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Teachers' perceptions of educational reform: A comparative study of EFL/ESL contexts in Algeria, Uganda, and the United States

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Keywords

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Abstract

Educational reforms are sustained processes of systemic change in educational policies, structures, and practices designed to improve the quality, equity, and relevance of education in response to societal needs (Fullan, 2007). Because these needs vary across contexts, reform implementation is inevitably shaped by local institutional, cultural, and pedagogical conditions. Despite the global diffusion of competency-based reforms, a persistent gap remains between policy intentions and classroom practice. Building on this gap, the present study investigates how teachers perceive educational reform across diverse Global North and Global South teaching contexts. Specifically, it examines English language teachers' perceptions of reform in Algeria, Uganda, and the United States. Using a single-instrument survey design with embedded qualitative components, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach. Data were collected from fifty-seven (57) EFL, ESL, and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers through a structured questionnaire combining Likert-scale and open-ended items. The analysis focused on teachers' perceptions of reform objectives, implementation processes, institutional support, and classroom impact. The findings reveal substantial cross-contextual convergence, particularly regarding limited teacher participation in reform design, insufficient professional development, increased workload, and weak alignment between policy expectations and classroom realities. Differences also emerged between Global North and Global South contexts: Algeria and Uganda emphasised implementation constraints, whereas the United States foregrounded accountability pressures. Although contexts differed in governance structures, reform visibility, and resource distribution, reforms were consistently experienced as top-down processes that constrained teacher agency and engagement. The study concludes that implementation challenges derive less from teacher resistance than from structural and contextual misalignment. It therefore calls for participatory, context-sensitive, and resource-supported reform models.

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Mots clés

Politiques éducatives ; Pratiques enseignantes ; Réforme pédagogique ; Agentivité ; Charge de travail ; Relations Nord-Sud

Résumé

Les réformes éducatives sont des processus planifiés et durables de changement systémique des politiques, des structures et des pratiques éducatives visant à améliorer la qualité, l'équité et la pertinence de l'éducation en réponse aux besoins de la société (Fullan, 2007). Les éducateurs reconnaissent que ces besoins varient selon les contextes. Malgré l'adoption mondiale des réformes fondées sur l'approche par compétences, un écart persistant subsiste entre les intentions des politiques éducatives et les pratiques réelles en classe. Partant de ce constat, cette recherche vise à examiner la manière dont les enseignants perçoivent les réformes éducatives dans divers contextes d'enseignement du globe Nord et du globe Sud. À cette fin, l'étude analyse les perceptions des enseignants d'Anglais concernant les réformes éducatives dans trois régions distinctes : l'Algérie, l'Ouganda et les États-Unis. En s'appuyant sur un dispositif d'enquête reposant sur un instrument unique intégrant des composants qualitatifs, dans le cadre d'une approche mixte, les données ont été recueillies auprès de cinquante-sept (57) enseignants d'Anglais langue étrangère (EFL), d'Anglais langue seconde (ESL) et 'd'English Language Arts '(ELA) au moyen d'un questionnaire structuré combinant des échelles de Likert et des questions ouvertes. L'étude examine les perceptions relatives aux objectifs des réformes, à leur mise en œuvre, au soutien institutionnel ainsi qu'à leur impact sur les pratiques de classe. Les résultats révèlent une forte convergence entre les différents contextes, notamment en ce qui concerne la faible implication des enseignants dans la conception des réformes, l'insuffisance du développement professionnel, l'augmentation de la charge de travail et le manque d'adéquation entre les attentes des politiques éducatives et les réalités de la classe. Toutefois, des divergences apparaissent entre le globe Nord et le globe Sud quant à l'orientation des réformes : l'Algérie et l'Ouganda mettent davantage l'accent sur la mise en œuvre des réformes, tandis que les États-Unis se concentrent davantage sur les mécanismes de responsabilisation et de reddition de comptes (accountability). Bien que des différences contextuelles existent en matière de structures de gouvernance, de visibilité des réformes et de répartition des ressources, les réformes sont néanmoins perçues de manière constante comme des processus imposés de manière descendante (« top-down »), limitant l'autonomie professionnelle et l'engagement des enseignants. L'étude conclut que les difficultés de mise en œuvre découlent moins d'une résistance des enseignants que d'un manque d'adéquation entre les réformes, les contextes locaux et les réalités structurelles. Elle plaide ainsi en faveur de modèles de réforme participative, sensibles aux contextes soutenus par des ressources adéquates.

1. Introduction

Educational reforms are planned and sustained processes of systemic change in educational policies, structures, and practices. These initiatives are aimed at improving the quality, equity, and relevance of education in response to societal needs (Fullan, 2007). Societal needs differ across contexts, leading many education systems to shift from

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traditional instruction toward competency-based models that emphasize the application of knowledge and skills in real-world settings. However, the success of these reforms often depends on the connection between policy discourse and classroom realities. This implementation process is heavily influenced by how teachers perceive change and their ability to exercise professional agency (Fullan, 2007).

In this study, we examine these dynamics across three distinct geographical and socio-political regions: Algeria, Uganda, and the United States. These contexts were selected to provide a diverse perspective on how English language teaching reforms are interpreted and implemented in different institutional environments. While each region faces unique linguistic and systemic challenges, they all share the common goal of modernizing their educational frameworks to better prepare students for a globalized world.

1.1 Contextual Background

The three contexts: Algeria (DZ), Uganda (UG) and the United States of America (U.S.) have been selected for being the environments of the researchers involved in this study. Algeria, a north African republic, Uganda, an East African country, and the United States of America all bear specific and characterizing contextual features that deserve to be investigated to identify convergences and divergences in terms of reform perceptions.

Algeria has a rich linguistic landscape that has witnessed quick and drastic changes since its independence in 1962. The educational system has witnessed revolutionary actions as the question of identity was a primary concern and the immediate actions post-independence were democratization, free education for all Algerians, and Arabization, the implementation of Arabic as a medium of instruction as a substitute to French (the colonial language prior to independence) (Sarnou, 2024). At the pedagogical level, educational reform was initiated in 2002 in order to modernize education by shifting from a traditional teacher-centered model to a competency-based approach (CBA) (Gasmi, 2020). Since then, many structural and organizational changes have been undertaken. In the teaching of English as a foreign language, reform aimed to develop learner autonomy, critical thinking, and problem solving. Equipping learners with skills that allow them to adapt to the 21st century challenges is a priority and today Algeria is experiencing even further reforms with the adoption of English as a first foreign language to better position itself in a complex technological and AI-driven international context.

In Uganda, the government has recently introduced a major change called the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) for secondary schools. This reform, led by the Ministry of Education and Sports (2019), is a significant shift away from the old way of teaching. In the past, the system was very focused on memorizing information to pass examinations. The new CBC aims to help students develop skills like critical thinking, creativity, and communication. To support this change, the Ministry has organized training sessions for secondary teachers (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019). These workshops are designed to help teachers gain the new skills they need to manage a

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classroom where students can succeed together with different learning needs.

In the United States, changes to how English learners are taught in secondary schools have been driven by federal laws. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 created a system where schools are held strictly accountable for the progress of students who are still learning English. This focus continued with the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015, which integrated English language skills into the core standards used to measure school success. Because of these laws, schools have moved away from teaching English as a separate subject. Now, teachers are expected to teach both language skills and academic subjects like science or math at the same time. This requires educators to use special teaching methods to make complex lessons understandable for students who are not yet fluent in English (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This paper examines English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as a Second Language (ESL), and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers' perceptions of educational reforms in three diverse contexts: Algeria, Uganda, and the United States. Using a comparative research design, the study explores how English language teachers in secondary education perceive reform in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and professional development. The analysis situates a contextual framework accounting for the linguistic and institutional dimensions shaping reform in each setting. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire targeting 57 EFL/ESL/ELA teachers from the three contexts to elicit teachers' views on reform objectives, implementation, institutional support, and impact on classroom practices.

The comparative analysis highlights cross-contextual patterns and context-specific variations in teachers' responses to reform. The findings point to shared challenges, limited teacher involvement in decision-making, gaps between policy discourse and classroom realities, and distinct concerns shaped by local resources, language policies, and systemic priorities. Foregrounding teachers' voices, the study underscores the role of teacher agency and contextual sensitivity in evaluating the effectiveness of the development and implementation of educational reforms.

2. Literature Review

Educational reform is a non-linear, systemic process that seeks to improve the quality of instruction and learning outcomes. However, the successful transition from policy design to classroom practice is often hampered by the "policy-practice gap," where the theoretical goals of the administration do not align with the on-the-ground realities of the school (Hall & Hord, 2015). To understand why reforms in Algeria, Uganda, and the U.S. experience varying degrees of success, it is necessary to examine the role of teacher agency, the global shift towards competency-based models, and the local barriers that impede progress.

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2.1 Teacher Agency and Change

Central to any educational transformation is the concept of teacher agency. Fullan (2016) posits that for a reform to be meaningful, it must be "internalized" by the teachers, for if they do not see the practical value in the change, they may resort to "surface-level implementation." This is supported by Alagöz and Canlı (2024), who found that a teacher's openness to change is a primary predictor of their adaptive performance in innovative school settings. When teachers feel a reform is imposed on them from the top-down without their consultation, their self-efficacy and commitment diminish (Gordon et al., 2024).

2.2 Global Shift to Competency-Based Education

Current global trends indicate a movement away from traditional, teacher-centered instruction toward competency-based approaches (CBA). This shift reflects a broader global convergence where educational frameworks native to the Global North are exported as "travelling policies" to the Global South, frequently functioning as a globalized localism that assumes universal conditions of material abundance and institutional support (Schweisfurth, 2013; Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012). Consequently, when these frameworks cross geopolitical and economic boundaries, they meet vastly different infrastructural and cultural realities.

In Algeria, the shift began in 2002 to modernize the curriculum, yet Sarnou (2024) suggests that the transition remains incomplete because the system has not fully accounted for the "generational perspective" of its teaching force. In Uganda, the 2020 Lower Secondary Curriculum reform represents a similar attempt to move toward skill acquisition and continuous assessment (Barasa et al., 2023). However, these goals often clash with historical, examination-based systems endemic to post-colonial contexts. Conversely, in the U.S., representing the Global North baseline where many of these outcomes-based paradigms originated, legislative frameworks like the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) attempt to balance competency goals with strict accountability standards, particularly for English Language Learners (ELLs).

2.3 Challenges to Effective Implementation

Despite the distinct sociolinguistic contexts of these three nations, the barriers to reform remain notably consistent. These range from failure to consult teachers in the design phase (Mugarura et al., 2026), significant gaps in professional development (Barasa et al., 2023), and ineffective implementation strategies that fail to meet the needs of the physical environment they are planned for (Clegg et al., 2007).

2.4 Summary

The literature shows that although competency-based education has become a dominant global reform agenda, its translation into classroom practice remains inconsistent across contexts such as Algeria, Uganda, and the United States. A persistent

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gap emerges between what reforms promise, being learner-centered, skills-based education, and how they are actually implemented, which is often through centralized and top-down approaches that leave limited room for teacher agency. In many cases, teachers are expected to drive change while having little involvement in shaping it, which weakens their sense of ownership and leads to superficial rather than meaningful implementation.

While implementation challenges are sometimes explained in terms of teacher resistance, the literature more often points to deeper systemic issues, including limited professional development, weak alignment with local realities, and insufficient institutional support. At the same time, much of the existing research tends to describe these problems within individual contexts rather than explaining how and why they persist across different systems. As a result, there is still limited understanding of how teacher agency is shaped, or constrained, within broader reform environments, and why competency-based reforms continue to struggle to produce real change in classroom practice despite their widespread adoption.

2.5 Research Questions

(i) What do teachers perceive as their role in educational reforms in Algeria, Uganda and the U.S.?

(ii) What do teachers perceive as challenges to implementation of the reforms?

(iii) What are the implications of teacher perspectives for the effective implementation of educational reforms across the Global North and South?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

For this study, we utilized a single-instrument survey design with embedded qualitative components (an embedded/convergent mixed-methods approach). This design allowed us to capture both quantitative trends as a primary source of data, as well as allowing for open-ended text within the same tool to capture deeper qualitative perspectives, nuances that numbers alone cannot express (Bouguebs & Djouima, 2025). Thus, we were able to examine and compare teachers' perceptions of recent educational reforms across three contexts.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

We used a purposive sampling strategy intended to provide quality, localized insights. In line with qualitative research traditions, the focus is on "information power" (Malterud et al.,2015) and the depth of the individual educator experience. Using a purposive sampling limited the ability to generalize across a larger population but allowed us to gather more in-depth information from this particular sub-group of teachers.

Using this strategy, participants were intentionally selected from active English teachers in one of the three countries studied. Participants self-identified as meeting the minimum criteria. In addition, the survey was designed to request detailed data only from

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participants who identified that they knew or weren't sure about educational reform in their country. Demographic survey items identified participants' teaching context (EFL/ESL/ELA) and location, the age range of their students, the length of their teaching experience, and the size of their classes (Table 1).

Table 1.

Cross-Contextual Demographics

	DZ (N=33) n(%)	**UG (N=16) n (%)**	**US (N=8) n (%)**
Teaching Context			
EFL	29 (87.87%)	1 (6.25%)	0
ESL	4 (12.12%)	16 (87.50%)	5 (62.50%)
ELA	0	1 (6.25%)	3 (37.50%)
Learners' Ages			
15 to 18+	31 (93.93%)	15 (93.75%)	8 (100%)
11 to 14	4 (12.12%)	3 (18.75%)	1 (12.50%)
Teaching Experience			
0 to 5 years	12 (36.36%)	3 (18.75%)	0
6 to 15 years	17 (51.51%)	11 (68.75%)	1 (12.50%)
16 years or more	4 (12.12%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (50.00%)
No response	0	0	3 (37.50%)
Average Class Size			
More than 70 students	0	12 (75.00%)	0
46 to 70 students	0	1 (6.25%)	2 (25.00%)
26 to 45 students	31 (93.93%)	2 (12.50%)	1 (12.50%)
1 to 25 students	2 (6.89%)	1 (6.25%)	2 (25.00%)
No response	0	0	3 (37.50%)

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3.3 Research Instrument

The research was conducted through a structured, web-based questionnaire created in Google Forms, composed of demographic questions and Likert scale items which measured key points including understanding of reform goals, teacher involvement in reform, adequacy of professional development, and overall impact on workload (both in and outside the classroom) and assessment.

A global reliability analysis was not performed on the entire survey instrument, as the survey is multidimensional and captures distinct conceptual domains (e.g., demographics, feedback, and outcomes). Because Cronbach's alpha assumes a unidimensional scale, calculating a single α across disparate sections would yield a statistically meaningless result. Therefore, reliability analysis was appropriately restricted to the specific subscale tracking impact (α = .793). A reliability coefficient of (α = .70) or higher was used as the acceptable threshold, as recommended by Nunnally (1978) and DeVellis (2016).

Open-ended questions were embedded in the survey to elicit qualitative elaboration on the quantitative mechanics. These questions allowed participants to share views on the biggest challenges they have encountered when implementing reforms in their classrooms, and what, if anything, they would change about how reforms are implemented.

3.4 Data Collection

Because this study presented minimal risk and involved completely anonymous data collection, formal institutional review board approval was not required. Nonetheless, we conducted the study in strict accordance with the ethical standards for human subjects research. The target population consisted solely of adult educators, ensuring that no vulnerable populations were involved. To protect participant privacy and maintain absolute anonymity, we did not collect any personally identifiable information, including names, email addresses, or IP addresses; thus, individual responses could not be linked back to any participant. Potential participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary, and because no identifying data was gathered, the completion and submission of the online survey served as implied consent. All collected data were stored securely on a restricted-access Google Drive folder, accessible exclusively to the primary research team.

The survey instrument was distributed using a dual recruitment strategy, utilizing direct email invitations to the research team's professional networks alongside recruitment posts in specialized educator social media groups.

After collecting the data with the Google Form, it was exported into an Excel sheet, then divided into regional groups and shared with each region’s individual researcher via a Google share to ensure secure access.

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3.5 Data Analysis

The data were quantified and analyzed by the use of descriptive statistics, focusing on the identification of patterns through frequencies and mean scores. Qualitative data were also integrated through thematic analysis interpreting comments on items designed to capture the nuances that numbers alone cannot express (Bouguebs & Djouima, 2025). This process began with an initial regional analysis, wherein individual researchers independently generated a first draft of codes for their respective contexts. To establish inter-rater reliability and minimize coder bias, the research team collaboratively reviewed the independent coding, resolving any discrepancies through discussion until consensus was achieved. Following this calibration, the regional data were combined, and we analyzed the shared patterns to construct overarching thematic categories. To ensure descriptive validity, these finalized themes were anchored strictly to the verbatim text of the participants' responses, ensuring an accurate, unembellished account of their perspectives. Ultimately, these overarching categories provided a unified framework for a rigorous cross-contextual evaluation of the findings.

3.6 Data Integration: Cross-Contextual Comparison Framework

To integrate the mixed-methods data, we utilized a cross-contextual comparison framework to systematically synthesize and contrast findings across the three studied national contexts. This comparative dimension allowed us to identify structural patterns of convergence and divergence in how educational reforms are experienced and perceived by educators. Rather than evaluating the dataset as a single aggregate, we examined the data multi-dimensionally, breaking down findings by geographic region, localized teaching contexts, and institutional environments. This approach provided a rich, nuanced view of how reform impacts have transcended regional boundaries (convergences) and which have remain uniquely bound to specific environmental or cultural factors (divergences).

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the comparative study on teachers' perceptions of educational reforms in Algeria, Uganda, and the United States. To ensure analytical coherence, the discussion is organized thematically rather than according to individual questionnaire items. This approach allows the findings to be interpreted comparatively while highlighting broader patterns related to reform awareness, implementation, teacher participation, professional development, and classroom realities. The discussion further demonstrates that educational reforms are deeply influenced by sociolinguistic environments, institutional structures, and contextual constraints.

4.1 Educational Contexts and Reform Orientation

The findings reveal that the status and function of English within each educational system significantly shape both the nature of reforms and teachers' perceptions of them.

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Although all three countries have undertaken educational reforms intended to modernize schooling and improve educational quality, the sociolinguistic positioning of English differs considerably across contexts.

In Algeria, English continues to occupy the position of a foreign language taught primarily within formal educational institutions. Since independence in 1962, French has retained substantial influence in administration and education, leaving English in a secondary position for decades. More recently, however, English has increasingly been associated with globalization, academic mobility, scientific research, and international competitiveness. Teachers in this study referred to reforms linked to competency-based instruction, early English teaching, ICT integration, increased instructional time, and the gradual expansion of English-medium instruction. These findings correspond to the broader educational reforms initiated in 2002, which aimed to modernize curricula and promote communicative competence in language teaching. As Gasmi (2020) explains, these reforms represented a major shift in Algerian education by reorienting language instruction toward competence development and communicative effectiveness.

Uganda presents a markedly different context in which English functions not only as an official language but also as the principal medium of instruction. Unlike Algeria, English extends beyond educational institutions into administrative and public life. Teachers overwhelmingly identified reforms associated with the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), learner-centered pedagogy, and continuous assessment. The high level of reform awareness among Ugandan respondents suggests stronger policy dissemination and visibility within the educational system. Furthermore, the Ugandan findings reflect broader international trends toward competency-based education aimed at equipping learners with practical and transferable skills relevant to labor market demands. According to Mugarura et al. (2026), many educational systems worldwide have shifted from content-based to competency-based curricula due to concerns that examination-oriented systems fail to prepare learners adequately for contemporary social and economic realities.

The United States differed substantially from both African contexts. Although English is the dominant societal language, most respondents in this study were ESL teachers working with multilingual learners. Participants demonstrated comparatively limited awareness of specific reforms and frequently associated educational reform with accountability legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This comparatively low level of reform literacy may be explained by the decentralized nature of the American educational system, where reforms are implemented across states and districts rather than through a unified national framework. Additionally, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), English Language Learners constitute approximately 15% of total school enrollment, indicating that the study sample reflects a specific segment of the U.S. teaching population rather than national trends more broadly.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that educational reform cannot be detached from the sociolinguistic and institutional realities within which it is

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implemented. Reform is therefore not merely a pedagogical process but also a historical, political, and contextual one.

4.2 Teacher Awareness and Perceptions of Reform

Teachers across the three contexts demonstrated differing levels of awareness and understanding of educational reforms (Table 2). Ugandan respondents reported the highest levels of perceived clarity regarding reform objectives, whereas Algerian teachers expressed moderate awareness and U.S. respondents demonstrated comparatively lower levels of understanding.

Table 2.

Awareness of reform by region

	DZ (N=33) n (%)	UG (N=16) n (%)	US (N=8) n (%)
Awareness of Recent Reform			
Yes	22 (66.66%)	16 (100.00%)	2 (25.00%)
I do not know	11 (33.34%)	0	3 (37.50%)
No	0	0	3 (37.50%)

The Ugandan findings suggest that sustained governmental communication and nationwide implementation strategies may contribute to stronger teacher awareness. Participants generally recognized the goals of competency-based reforms and viewed them as relevant to labor market demands and practical skills development. This finding supports the argument advanced by Barasa et al. (2023), who identify teachers as a fundamental condition for successful educational change. Teachers who clearly understand reform objectives are more likely to engage meaningfully with implementation processes.

In Algeria, respondents demonstrated partial awareness of reform objectives but also considerable uncertainty regarding the nature and implications of reforms. While many participants referred to competency-based education and curriculum modernization, others remained unfamiliar with specific policy initiatives. This ambiguity may reflect insufficient dissemination of reform information as well as the gradual and uneven implementation of educational transformation within the Algerian system.

The U.S. findings reveal a different form of uncertainty. Several respondents either failed to identify recent reforms or perceived reforms primarily as administrative rather than pedagogical initiatives. This may stem from the fragmented structure of educational

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governance in the United States, where policy changes are often introduced incrementally at local or state levels and are not always explicitly framed as reforms.

Despite contextual differences, teachers across all three countries expressed reservations concerning the relevance of reforms to classroom realities. Although Ugandan teachers generally viewed reforms positively and aligned them with skills-oriented learning, they also highlighted implementation difficulties linked to inadequate training and limited resources. Algerian and U.S. teachers, meanwhile, more frequently perceived a disconnect between policy expectations and classroom conditions.

These findings are consistent with broader reform literature suggesting that educational change is often experienced as externally imposed rather than collaboratively constructed. Teachers may therefore acknowledge reform goals conceptually while simultaneously questioning their practical applicability and relevance to everyday classroom realities.

4.3 Teacher Participation in Reform Design

One of the most significant findings emerging from the study concerns teachers' perceived exclusion from reform planning and decision-making processes. Across all three contexts, respondents consistently described reforms as top-down initiatives implemented with limited teacher consultation.

In Algeria, teachers reported that reforms were introduced with minimal involvement from classroom practitioners. Similarly, Ugandan respondents described themselves as "outsiders" expected to implement policies in which they had little voice. U.S. participants echoed these concerns by repeatedly emphasizing the importance of consulting "actual teachers" before introducing educational changes.

This convergence across contexts is particularly noteworthy. Despite differences in educational systems and reform priorities, teachers consistently perceived themselves as implementers rather than contributors to educational change. These findings strongly support Michael Fullan's (2016) argument that successful reform depends heavily on teacher ownership, engagement, and professional participation. Likewise, the UNESCO (2025) Education 2030 Incheon Declaration identifies teachers as a "fundamental condition" for achieving quality education.

The findings further suggest that teacher exclusion contributes directly to uncertainty, frustration, and uneven implementation. When teachers are not consulted, reforms risk being perceived as administrative obligations disconnected from classroom realities. Consequently, policy compliance may occur institutionally without genuine pedagogical transformation.

4.4 Professional Development and Institutional Support

A major finding across the three countries concerns the perceived inadequacy of professional development and institutional support accompanying educational reforms (Figure 1). Although professional training initiatives existed in all contexts, respondents

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consistently described them as insufficient, fragmented, theoretical, or poorly aligned with classroom realities.

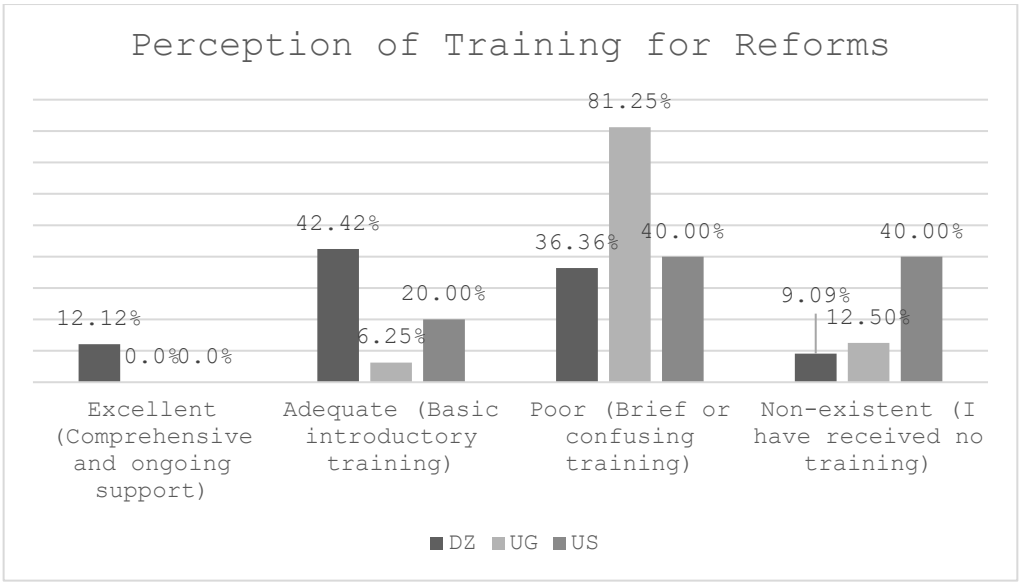


Figure 1. Perception of training reforms by percent of responses by region

In Uganda, most participants characterized reform-related training as brief, confusing, or inadequate. Teachers emphasized that they were expected to implement competency-based approaches without receiving sufficient preparation. Similar concerns emerged in Algeria, where respondents frequently described training opportunities as inconsistent and lacking practical applicability. U.S. teachers likewise criticized professional development programs for failing to prepare them adequately for changing instructional demands.

These findings align with the conclusions of the Boston Consulting Group (2014), which reported that teachers often perceive professional development as disconnected from their professional needs and classroom realities. Effective educational reform therefore requires sustained and practice-oriented support rather than isolated or purely theoretical training sessions.

Institutional constraints further intensified implementation challenges across contexts. Large class sizes, insufficient teaching materials, limited ICT access, and inadequate infrastructure were repeatedly identified as major barriers to reform implementation. These constraints were particularly severe in Uganda, where some teachers reported overcrowded classrooms and shortages of essential resources.

Similarly, Algerian respondents highlighted the difficulty of implementing learner-centered approaches within overcrowded classrooms that restrict interaction and individualized instruction. Although structurally different, the U.S. context also reflected tensions between reform expectations and institutional realities, particularly regarding

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workload expansion, accountability demands, and limited support mechanisms.

These findings reinforce the argument advanced by Barnes-Storey et al (2025), who contend that large class sizes contribute significantly to the gap between educational policy and classroom practice. Reforms frequently assume ideal implementation conditions that differ substantially from teachers' everyday realities.

4.5 Workload Intensification and Professional Impact

The findings further demonstrate that educational reforms have increased both administrative and instructional responsibilities across the three contexts. Although the degree of change varied, teachers consistently described reforms as contributing to heavier workloads and intensified professional demands (Figure 2).

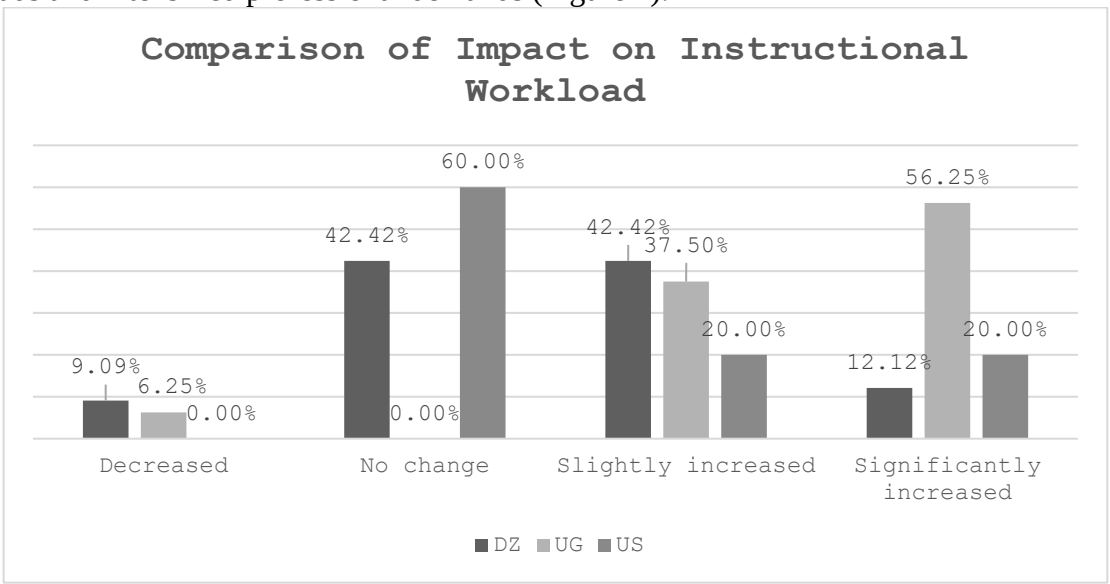


Figure 2. Comparison of impact on instructional workload by percent of responses by region

Ugandan teachers reported the most substantial increases, particularly due to continuous assessment procedures, project-based learning requirements, and extensive documentation associated with the Competency-Based Curriculum. Algerian teachers described moderate increases in both administrative and instructional responsibilities, while U.S. respondents emphasized accountability pressures and assessment-related tasks.

Importantly, the type of reform appeared to shape the nature of workload intensification. Reforms emphasizing pedagogical transformation, such as Uganda's CBC, generated substantial instructional demands linked to learner-centered approaches and continuous assessment. In contrast, accountability-oriented reforms in the United States primarily increased administrative responsibilities associated with testing, reporting, and compliance.

Teachers also reported varying degrees of impact on curriculum, pedagogy, and

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assessment practices (Figure 3).

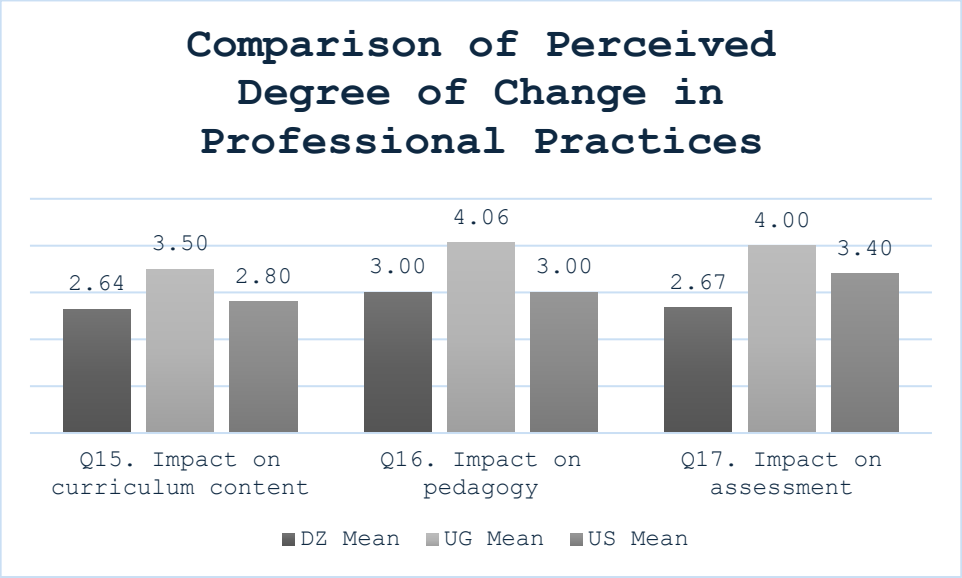


Figure 3. Comparison of perceived degree of change in professional practices by mean score (5=high impact) by region

Ugandan respondents perceived the greatest transformation, especially regarding learner-centered pedagogy and continuous assessment. Algerian teachers reported more limited or uncertain changes, suggesting that reforms may not yet have substantially transformed classroom practice. U.S. teachers identified relatively modest curricular change but more noticeable changes in assessment procedures.

These findings support the work of Christopher Day and Qing Gu (2007), who argue that teachers' responses to reform are strongly shaped by professional experience and repeated exposure to reform cycles. Similarly, Michael Huberman's (1993) teacher career cycle model suggests that novice teachers often prioritize classroom survival over policy engagement due to the pressures associated with early career stages.

Overall, the findings indicate that educational reform affects teachers not only institutionally but also professionally and emotionally. Increased workload, combined with insufficient support and limited participation in decision-making, may contribute to frustration, reduced professional motivation, and resistance to reform implementation.

4.6 Teacher-Identified Challenges and Recommendations

Teachers across the three contexts identified several recurring challenges that hinder effective reform implementation. Despite contextual differences, the findings reveal considerable convergence around issues related to institutional support, teacher involvement, and practical implementation conditions, whereas the area of materials and financial barriers shows the distinct differences in implementation between Global North and South (Figure 4).

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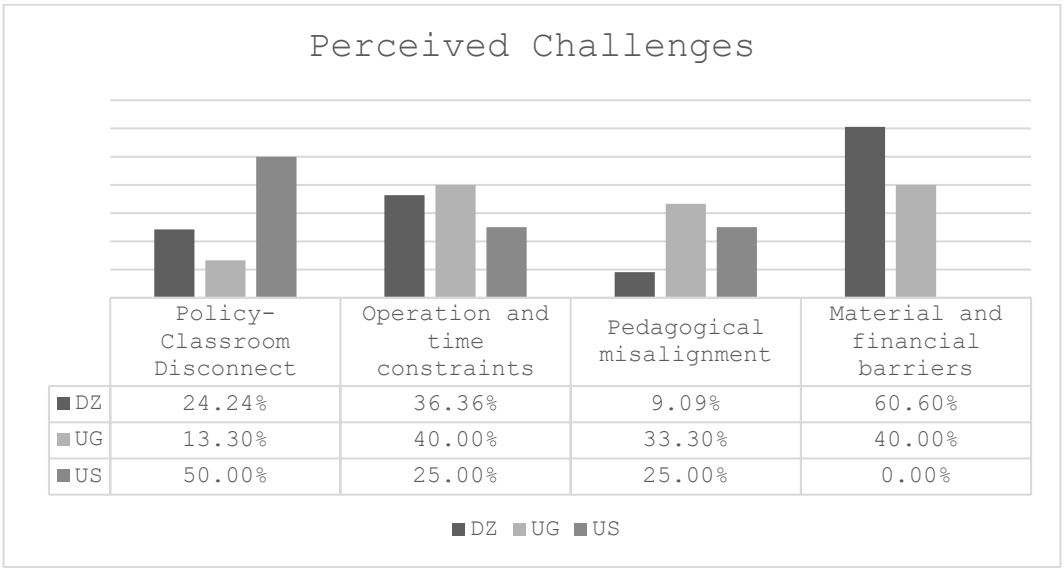


Figure 4. Perceived challenges to implementation of reform by percent of responses by region

Algerian respondents primarily emphasized institutional barriers such as overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching materials, and inadequate professional preparation. Ugandan teachers highlighted operational constraints, lack of resources, time pressures, and linguistic difficulties affecting learners' ability to engage with the new curriculum. U.S. respondents focused on policy-classroom disconnects, excessive workload, and tensions between experiential learning requirements and standardized testing demands.

Importantly, teachers across all contexts proposed similar recommendations for improving reform implementation. The most frequently cited recommendation involved greater teacher participation in policy design and decision-making processes. Respondents consistently argued that reforms should be developed collaboratively with practitioners rather than imposed hierarchically.

Teachers additionally emphasized the importance of stronger institutional support, including reduced class sizes, improved infrastructure, practical professional development, and access to adequate teaching resources. U.S. participants further recommended reducing excessive reliance on standardized testing and technological dependence in classroom instruction.

These recommendations reinforce the broader conclusion emerging from the study: successful educational reform depends not only on policy design but also on teacher inclusion, contextual adaptation, and sustained institutional support.

4.7 Overall Discussion

The comparative findings reveal a shared international pattern in which

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educational reforms are frequently experienced as top-down administrative mandates rather than collaborative pedagogical transformations. Although Algeria, Uganda, and the United States differ substantially in linguistic environments, educational structures, and reform priorities, teachers across all three contexts reported similar concerns regarding insufficient consultation, inadequate professional preparation, institutional constraints, and increasing workload demands.

At the same time, important contextual differences emerged. Uganda demonstrated the strongest levels of reform visibility and pedagogical transformation, largely due to the systemic implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum. Algeria reflected a transitional reform environment characterized by moderate awareness and uneven implementation. The United States exhibited comparatively lower reform coherence, likely influenced by the decentralized nature of educational governance.

Overall, the findings support the argument that educational reform is not simply a matter of policy adoption, but a complex social process shaped by institutional realities, professional identities, and classroom conditions. Reforms are more likely to succeed when teachers are recognized not merely as implementers of policy but as active partners in educational change.

5. Limitations

While this study provides valuable cross-cultural insights into teacher perceptions of reform, several limitations need to be acknowledged. First, the total sample size (N=57) is relatively small, which limits the statistical significance of the quantitative data. Furthermore, the distribution of respondents across the three contexts is imbalanced, with Algeria (n=33), Uganda (n=16), and the United States (n=8). This particularly small cohort from the U.S. means that the findings cannot be generalized and should be taken as a preliminary case study rather than a representative sample of a broader population of American teachers.

Second, the methodology relied entirely on self-reported data from an electronic questionnaire. Self-reporting is subject to bias where participants may provide answers they believe to be professionally correct or aligned with policy goals rather than what is actually true in their classrooms. Additionally, the quantitative nature of the Likert scale cannot fully capture the complex nature of the lived experience.

Finally, the study represents a singular point in time. Educational reforms are longitudinal, often multi-year processes, and teacher perceptions may change significantly over time as a reform moves through different phases. For this reason, future research would benefit from longitudinal designs and include more qualitative data to better understand teachers' perceptions with actual instructional behavior.

5.1 Points for Further Research

Further research should include interviews with all stakeholders and take up in depth discussions with policy makers at the helm of education systems in the study area

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to establish the dynamics in implementing reforms: What is keeping the policy designers from including teachers' voices? In what ways can teachers be brought on board to fully participate in innovations? What are the best practices in educational reforms and how can they be scaled across the three regions of study?

In continuing the investigation into the three contexts, more inquiry into the history of education and educational reform in each country could give a greater depth to understanding how and why the U.S. would be leaning more towards increased accountability and standardized assessment where the Global South countries are moving away from it.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study seeks to synthesize evidence of perceptions on the implementation of curriculum reforms undertaken in the three countries under study; Algeria, Uganda and the U.S., and has attempted to examine the gap between policy and practice in curriculum change efforts through teachers' voices. The evidence suggests that there is inadequate teacher involvement in terms of consultation during the reform processes. Additionally, evidence points to little or inadequate teacher participation in planning, preparation and execution of reforms in actual classroom practice. The study has shown that while there is convergence around ideas and purposes of educational reform, there is divergence in practice in the extent to which reforms are put into actual classroom instruction. The findings show there is an urgent need for education stakeholders and governments to rethink better ways to strengthen training and implementation of teaching strategies prior to implementing curriculum reforms. Stakeholders should be proactive and make deliberate efforts to bring on board key players on the front lines of education to ensure meaningful and sustainable change takes place. Empirical studies should be conducted in the three regions with a view to mapping out strategic intervention measures while bearing in mind the needs of the 21st-century learner.

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APPENDIX (1): AGGREGATE SURVEY DATA

Raw Data - Teachers' Perceptions of Reform

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/10yfYXtvw2B-PTUOUjwgVqG7MPeSZhKsEjdfSAT8sdt0/edit?usp=sharing

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Authors' Contributions
Each of the authors contributed equally to collect, report, and analyse data from their respective countries, and participated in equal shares to the conceptualization, research, methodology, and writing. Editing was primarily conducted by Dr. Leila Djouima and Erin Watters.

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Informed Consent

Human subjects completed an anonymous survey which by its anonymity and voluntary nature, informed consent was implied upon completion of the survey.

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