 per cent (Abassi, 2021), there is a high rate of children out of school and high drop-out rate (UNICEF, 2021) and education remains gendered so that girls attend school less than boys and leave earlier (HRW, 2018).

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5 The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines an educational qualification as: 'Educational qualifications are the degrees, diplomas, certificates, professional titles and so forth that an individual has acquired whether by full-time study, part-time study or private study, whether conferred in the home country or abroad and whether conferred by educational authorities, special examining bodies or professional bodies' (OECD, 2003).

3.5 At school and out-of-school children (OOSC)

In Pakistan, UNICEF estimates 44 per cent of the children between five and 16 years (Grades 1–10) who should be in school do not attend (UNICEF, 2021). Attendance also drops with age so that after Grades 1–5 the percentage of children who attend school decreases. As a general trend, attendance is far higher among boys than among girls, higher among children from wealthier families and higher in urban areas than in rural areas. However, the federal government is working with UNICEF on a number of initiatives to address attendance and retention and, prior to Covid-19, the attendance rates in Pakistan were improving.

3.6 Summary

Pakistan's federal and provincial governments recognise the challenges the educational system faces. From 2020 onwards, policy initiatives have been introduced that are intended to standardise the educational experience of children in Pakistan. Under the 'One Nation, One Curriculum' policy, Pakistan's federal government has introduced a Single National Curriculum (SNC) (described further in section 4) with the intention of standardising education and addressing class-based educational disparities.

Education and English language policy timeline

Pakistan Educational Conference (Education Division, 1947)

The Primary and Secondary Education Committee recommended that the medium of instruction for education should be Urdu. The committee also recommended that as a 'transitional measure' English should be 'retained as a compulsory language at school age' (Education Division, 1947:22). However, resolutions three and four from the conference resolved that Urdu should be a compulsory language and the status of English in education was not referred to except that it was noted that 'Provincial governments will determine the medium or media of instruction at the school stage' (ibid:44).

1947

1979

1972–1980

The National Education Policy and Implementation Programme

The policy required all English-medium schools to 'adopt Urdu or an approved provincial language as the medium of instruction' (MoE, 1979:59). However, it also noted the importance of English as an international language and stated that 'the switch over from English to Urdu or an approved language as the medium of instruction should not be sudden' (ibid:60). English was to be taught as a compulsory second language in all schools from Grade 6.

Education Policy

This policy recommended designing of curricula relevant to changing social and economic needs compatible with the ideology of the country. To achieve national cohesion and harmony, the policy recommended implementation of a national curriculum in all federating units.

Single National Curriculum (SNC)

This was the operationalisation of the National Curriculum Framework (MoFEPT, 2017) and National Education Policy Framework (MoFEPT, 2018). The SNC was to be gradually introduced, however, starting with Grades 1–5. In respect of English, the curriculum is primarily methodological, marking a transition to teaching English as a language (L2) rather than using English primarily as a medium of instruction. The SNC for English focused on pedagogical practices and assessment featuring competencies and standards, and describes itself as a roadmap (MoFEPT, 2020).

National Education Policy Framework (NEPF)

Confirmed that Pakistan would have a multilingual policy with English taught as a second language as outlined in the 2017 National Curriculum Framework (MoFEPT, 2018).

National Curriculum Framework (NCF)

Established standards for English Language teachers which included detailed description of the expected knowledge, values and practices teachers should hold. Also described a position on the learning of languages, with a preferred multilingual model in education. For this reason, education would start with instruction in the 'mother tongue' (i.e. L1) in early grades, but move to Urdu and English for all schools at lower secondary or secondary levels (MoFEPT, 2017).

2020   **2018**   **2017**
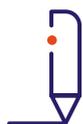
National Curriculum for English Language

Introduced a framework approach to the development of the English language curriculum. English was introduced 'as a language from Grade 1' and as 'a medium of instruction across the curriculum for various subjects' (MoE, 2006:01).

2006   **2009**

National Education Policy (NEP)

Committed to seven per cent of GDP to education by 2007. Provinces were required to develop an English language action plan (MoE, 2009:08). The curriculum from Grade 1 should include English. English should be employed as the medium of instruction for sciences and mathematics from Grade 6 onwards. Provinces would have the option to teach mathematics and science in English or Urdu or the official regional language until 2014. After 2014, teaching of these subjects should be in English only. The policy also said that opportunities would be provided to children from low socio-economic strata to learn the English language but there was no specificity on what these opportunities should be.

1998– 2010

National Education Policy

This was primarily a large-scale strategic policy. The arrangements for teaching and learning English were not specifically addressed but the document noted that it was expected that students leaving secondary school (Grade 10) should 'be able to speak and write Urdu or English fluently along with good communication skills' (MoE, 1998:32).

4 Policy in English language education

As elsewhere, Pakistan's education policies have developed over time with a number of changes made to the position on language of instruction and language teaching within the curriculum. The timeline on pages 22 and 23 illustrates the most important policy directives with respect to English language provision since independence in 1947.

4.1 English language policy in Pakistan

4.1.1 Position and philosophy

The position of Pakistan on the teaching and learning of English has evolved in recent years. It remains a priority, as identified in the National Education Policy (2009), for children to learn English but the National Education Policy Framework (NEPF) (2018) signalled a move in how this was to be done. The NEPF suggested a move away from employing English as a medium of instruction to one where English would be taught as a subject (i.e. a second or third language) within a multilingual approach to school education (MoFEPT, 2018). This position was strengthened in the SNC (2020), which requires (rather than suggests) 'English to be taught as a language' (MoFEPT, 2020:08). The required approach was underpinned by a vision which identifies English as central to embedding themes of peace and social cohesion in the curriculum and introduces 'two key concepts' – 'education for sustainable development' and 'education for global citizenship'. These two key concepts are required to be included in textbooks and are associated in the SNC with English language learning. There is also a statement of philosophy in the NEPF that includes reference to the natural acquisition of language, the development of competencies and emphasises the 'understanding and use of the English language in different academic and social contexts' (MoFEPT, 2020:10). In short, there has been an identifiable change in the federal government position on how English should be taught, signalling a move away from the notion that the best way to teach English is to employ it as a medium of instruction. The position that has emerged is as much philosophical as it is practical and is a strong argument that English should be taught communicatively and so that it can be used practically in real-life situations.

4.1.2 Pakistan's language in education policy

Since 2009, federal policy actions have reflected the shift in position toward teaching English as a language. For example, the 2009 NEP (MoE, 2009) required the following.

- All provinces to develop an English language action plan[6]
- The curriculum from Grade 1 onward to include English, Urdu, one regional language and mathematics along with an integrated subject
- English to be employed as the medium of instruction for sciences and mathematics from Grade 6 – Provinces have the option to teach mathematics and science in English or Urdu or the official regional language (from 2009), but after five years[7] the teaching of these subjects should be in English only
- Opportunities for children from low socio-economic strata to learn the English language
- All schools to develop a language policy

However, by 2018 there had been a shift in policy. While the National Education Policy Framework (MoFEPT, 2018) re-stated that Pakistan would have a multilingual policy with English taught as an additional language, it also noted that 'Since children learn and perform better when taught in mother tongue and teaching in foreign language hinders their comprehension, therefore, provinces and areas should keep in view pedagogical principles and considerations while making decision about medium of instruction' (MoFEPT, 2018:67). This signals a shift (between 2009 and 2018) consistent with the shift in the philosophical position of the federal government, although it is worth commenting that federal policy on language (by 2018) is interpretable. It appears to allow a number of possibilities, and while this approach is necessary given the policy-making powers of provinces, for educators in the classroom the policy direction may be unclear.

4.1.3 English language curriculum in Pakistan

The current English language curriculum (as described in the SNC) has emerged since the 2009 NEP. The 2017 National Curriculum Framework (MoFEPT, 2017) established a set of principles for curriculum development (including English) and outlined a series of steps for curriculum development. The curriculum was not proscribed closely, rather the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) described a framework

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6 The National Education Policy did not elaborate on what should be in each province's language plan
7 This means five years after the Policy's publication, so this requirement should have been fully in place across the country by 2014.

for the development of teaching and learning, including language. In respect of language teaching and learning, the NCF avoided proscription, but noted that the 'most preferred model to follow was a multilingual policy for education in which the mother tongue (i.e. L1) would be the medium of instruction in early grades and moving to L2 (Urdu and English) at lower secondary Grade [6] or secondary levels' (MoFEPT, 2017:35). Although there appears to be a degree of uncertainty over exactly at which grade English learning and teaching should commence, the change in position was clearly towards commencement of English teaching and learning at a later stage of education.

The 2020 Single National Curriculum (MoFEPT, 2020) is effectively the operationalisation of NEP, NCF and NEPF in Grades 1–5. Describing itself as a roadmap (rather than a minutely prescribed curriculum), the SNC for English is broadly based on communicative approaches to language teaching, learning and assessment. It starts with what learners 'can do', identifying benchmarks – and then standards – as a series of skills. There are five competencies:

- Speaking and listening
- Reading and critical thinking
- Formal and lexical
- Writing
- Ethical and social development

The SNC describes what children 'can do' under each competency. For example, under the standard C1 (competency 1): Oral Communication Skills (Listening and Speaking), the SNC identifies the benchmark for Grade 1–2 such that children can 'Recognise and articulate the basic sounds and sound patterns of English language at word and sentence level'.

From this benchmark, the SNC then describes how children will (or should) progress. Progression is identified as 'standards' (or specific outcomes). For example, at Grade 1, the standards say that children should be able to 'Recognise and identify consonants and vowels in the English alphabets using common consonant blends (/bl/, /cl/, /br/ and /dr/) and digraphs (/th/, /ph/, /ch/)'.

The SNC also addresses, in detail, how teachers can help children attain the required standards. The SNC includes descriptions of classroom methodology, methods of assessment, the development of textbooks and outlines teacher training for teachers.

In our interviews and focus groups, participants tended to support a communicative approach to language teaching, learning and assessment but had some observations to discuss. The first observation concerned the level of English expected of children, with one participant (who teaches internationally) noting:

[The] Level of English selected in SNC is way too high for our children.

Another observation, this time from an individual interview with a teacher trainer, concerned the pace of change required by the SNC:

I don't understand, why did the government bring the SNC in so much hurry? They themselves were not ready, including teachers and students. Teachers have no information on how to teach this new curriculum; they are still confused, actually everybody is confused with lots of contradictions.

It remains to be seen if the level of English is too high or if the pace of implementation is too rapid. There are also questions over whether all provinces will implement the SNC. The government of Sindh province appears to have rejected the SNC (see Sheikh, 2021), claiming there had been insufficient consultation with provinces in its development. From an academic perspective, Zahid (2021) has some criticisms of the SNC, suggesting its introduction may not reduce the tendency to 'teach to the test' in Pakistan, but he also suggests that critique (of an educational policy) motivated by pedagogical concerns is healthy and supports the need for more dialogue on the SNC.

4.1.4 Qualifications and accreditation for English language teaching

The minimum qualifications for teaching by grade level in Pakistan under government policy are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Minimum qualifications to teach in Pakistan (Source: MoFEPT, 2020)

Grade taught	Qualifications required
Grades 1–5	Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Education, Associate Degree in Education
Grades 6–10	Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Education, Master of Arts, Master of Science

The qualifications required to become a teacher place emphasis on teacher training in higher education. As an associate degree, bachelor's degree or master's degree is a requirement for employment as a teacher in Grades 1–10, teacher training should take place in authorised and accredited institutions of higher education.

In addition to the above accreditation, the National Professional Standards (MoE, 2009) require teachers of English as a second/foreign language to have subject-specific knowledge and understanding, dispositions and performance and skills (under Standard 10). These subject-specific standards require a knowledge of English as a language (syntax, structure), teaching methods and strategies as well as understanding of the aims of Pakistan's EFL/ESL policy.

4.2 Summary

Pakistan's education policies, including for English teaching, learning and assessment, are thoroughly articulated, although they are complex. The English curriculum emphasises communication, teachers are required to be qualified and there are extensive frameworks written into policy documents (not only at federal level but also in provincial policy documents) that could act as roadmaps for a consistent approach to English language pedagogy. But consistent does not have to mean that teaching practices should be identical across Pakistan. Pakistan is a multilingual country and, as noted in section 3, there are different challenges associated with geography – particularly the urban/rural challenge – which should be considered as the SNC is implemented. The following section discusses practice and in doing so provides some insight into some of these challenges for both teachers and learners.

5 Practice

5.1 The multilingual context

The position of English in Pakistan is complex. Practically, and for reasons of equality and participation, some level of English proficiency is a necessity for most people in Pakistan because of the role English plays in high-stakes situations. For example, English is the language of higher courts, the military and in many governmental and commercial transactions. Additionally, English is an international language used in tourism, on the internet and in media, so daily communication and access to information is frequently via English. However, English usage in daily life is stratified so that daily usage tends to be the preserve of the well-educated or elites, meaning proficiency is a matter of class, geography and gender. A similar situation pertains in education: while English is essential in education on a daily basis, the reality of its proficient usage is a matter of stratification by class, gender and geography (Azar et al., 2016; HRW, 2019). At the same time, Pakistan is multilingual and English sits within this multilingual reality.

A participant in our focus group provided insight into how this complex, multilingual context is experienced by children:

> *In our school we are asked to speak English during the English lessons, but when I teach English to the primary children I have to use Urdu because they don't understand as they belong to an underprivileged background. The medium of instruction depends on the areas. The school where I work is in an area where Balochi speakers live, so their children speak Urdu, Balochi and on top of that they have to learn English, which is too much for them as their parents are mostly illiterate in their own language (such as Urdu or Balochi) and cannot support their children's English skills after school classes. That's why we cannot use English as a medium of instruction.*

As the participant notes and as research shows, multilingualism presents challenges (as well as opportunities) for teachers and learners alike (Heugh et al., 2017). Teachers may try to implement a multilingual language policy, but they can find it difficult, regardless of policy directives, not only because they are not fully trained in working multilingually (ibid:16), but also because of the context (or real lived experience) of the children they teach.

5.2 English language textbooks and resources

5.2.1 Textbooks

Evaluation of named textbooks in use in Pakistan has not been extensive but some research has been conducted within the school system. Aftab's (2011) doctoral research evaluated textbooks in use across the country in 2011, identifying the following textbooks in general use:

- *English for Class 8, Punjab*
- *Everyday English*
- *Guided English*
- *Oxford Progressive English*
- *Advance with English*
- *Step Ahead*
- *Oxon Concept Secondary English Book 1 for Class 6*

Academic evaluation of textbooks in use suggests that textbook usage is such that in class there is a focus on written English and/or a lack or absence of oral/spoken English (Baig et al., 2021; Syed et al., 2019; Nazeer et al., 2015). Consequently, there is a lack of balance in teaching and learning arising from over-reliance in classrooms on the textbooks. The effects of this are that there is little integration of the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking (Aftab, 2011; Syed et al., 2019). Furthermore, Asif et al. (2021) argue there is little congruence between the coursebooks used and the curriculum studied, which is problematic if the curriculum is (as it claims to be) constructed around natural acquisition of English. Finally, related to this latter point, Aftab (2011) suggests there is very little authenticity in textbooks used. In summary, there does appear to be a number of problems in textbook usage from a theoretical/academic perspective in the teaching, learning and assessment of English in Pakistan.

Participants in focus groups and in interviews commented on the use of textbooks, raising more questions. In one focus group, teacher participants noted:

> *In government [schools] we use the Sindh textbook and in private [schools] there are different publisher[s], and it depends on schools what they like and what they think is most suitable according to their curriculum, but mostly it's like a medical rep trying to sell their medicine to a doctor and it's all commission based. Also, lots of private schools started their own publishing companies and ask parents to buy textbooks from them. It's all about ways of earning more money and commission.*

The participant's comment suggests that commercial interests are an additional factor in the use of textbooks in Pakistan but also suggest that – whether commerciality is a factor or not – children studying at the same level may have access to very different quality texts.

The Pakistan government recognises there is an issue with textbooks and their usage in the country. The Single National Curriculum addresses textbooks in detail in sections 4.6 to 4.11. Although the SNC notes that the issue of development of appropriate textbooks (for language learners in Pakistan) is a relatively new area of attention, Pakistan did establish a National Textbook and Learning Materials Policy and Plan of Action in 2006 (published in 2007), which also addressed textbooks (MoE, 2007). The plan established Provincial Committees whose responsibility was to 'select and prescribe textbooks for use in public schools in the respective province or areas of jurisdiction' (MoE, 2007:02). The 2006 policy was largely focused on administrative processes and structures, and established – according to the SNC – a 'well-regulated system of competitive publishing' (MoFEPT, 2020:35).

However, as the SNC noted, there were challenges in implementation towards a new approach to approved textbooks. Although the SNC does not address in detail what these challenges have been, some of the challenges may arise from earlier approaches to educational policy making. As one interview participant, who works as a curriculum developer, noted:

We have three versions of the textbook such as English, Urdu and Sindhi, and they can be used by private schools including English medium. Other private schools such as [.........] do not use our textbook, there are other textbooks for them such as [.........]. There is no study or data to see the comparison of this difference which determines what level for what grade and how to do it. Their [private] systems are working well but there is no link with government, so good lessons can be learned by communicating with them and building a network between these schools and government schools.

It does appear that textbook use warrants further discussion in Pakistan. The SNC is not a prescriptive curriculum (in the sense that it does not specify particular textbooks); instead, it describes, in detail, a staged approach to the development of textbooks – suitable for use in a Pakistani context – that includes requirements on textbook developers who need to consider:

• The relevant curriculum, scope of topic and age of learner during the writing phase of textbook development

• Use of culturally suitable images to support understanding and employment of effective graphics to elaborate concepts; this should happen during the editing phase of textbook development

• The quality of printing, cost and delivery of the textbook during approval (by a textbook board) during the delivery phase of textbook development

The approach is further detailed under five stages, which are planning, drafting, revising, editing, field testing. The SNC also outlines 35 sub-stages (as step-by-step tasks) in the development of textbooks. If the approach is followed, it should result in the development of suitable textbooks because the procedure outlined allows for checks and balances, review and discussion by various stakeholders. However, the SNC is in the process of being phased in, so it is too early to tell if outcomes include a range of textbooks suitable for language learning and teaching in Pakistan at Grades 1–10.

5.2.2 Resources
There is no evidence we could find to suggest that, other than textbooks, English language teaching, learning and assessment is generally supported through use of other classroom resources, such as flashcards, visual aids or authentic materials. We acknowledge that teachers in some classrooms may introduce additional materials, but the practice does not appear to be widespread.

5.3 ICT to support the teaching and learning of English
The NCF (2018) has a provision such that 'computer labs may be available with at least 20 computers with internet connectivity in each secondary and higher secondary school'. The SNC also recommends websites to assist with learning and teaching. In fact, as early as 1947 the Pakistan Educational Conference recommended the use of television, radio and other technology in teaching, meaning the use of technology to support teaching and learning is not a new idea. Furthermore, Taimur-ul-Hassan and Sajid (2013) reported that both teachers and learners had a positive attitude towards the use of multimedia (ICT) in English teaching, learning and assessment (when people are able to access ICT). The reality, however, is that widespread use of technology in schools per se is currently more of an aspiration. The most recent finance report from government noted that '14 per cent government and 27 per cent private schools have a functional computer lab' (Finance Division, 2021:215).

The Covid-19 crisis gave further indication of the status of ICT in teaching and learning in Pakistan. About 27 per cent of school-age children surveyed reported they accessed PTV's Teleschool, while 16 per cent used smartphones. The average number of hours the surveyed children had access to any form of technology at home (television or ICT) was an hour

per day (Finance Division, 2021). While these statistics refer to education generally, a further one-third of children reported that they struggled to study English on their own during the pandemic, as they lacked the confidence to do so (ibid:215). The government of Pakistan did respond to Covid-19 (as discussed in 5.10) and it appears that – based on that experience – ICT does have possibilities in Pakistan in the teaching and learning of English.

However, there is a fundamental problem of infrastructure for schools, as Naviwala (2016) illustrated. Further to this, a government report also noted that drinking water was only available in 68 per cent of government schools and that 77 per cent had toilets (Finance Division, 2021:215). If schools are in general disrepair and lack running water so that neither teachers nor learners are comfortable, the potential for ICT to be effective in supporting teaching, learning and assessment is much reduced.

5.4 Assessment of students' English in school

In Grades 1–10, the SSC part 1 (Grade 9) and SSC part 2 (Grade 10) are taken as annual examinations in March and April each year, assessing students on the whole curriculum, including English. Federal and provincial educational boards are permitted to approve end-of-year examinations in schools. The content of tests administered by boards varies but the tests are generally written only. A model test from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa BISE (accessed for this report) provides an example of a typical English test. The test consists of three sections:

- Section A: multiple choice – grammar and lexis
- Section B: comprehension
- Section C: translation

The construction of the test does emphasise writing and reading and there is only one 'correct' answer to most questions on the test. As a structural approach, this suggests answers could be memorised or prepared in advance, particularly if questions on the test are drawn from a test bank. A participant who was interviewed for this report suggested that 'teaching to the exam' is standard practice:

In most schools teachers teach exam techniques and strategies of passing an English language test rather than communication skills in English. Students memorise everything by noticing the specific familiar characters of the content and attempt the test paper by using their memory and using the exam strategies. Teachers textualise [sic] the English language and students are unable to visualise it. The same is happening in private schools and even college level.

Rind and Malik's (2019) research tends to converge with the views of the practitioner, arguing that current assessment of English is of memory and comprehension and that assessment encourages rote learning because of 'teaching to the test'. Rahman et al. (2021) also point to the connection between classroom practice and assessment, arguing that there is a 'strong negative washback'[8] on classroom practices due to this exam orientation. They argue that this is because there is little congruence between the outcomes and objectives of the curriculum and the format of the assessments. Abbas et al. (2017) outline some of the possible consequences of a general 'teach to the test' approach. They argue that 94 per cent of students tested in six government schools did not meet the criteria for expected English proficiency levels at Grade 5. Data from the 2019 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2019) also illustrates the consequences of the teach to the test approach, showing that only 55 per cent in Grade 5 have reached the expected learning level for reading English. This suggests problems in the current pedagogical (classroom) approach. Dad (2017), similarly to other researchers, argues there is a general problem in classroom approaches such that daily classroom practice involves summative assessment based on anticipated test content.

Teacher participants also noted the complexity of administering teaching, assessment and tests:

We have Sindh board and Aga Khan University (AKU) board in _____ School. In primary, from Grade 1 to 5, we follow the Sindh curriculum. In secondary, we give them a choice of two boards: (i) Sindh Board and (ii) AKU board. Then we teach them curriculum according to their choice of the examination boards from Grade 6 to 10. We have licences from two boards because we met their criteria and we got affiliation. So, we have two separate classes with separate teachers. One type of teachers is trained to teach Sindh's curriculum and the other type of teachers are trained to teach AKU curriculum. They will sit in the same [exams] rooms but will get different papers according to their chosen examination boards. Sindh board assesses on the textbook content, but AKU assesses on skills-based learning outcomes.

However, assessment of English may be in transition in Pakistan as the problem of teaching to the test is recognised in policy documents. For example, the SNC proposes that two forms of assessment should be part of teaching. There should be formative assessment in class through 'quizzes, class tests, presentations, assignments and group discussions' and a summative assessment at the end of term (for example, an end-of-term exam), but the SNC emphasises that summative assessment on its own is of little value (MoFEPT, 2020).

8 "Washback" (alternatively "backwash") is a term used in education to describe the influence, whether beneficial or damaging, of an assessment on the teaching and learning that precedes and prepares for that assessment' (Green, 2020:01).

Further to this, guidelines for assessment have been included in the SNC from 2021 (MoFEPT, 2020). The detailed guidelines on assessment suggest a move away from 'rote learning' towards skills-based assessment using unseen texts and materials. To support the development of this new approach to assessment, the SNC outlines a step-by-step process for constructing a summative assessment. The steps are shown in the following table.

Table 2: Steps towards construction of summative assessment (adapted from MoFEPT, 2020)

Step	Action
1	Decide the type of the test
2	State the criteria of the test
3	State the objectives of the test
4	Produce a 'grid' or a table of test specifications, clearly identifying what is to be tested in relation to the syllabus objectives
5	Decide on type of questions to be used
6	Write the test items, making sure they are appropriate for what they are supposed to test (validity)
7	Devise a marking scheme, which is easy to understand and use
8	Undertake an item analysis to find out the validity and reliability of the test

The SNC also provides a number of examples of assessment tasks to illustrate how assessment should be conducted. In principle, teachers should be able to devise classroom assessment that is formative and summative assessment that tests learning (not memory) by referring to the SNC framework (we also note that similar frameworks have been provided by provincial governments).

However, comments by teacher participants in interview suggest that there is a necessity for training in assessment for teachers at a fundamental level, with one participant noting:

Teachers have no concept of formative assessment and they only do summative assessment that is putting pressure on children, and they hate exams because teachers are creating fear in their hearts. Also teachers don't know how to mark the test and there is no concept of feedback and I am sure that they have never heard of the term 'constructive feedback'. They pass or fail children by guessing on their overall behaviour in the classroom and with them.

While this may appear to be an opinion, another participant, a curriculum director, suggested the same thing in a separate interview, stating:

No, that's the main problem, they have no training [in assessment]. No training on setting and designing and no training on assessment, they only copied the questions from the textbooks.

In the focus group (conducted separately from either interview) teachers also noted that:

We do lots of ongoing assessment. This is to take feedback on how we are in terms of learning outcomes and to see if children are ready for the next step. But most of the time teachers are not trained, so they don't know how to do an informal assessment. They say that they are doing a formative assessment, but they actually make it very hard for children and prepare an exam paper, which is technically wrong. It puts children under a lot of pressure and shows that teachers are not well-trained to assess their children in an appropriate way. Or if I say that they don't entirely know about formative assessment. What they always do is what we call a summative assessment. They make an exam paper and ask their children to fill it like exam style and mark it and then put results in their progress report. In our school we used to do it too but after attending training thanks to CPD we now know how it should be done.

Overall, it appears that teaching to the test is probably embedded in classroom practice, which suggests that the transition to using formative and summative assessment effectively may be a challenge across Pakistan.

5.5 English language teacher accreditation and standards

As noted in 4.1.4, government policy requires teachers of English to be qualified to at least associate degree level (for teaching Grades 1–5) or at least to bachelor degree level (for teaching Grades 6–10 and above). Teachers of English are also supposed (since 2009) to understand the pedagogy of English as a second or foreign language, established as professional standards. From the full set of standards, there are three – 10A, 10B and 10C – which specifically apply to English teachers, shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Standards for ELT teachers adapted from National Professional Standards for Teachers, 2009

Standard	Descriptor
10A Teachers know and understand:	• status of English language in Pakistan • aims of teaching English as a subject at the national level • aims of using English as a medium of instruction in Pakistan • constraints of teaching English as a second/foreign language and strategies to enhance 'learning in English' and 'learning of English as a language' • syntax and structure • English teaching methods and steps of learning process • specific learning difficulties, i.e. specific language impairment
10B Dispositions Teachers value and are committed to:	• understand lesson biases and anxiety for learning ESL/EFL • address all specific needs related to ESL/EFL
10C Performance and skills Teachers engage in activities to:	• use simple English language along with supportive use of Urdu (national language) for effective teaching and learning purposes • identify, analyse and address specific learning difficulties • gradually enable students to communicate in English through a natural sequence of language acquisition, e.g. listening, reading, writing and listening • provide classroom opportunities for choral reading, descriptive writing and spoken English • apply ESL learning theories, rules and pedagogies

Despite the standards and professional requirements, the government of Pakistan's data from 2009 onwards (MoE, 2009) suggests that 26 per cent of teachers are completely untrained. Government analysis (ibid.) also states that teacher training programmes, particularly for primary teachers, are 'abysmal' (MoFEPT, 2020). Other research from 2016 suggested 58 per cent of teachers had no knowledge of the national curriculum and 73 per cent of government-employed teachers had no training in assessment (Mohammad et al., 2017; Tribune, 2017).

5.6 Evaluation of English language teachers

Mansoor (2019) suggests there is no reliable or regulated systems for collecting data on teacher evaluation in Pakistan, although there has been an overall improvement in teacher attendance (a prerequisite for evaluating performance) so that 89 per cent attendance in work by teachers has been sustained for three years (ASER, 2019). However, while this level of attendance is an improvement on previously reported statistics, teacher absenteeism remains a problem (Naviwala, 2015; ASER, 2019:10). Given this situation, comment on teacher performance and evaluation is problematic until a reliable system of teacher evaluation is developed and until the situation with absenteeism (where it exists) is improved.

5.7 CPD for English language teachers

The need for continuing professional development (CPD) has been emphasised in the SNC with greater clarity than previously. The SNC requires 'All teachers should have opportunity for professional development through a programme organised on three-year cycle basis' (MoFEPT, 2020:84). Standard 9 of the SNC elaborates further, requiring teachers to improve, refine and reflect to develop their own teaching practice, to share good practice and develop a 'productive learning environment' in each school and to access resources that will help improve their practice via professional organisations, media and print.

Singh, Rind and Sabur (2020) and Nawab (2020) argue that while there are various programmes of CPD available to teachers across Pakistan, most in-service professional development in Pakistan is provided by donor agencies. This means there is no national programme of CPD. Participants in interviews and focus groups tended to confirm this view, with teacher participants arguing that:

There is no concept of CPD in the mainstream education system. I wasn't even aware of the terminology and it is the same for the majority of teachers. That's why we are far behind and not updated. The Covid pandemic made us all realise the importance of CPD, that without it we cannot function and be ready or prepare to act appropriately according to the situation. And we couldn't

deal with it. But it depends on schools to schools and areas to areas. We need passion, an indulgent approach, adequate facilities, monitoring and a good leadership.

The call for leadership on CPD was echoed by the curriculum development expert who has been involved in delivery of CPD and who described their experience:

Nearly two years ago before the pandemic (in 2019) we conducted training of trainers and trained 30–50 master trainers from all over the province (29 districts, now 30 districts including Kemari in Karachi). The district authorities were not interested. They are stuck in their own administrative stuff that they don't have time to look for any academic stuff (such as CPD, etc.). First of all, they are not academically sound. Most of them are teachers themselves and they don't want to put more responsibilities on their shoulders to spend time on organising new training or to work for CPD; this can be seen at all levels from district education officers to directors, they don't feel any need or they think it's important.

Another participant – an academic – who was interviewed separately was also critical of the role of officials, noting that:

But sadly, official[s] and staff are not interested [in training]; they rely on the third sector.

The same participant did, however, comment positively on the role played by NGOs in delivering training and CPD:

NGOs are working on teachers' training and doing a very good job, but sadly there are not many who can cover all teachers. [xxxxx] Trust is very active. They adopted lots of government schools and not only in Punjab but in other provinces. They train English teachers in government schools, but it depends if they have any projects or not. Government institutions are there but they are not functioning, so NGOs need to step in and that is the only way of providing training to the existing teachers in government sector.

One programme of CPD supported by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) was the PEELI project, operated in Punjab province under the direction of the Punjab School Education Department. PEELI's aim was 'to strengthen the effectiveness of 250,000 primary schoolteachers across Punjab in order to improve the attainment and engagement of the six million children they teach' (British Council, 2020:i). Between 2017 and June 2020, the project was supported by Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development (QAED), working in partnership with the British Council to deliver the project (British Council, 2020:01). PEELI operated under a cascade model of development so that 1,001 primary schoolteachers

from across the province were developed as Expert Trainers, before cascading training to teachers across 36 districts of Punjab. The teachers were provided with 25 days of training, which included a Trainer Development element, a Professional Development element and a Teaching for Success / classroom methodology element.

PEELI was a connected and complex project. Five pieces of research were commissioned during the project including on digital access and literacy among schoolteachers, progress and attitude on English as a medium of instruction, CPD for teachers, change of medium of instruction and inclusion. The project was also evaluated by a third-party partner (FAME) to assess its impact. It is beyond the scope of this report to describe the outcome of PEELI in full but there are two key findings clearly identified in research. The first is that teachers involved in PEELI performed better than teachers who were not. Secondly, teacher competence was noted as 'on an upward trajectory' as a consequence of involvement in PEELI. PEELI was limited to the Punjab province so its impacts were concentrated to this one province, but a notable (and we would suggest significant) development that emerged was the facilitation of 'communities of practice' among educators. Throughout the project, teachers were encouraged to meet in small, relatively informal groups to share ideas and experience. These informal groups are known as communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), which have been shown as effective in encouraging peer learning, mutual support among educators and the co-creation of knowledge and expertise. The concept of communities of practice is particularly helpful in supporting CPD and training because in-service and continuing development is less effective if it simply consists of isolated training days. It is important that training and development is a continuing and continuous process involving sustainable mentoring, ongoing support in school and holistic development for educators.

5.8 English language proficiency in teachers

While federal and provincial government have reported on English language teachers' general levels of proficiency, acknowledging this as low (British Council, 2013; MoFEPT, 2018:03), academic research delivers some further insights into the proficiency of teachers. A descriptive study (Sarwar et al., 2014) investigated the speaking proficiency of 206 prospective teachers who were training at three public sector universities in Punjab.

To investigate English language proficiency, participants (consisting of people who had just started training and others close to graduation) engaged in a dialogue as a warm-up and then performed a speaking task. Researchers employed a rubric to assess English language proficiency of the trainee teachers. Sarwar et

al. (2014) found that there was no significant difference in English proficiency between the two groups during a course of teacher-training, even though the medium of instruction and assessment was English.

Meanwhile, Gul and Aziz (2015) assessed the speaking competencies (fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, confidence) of 150 in-service teachers for using English as a medium of instruction and then interviewed 200 teachers on the outcomes of the assessment. The research suggests that teachers rated their own fluency and grammar competency as lowest, although they had confidence in their ability to teach and confidence in their pronunciation and vocabulary. Gul and Aziz suggested that the social environment – the absence of opportunity to develop their natural English proficiency – was the primary cause of the lack of fluency and grammar competency.

Comments from participants in focus groups and interviews also highlight some of the problems with teachers' proficiency in English. A curriculum developer noted how positive work in developing a curriculum was rendered less effective because of teachers' levels of English language proficiency:

When I visit schools and meet teachers, I find that they [schools] don't have the capacity to teach. They [government and schools] should have checked and matched the curriculum level and teachers' and students' level by conducting a pilot study to assess the ground realities before implementing the idea on the real people. Then the teachers' skills must have been taken into account so they can be properly trained and can therefore be matched with the curriculum elements. The current English curriculum is far too high for the teachers' capacity and their level of English. Secondly, when they don't understand anything in English, then tell me how would they teach?

5.9 Private sector schools in Pakistan

This report has primarily focused on the public sector and government language policy but there are approximately 66,000 private schools in Pakistan (Finance Division, 2020). There is variety in private schools in Pakistan so that there are low-cost private schools (Bizenjo, 2020) who have had some success in closing the gender gap (in outcomes) as well as private schools charging higher fees. Children in some private schools study for the SCC whereas children in other private schools study for iGCSE, International Baccalaureate or other qualifications. This variety makes it difficult to generalise about private education, but we can note that much of what is included in this report regarding the conditions in schools (where private schools follow the federal or provincial curriculum) applies equally to much private education.

Having said that, the teaching and learning experience in private education can be different from the experience in government public schools. An interview participant described one difference:

> Government has the same examinations using the same curriculum, [private provider] has a different pattern, they focus on student's learning outcome rather than text. In government schools we focus on the textbooks, so government and private have different strategies. [Private provider] follows the curriculum and prepare their text from it. In government, teachers look for the text and take questions from the textbook's exercises and copy and paste the exam questions. Teachers set the test if they are subject specialists. Each board has their own exam paper, they all follow the same pattern according to the Sindh textbook board, [so it is the] same style of administration [in government schools] but in private [education] it is different.

There are also differences in facilities and resources between some private schools (typically the better-funded private schools) and the public sector, as one focus group participant described:

> Absolutely right, they are different because they cannot be compared. Government schools don't even have fans in extreme hot weather conditions, no windows in cold weather conditions, then how would we expect modern facilities like the private sector have in terms of everything such as well-trained teachers, smart classrooms with multimedia and all sorts of things? Government teachers cannot replicate the acquired pre-service knowledge, then why would they be motivated towards CPD when they are unable to use the updated skills without necessary facilities?

5.10 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

In Pakistan, schools first closed on 27 February 2020 (in Sindh) and from 14 March in the rest of the country. In 2020, schools began phased re-openings on September 15 (Grades 9–12), September 23 (Grades 6–8) and September 30 (nursery to Grade 5). Children in all schools attended on alternate days (Zacharia, 2020). Schools closed again on 26 November 2020 and re-opened on 18 January 2021 (Crawford et al., 2021). There were extensions of school closures in 18 Covid 'hotspots' until April 2021 when staggered re-opening began again with Grades 9–12 re-starting school from 19 April and Grades 1–8 following on 28 April (Dawn, 2021). It is estimated that 300,000 schools have been closed during the pandemic for various periods to date, affecting 30 million children (World Bank, 2021).

The government response to Covid-19 was rapid, launching an educational TV channel starting with Taleem Gar in Punjab on 13 April 2020 and Teleschool across the rest of Pakistan (World Bank, 2021). Teleschool was supported with a $5m grant from the World Bank, producing 'Knowledge Packs' to support policy makers' decision making (Zacharia, 2020). The government followed Teleschool with the introduction of a text messaging system to enable parents and educators to keep in contact from May 2020. Further initiatives by government included securing $20m (USD) from the Global Partnership for Education, which will – in time – enable them to offer children a range of distance learning materials and provision, support and inclusive distance learning pathways to address the effects of loss of education through Covid-19, including support and training for teachers in the delivery of distance learning (GPE, 2020).

However, children's experience of schooling under Covid has been variable. For example, the BBC reported that students in a private school in Lahore were able to access online learning five days per week due to the school's (and the children's) capacity to engage online. Elsewhere though, research by UNICEF (2020) suggested that at the start of the pandemic 15 per cent of children had no access to any kind of technological device, only 47 per cent of teachers reported teaching remotely and only 38 per cent of children reported receiving learning materials from their school. This report was based on research conducted in August 2020 and it should be noted that the Pakistan government has continued to act under its Covid recovery plan since then. UNICEF's research does, however, illustrate well the scale of the challenge presented by Covid-19.

According to people we spoke to, teachers also felt the pressure exerted by the challenge of teaching during the pandemic. One focus group participant spoke emotionally about this:

> Government teachers were under immense pressure to conduct online trainings. The majority of them had never used any computers in their life and they didn't even have any smartphones. Also, the electricity was the key issue.

Another focus group participant (who works in a different school) also suggested how many teachers had risen to the challenges of working in a pandemic:

> … for example, when we had to move to online classes, my schools had no resources that they could provide computers or laptops to teachers and students or even internet facilities. But all teachers arranged everything for our children (students) as a matter of self-help. I am so proud that our teachers felt that they should do something, the students would be left behind otherwise. Also, teachers learned how to use ICT so they can help their children. I know teachers purchased smartphones and other devices only because of their online classes.

There were two fears, one their own jobs were at stake and second that they were thinking about the students. People weren't able to put food on the table but they had to buy the online resources. This happened to almost all private schools as far as I am aware, teachers bought their own devices, own internet, no bill was reimbursed by the schools' authorities no, nothing.

5.11 Summary

It would be easy to read this section pessimistically, as it highlights a number of challenges in the teaching, learning and assessment of English. But it is important to note that the educators we spoke to in developing this report were passionate and committed to education. It is also important to note that some NGOs and government departments (for example, the British Council and QAED in Punjab) have worked together very productively on complex and challenging projects, primarily (but not only) in developing support for teachers. Given the energy and commitment we note here, there are reasons to be optimistic – despite some of the issues around English language teaching, learning and assessment. For teachers, initial training, in-service training and continuing professional development appear to be key issues to be addressed, However, there have been projects in Pakistan that appear to have developed positive, relatively low-cost approaches to addressing the training of teachers. We highlight particularly the emergence of communities of practice among English language teachers in Pakistan as a positive development. The final section is a reflection on the strengths, challenges and opportunities for English language teaching, learning and assessment in Pakistan.

6 Strengths, opportunities and challenges

There are a number of strengths to Pakistan's education system which should be noted. Firstly, Pakistan's Single National Curriculum of 2020 is a framework for teaching and learning English through communicative language teaching. The SNC represents a development over ten years towards teaching English as a language. It contains, for the first time in policy documents, a fully articulated approach to pedagogy. The SNC is not simply a policy document, it is a roadmap for teaching and learning. Secondly, Pakistan has a large young population which is increasingly IT capable and has a rapidly growing IT sector. The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of distance learning and mobile learning so that Pakistan's youth appear to be well placed to engage in distance and mobile learning if the right approach can be found. Thirdly, the passion in the workforce of teachers, curriculum designers, educators and ELT experts in Pakistan is clear. It came through in our interviews and it comes through in the engagement of educators, as reported in projects such as PEELI. This passion for teaching and learning represents a significant resource.

However, there are a number of challenges faced by Pakistan in the implementation of effective language teaching, which include the challenge of infrastructure – in rural areas some schools lack basic facilities of running water, electricity supply and lack of classroom facilities and material resources. In some schools there are no bathroom facilities for girls. A second challenge is that the teaching workforce is under-supported and under-skilled. Specifically, teacher training in Pakistan has systemic problems despite the professionalism and commitment of individuals who work within it. In this report we describe how some trainee teachers do not improve in English proficiency throughout a one-year course.

A third challenge is school attendance and drop-out (OOSC) – parental attitudes, economic pressure, access are factors in low attendance and high drop-out rates. The 'raw materials' of teaching and learning are learners, and the high drop-out rate in Pakistan is a concern if equality is considered because drop-out tends to be among lower socio-economic groups and among girls. This is a concern for English language teaching and learning because of the importance of English in opportunity. Finally, complexity presents a challenge in Pakistan. The system that has developed in Pakistan is immensely complex, including its approach to teaching and learning English. This complexity is such that pupils sitting side by side in the same exam for the same-level qualification (SSC) could be taking different tests, which have been assembled differently, drawing on different (non-comparable) coursebooks after being taught in a completely different way. Complexity per se may not be a 'bad' thing but such levels of complexity are hugely wasteful of resources and don't allow easy sharing of best practice among the teaching community.

Despite challenges, our report suggests that if Pakistan builds on a commonly agreed framework for teaching and draws on the passion and knowledge existing within its own workforce, the learning and teaching of English will continue to improve and could meet the aims of policy and provide a great learning experience for learners. We suggest some changes could be beneficial for English language education in Pakistan.

1. **A change in teaching philosophy.** The future of English language learning and teaching both indicates and necessitates a shift in pedagogy. The SNC is a fully articulated approach, but for it to be fully effective teachers must both understand the theoretical bases of the government approach and then learn new techniques. For this to occur teacher training also needs to embrace the shift to a communicative language approach because it is in teacher training that the epistemology of teaching (the understanding of why teaching works) is located. Ashraf, Turner and Laar (2021) address this point, noting that teachers are mediators of language in a classroom so that 'buy in' has to involve teachers as a matter of teaching philosophy, not just practice.

2. **The emergence of a community of practice among ELT educators, experts, academics and language-focused policy makers.** This is a change which already appears to be happening.

3. **The development of mobile learning.** This appears to present an opportunity. As Rehman (2020) notes, the pandemic has caused – through necessity – a global experiment in education and in distance and mobile learning. The Pakistan government responded quickly to the pandemic with the introduction of Teleschool and subsequent initiatives. The government took the position that 'We have to think of this [education] not as a coronavirus-specific problem, but how can we use coronavirus to fix the other problems; for example, that millions of kids are out of school?' (Malik, 2020).

Distance learning does have limitations and challenges, but when it is considered that, as of November 2021, the pandemic is still rolling around the planet, it does appear that countries will have to establish ways of educating children from a distance for the foreseeable future. Viewed from that perspective, if Teleschool and subsequent initiatives are seen as the start of an approach to distance learning, incorporating mobile learning will be integral to addressing educational inequalities, including those in learning English.

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Syeda Nudrat is a researcher, community activist and language teacher. Syeda grew up and was educated in Pakistan and worked as a professional in education from 1999 to 2010, initially as an English teacher before working as an educational programme project worker focusing on women's health programmes in Karachi. As an academic, Syeda's research has investigated the conditions in a women's prison in Karachi, Pakistan, and she conducted an ethnographic project investigating the acquisition of English as a second language among Pakistani people in Birmingham, UK. Syeda speaks Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi and some Arabic and Farsi.

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This report provides an overview of how English language teaching, learning and assessment are currently situated within school-level education in Pakistan. The report provides up-to-date contextual information, exploring policies and practices. The authors draw on policy documentation, research studies and a small number of interviews and focus groups to provide an overall picture of the current scenario. They provide commentary on the status of English within the curriculum, classroom practices, how teachers are supported to develop their skills and knowledge and the opportunities, challenges and future trends that the authors have extrapolated from their research.