

# EXPLORING PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SINGLE NATIONAL CURRICULUM IN DISTRICT PESHAWAR

# <sup>1\*</sup> DR. WILAYAT BIBI, <sup>2\*</sup> DR. HALEEMA AKBAR, <sup>3\*</sup>SOHAIL AHMAD, <sup>4\*</sup>SADAF MUSHTAO

<sup>1</sup>ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, SHAHEED BENAZIR BHUTTO WOMEN UNIVERSITY, PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN. EMAIL: wilayat.bibi@sbbwu.edu.pk

<sup>2</sup>ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION & RESEARCH, WOMEN UNIVERSITY MARDAN, PAKISTAN. EMAIL: drhaleemaakbar@wumardan.edu.pk

<sup>3</sup>M.PHIL. ENGLISH LINGUISTICS. SSE ENGLISH SCHOOL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (SED), GOVT. OF PUNJAB, PAKISTAN. EMAIL: ahmad.sohail664@gmail.com
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8710-3237

<sup>4</sup>MS STUDENT, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, SHAHEED BENAZIR BHUTTO WOMEN UNIVERSITY, PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN.

#### Abstract

The Single National Curriculum (SNC) in Pakistan is designed to provide equitable and standardized education across the country. This qualitative study explored the perspectives of primary school teachers in District Peshawar regarding its implementation and identified the challenges they face. Using a purposive sampling technique, twelve teachers from four government primary schools were selected for semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that teachers held mixed views on the SNC; while they appreciated its student-centered and activity-based approach, they reported significant obstacles to its effective implementation. Key challenges included a lack of comprehensive teacher training, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources, and parental disinterest. Crucially, the study found that teachers felt underprepared and unsupported, contradicting the official assumption of their readiness. The study concludes that without addressing these foundational challenges particularly through meaningful teacher professional development, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement the successful implementation of the SNC remains unlikely. Recommendations are provided for policymakers to foster a more supportive environment for this curricular reform.

**Keywords:** Primary school, Implementation, Curriculum Development, Teachers, Single National Curriculum, Pakistan

### INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is one of the most important components of education. The teaching learning process is based on the curriculum. Curriculum refers to all the experiences that students gain through classrooms, workshops, playgrounds, and interactions with teachers. In this sense, the curriculum throughout the school life touches on all aspects of the students' life and makes a cohesive personality. The word "curriculum" comes from the Latin word "currere". The etymological meaning of the word "currere" is "racecourse". In the field of education, students try to reach the desired goal of education according to their needs and abilities with the help of curriculum, just as they must reach a destination or goal as soon as possible according to their ability by taking a path on the racetrack. Human life is changeable. With the advancement of science and technology, knowledge is spreading, and society is changing. With that change, many changes are coming in the life and livelihood of the people. And the curriculum is also changing in keeping with it. That is, an important feature of the curriculum that it is subject to change (Caswell & Campbell, 1935).

Curriculum change is a learning process for teachers and their schools. A good understanding of change and a clear conception of the curriculum are necessary conditions for improved implementation of the new curriculum into practice. Policymakers, education leaders, and teachers need to know more about the drivers of successful curriculum change in schools. Therefore, learning about educational change and its key features should become integral elements of any serious curriculum reform process (Wang, 2007).



Curriculum reform is a dynamic process that needs to be streamlined with the growing requirements of the world as it's the primary source of instruction for preceptors and learners.

Curriculum is the co-operation of the programs that are adopted and consciously materialized in the school to develop the personality of the student and change the behavior. Human life is changeable. With the advancement of science and technology, knowledge is spreading, and society is changing. So, the curriculum is also changed accordingly (Barnes, 2018).

# **Objectives of the Study**

This research study aimed to explore the perspectives of primary school teachers about the implementation of the Single National Curriculum. The objectives were:

- 1. To explore the perspectives of primary school teachers on the implementation of the Single National Curriculum.
- 2. To investigate the challenges, they face in implementing the Single National Curriculum at the primary school level in District Peshawar.

#### **Research Questions**

- 1. What are the perspectives of primary school teachers regarding the implementation of the Single National Curriculum?
- 2. What challenges do primary school teachers face while implementing the Single National Curriculum?

### Statement of the problem

Teachers have to know objectives, contents, teaching methods and techniques and evaluation approaches well and apply them in learning –teaching processes in order to manage the requirements of curriculum. No matter how well the developed curriculum is, it will not achieve its objective unless teacher who put curriculum into practice fulfill their task efficiently. An ideal curriculum will only achieve its objectives if it is implemented effectively, therefore teachers are expected to control the curriculum implementation level by mastering principles of teaching, objectives, contents, learning-teaching approaches, educational technologies and evaluation process of the curriculum. The purpose of this research is, to examine the teachers' perspectives regarding the implementation of Single National Curriculum at primary level in District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhutunkhwa.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers contribute a great deal to the success or failure of any change introduced in their teaching practice. They often need enough time to understand what change is all about and its importance for their teaching practice (Raselimo & Wilmot (2013).

Demirel (2007) emphasizes that teachers have responsibilities in the field of determining the needs of students in curriculum development process, determining the objectives, designing content, applying the teaching activities effectively, material development, curriculum evaluation, etc. In the research, which is titled "The Role of The Teacher in The Teaching of Curriculum development", conducted by Yigit (2002), he states that the teacher is the most effective part of curriculum development. How wonderful the prepared curriculums are, if the teacher, who is the practitioner of the curriculum, does not perform his/her duty effectively the curriculum cannot reach its target (Erturk, 1994 & Gurol, 2004).

Teachers are likely to have different concerns regarding the new curriculum and its implementation in schools. The teachers' concerns will determine the success or the failure of such an innovation (Handler, 2010). Furthermore, teachers may have different attitudes concerning the implementation of the new curriculum due to their experiences and the management conditions that they find in their schools (Khoboli & O'toole, 2012). For example, if the changes demand an innovation that is beyond their experiences, teachers may tend to be confused and/or resist such change and continue with the old way of doing things. However, as stated earlier, teachers are important driving forces intended for conveying alterations into the teaching and learning environment and therefore, they have to be the heart of analysis and foundations of validation concerning the foreword of any curriculum restructurings. There is a legitimate need to examine and study teachers' experience and concerns, especially at the time of implementing a new curriculum. Moreover, there is a need to follow-up and support them for the development of Curriculum change is the constant process (Cheng, 1994), which is complex and problematic at the same time (Fullen, 1993).

New initiatives, procedures and systems work well when the participation of and ownership of the teachers who are responsible to implement them is considered(Spillane,1999). Teacher's contribution to and participation in change process is vital and no change can actually happen without their understanding and participation (Kirk & MacDonald,2001; Wang ,2007). However, it has been noted that the powerful institutional forces that exist in the most education systems delimit the possibilities for teachers to be agents within the re-contextualizing field(policymaking,



textbooks, syllabus writing). The marginalizing teachers in this process prohibits them to make sense of ,and operationalize the ideas advanced by the reformers and other top authorities (Kirk & MacDonald, 2001).

The Single National Curriculum that has been finalized currently is considered to be a perfect curriculum from the government. Although some educational experts still have a few reservations. The latest curriculum depicts new styles to be followed by instructors for teaching practices and exams simultaneously. Nonetheless like all other fully elaborated approaches, the current opinion of education policy is more similar to an abstract all over which is tough to accept in reality if it has been given a deep thought. The reform during implementation (Leung, 2008).

Qualified and effective curriculum development process will be possible with teachers' active involvement to this process. Marsh (1978) emphasizes the role of teachers as identifiers of objectives in curriculum development process are crucial for the success in curriculum implementation. Oliva's statement (2001) "Just as the curriculum leader works primarily in one realm (curriculum) of the continuum called curriculum-instruction and the secondarily in the other realm (instruction), so too the teacher works primarily in both instruction and curriculum" emphasizes the role of teacher in curriculum development process. Moreover, he adds that teachers and curriculum specialists all engage in activities to improve both curriculum and instruction. In that case, it can be inferred that their roles are similar.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

# **Research Design and Sampling**

A qualitative research design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences. The population comprised all primary school teachers in District Peshawar. A purposive sampling technique was used to select twelve teachers from four different government primary schools. This strategy was chosen to ensure the selection of information-rich participants who were directly involved in implementing the SNC and could provide diverse insights based on their practical classroom experiences. The sample included teachers from various grade levels to capture a comprehensive view.

# **Data Collection and Analysis**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a self-constructed, protocol-based interview guide. This allowed for consistency while permitting flexibility to probe emerging ideas. The interviews were conducted in the national language, Urdu, to ensure comfort and clarity. They were audio-recorded using a mobile phone application, transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English for analysis.

Thematic analysis, following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to analyze the data. The process involved:

- 1. Familiarization: Repeated reading of transcripts.
- 2. Coding: Generating initial codes from the data.
- 3. Theme Development: Collating codes into potential themes and sub-themes.
- 4. Theme Review: Refining themes to ensure they accurately represent the data set.
- 5. Defining and Naming Themes: Clearly defining the essence of each theme.
- 6. Reporting: Presenting the analysis.

To ensure trustworthiness, credibility was enhanced through member checking, where participants verified the transcripts and preliminary findings. Dependability was addressed by maintaining a clear audit trail of the research process. The interview guide was pilot-tested with two primary school teachers (not part of the main sample) and validated by experts.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were informed about the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and advised that their participation was voluntary. Anonymity was protected by using codes (R1 to R12) instead of names. All procedures followed ethical principles as outlined by Arifin (2018).

### ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The data were organized into two main themes: (1) Perspectives of Primary School Teachers, and (2) Challenges in Curriculum Implementation, each with relevant sub-themes.

**Table 1: Themes and Subthemes** 

| Themes                                  | Subthemes                                  |
|---|--|
| Perspectives of Primary School Teachers | a. Teacher Preparedness and Support system |
|   | b. Comparisons and Reflections             |
|   | c. Curriculum Contents                     |
| Challenges in Curriculum Implementation | a. Basic Facilities                        |
|   | b. Overcrowded Classrooms                  |
|   | c. Parental disinterest                    |



Van Deventer and Kruger (2010: 219) believe that for a school to be successful in the implementation of any new curriculum, it requires a comprehensive and well-organized development program for teacher training. Teachers generally feel professionally obliged to improve their skills, and understand and accept that there is a need to undergo change, and that renewal happens slowly and with some difficulty in their professional careers. Constant support, guidance and follow-ups are essential in the current teaching practice.

Teacher's training is the key element of every curriculum implementation, according to respondent R1,

"Training contributes better role for implementing the Single National Curriculum because teachers know about the new and effective teaching methods then they motivate their students for quality education. Professional development and training provide opportunities to teachers how to teach students?"

Adequate training could assist in the implementation of SNC. This is confirmed by Hoadley and Jansen (2009: 331), who believe that staff development and training activities are critical elements of successful implementation. It is meant to equip teachers with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required in the implementation process.

"Ongoing seminars are insufficient, Teachers need workshops and seminars to implement the single national curriculum in better way, it will contribute to students' learning as well." [R2]

Content is the core of knowledge acquisition. Learners are able to progress and develop because of the content they master. The challenge in this context is in relation to the number of topics to be covered within a given period. The findings show that there is too much to be covered within a short term of study.

Gultig et al (2008: 114) believe that subject content should assist learners to acquire the techniques and skills necessary for developing critical intellect. The school should assist in developing certain abilities of the learner, starting at an early stage. Learners should not be burdened with unnecessary loads.

A question was asked from different respondents that content of SNC relates to students' culture and society or not? Different respondents shared their feelings;

"The content of current curriculum is very well; all the concepts are related to the student's capability level and also grooming potential skills of the students. It helps understand different perspective on a particular topic but there are many grammatical mistakes which need to be renewed". [R3]

R4 stated that;

"The content of SNC is satisfactory, informative, and up to date. Syllabus breakdown is nicely done. The content of the lesson is based on practical activity; the content of SNC highlights the creativity of students"

Teachers who are the agents of implementing changes, are experiencing continuous challenges in administering the core of curriculum change, especially in the classroom

Gultig et al's perspective emphasizes the role of subject content in helping learners acquire the techniques and skills required for developing critical thinking. Early development of such abilities is vital and schools play a crucial role in nurturing them from young age. This aligns with the idea that education should not only provide knowledge but also foster essential cognitive skills. The premise that small numbers of learners in the class increase learners' achievement seems logical. Van Deventer and Kruger (2010: 9) argue that learners' education can be fully realized in tripartite cooperation, which consists of learners, educators and parents. Participants in this study revealed that teachers are not receiving support from parents. All of the participants acknowledged the absence of this one element in this tripartite co-operation. Participants were positive that the presence of parents could minimize the challenges they were experiencing with learn When question was asked regarding challenges in the context of SNC the respondents said;

"Our policy makers are confused about medium of instructions; same is the case with SNC. English language is a big barrier and challenge. Sometime facing challenges to add some complex concepts." [R5]

Likewise, the respondents R6 stated that;

"Yes there are some areas or subjects where we found challenges;

Excessive materials are included in the exercise.

Use of complex and difficult words in the books of lower classes.

Contents included beyond the mental capacity of students.

The content of higher class has been included in the books of the lower classes such as science.

Mentioned historical periods that are beyond the mental capacity of students such as Pak studies."

Respondent R7 mentioned that;

"Lengthy and difficult exercises are really challenging".

Another respondent prefers the SNC and expressed his opinion;

"SNC course is well design. Math and Science need some elaboration."

The R8 expressed her idea about the challenges in curriculum implementation;

"English is a subject that looks more challenging because if I talk about my class, it is difficult to explain consonant to children. How will students understand consonant blenders and consonant clusters?"



Different respondents shared their ideas and opinion about challenges they are facing in daily routine in implementing new curriculum (SNC) in their classroom. One of the respondents expressed the following view;

"Sometimes being a teacher, we are facing some challenges to implementing the SNC in our classroom, because government school the number of students is very high and teacher arrange the activity but lack of resources and time create problem and some students not participate activity."

### Another respondent expressed that;

"The course is difficult for government school students; they face more difficulty in learning subjects in English that were taught in Urdu. Some terms and methodologies are difficult to understand for students especially in Science and Social studies it need more explanation."

#### In this regard, R9 asserted the following;

"By the way, the curriculum is very good and efficient but at primary level, the course of small classes is easy but long and lengthy, it takes two to three days for teachers to finish a lesson. Class 4th and 5th have things that are not according to the mental level of our children."

#### The respondent R10 replied;

"Individual differences, over-crowded classrooms, language barrier, absentees, lack of parental interest, no proper training on SNC from government."

# Respondent R11 and R12 shared their views by saying the following;

"A common challenge that I face in implementing this new curriculum is that there is less time duration whereas the chapters are quite tough, long and time consuming. There is too much content to be covered within a short period of time. I am teaching mathematics in grade 5 and for the past two years, I found it difficult to cover all the required topics within a quarter. Learners are failing because we were not able to cover the prescribed work."

"Exceeding the number of students in class, parental disinterest, parents do not pay attention to their children education and many students absent from class, these are the challenges we are facing in our daily routine."

When question was asked from the respondents that how might collaboration between teachers, administrators, stakeholders, parents and students lead to more successful implementation, different respondents stated that;

"Collaboration and mutual cooperation are very important in the process of curriculum implementation because curriculum implementation will be successful if different stakeholders such as teachers, administrations, parents and students they keep in touch with each other and share ideas and opinions with each other. It is not difficult to implement this curriculum if all the fields or parents who are needed in the education of children equally participate."

Another respondent expressed his opinion about the collaboration among stakeholders, teachers, school administration and parents;

In the process of implementation, all stakeholders must coordinate and collaborate with each other. without involving all the stakeholders, the implementation might not be possible."

#### One of the respondents R4 stated that;

"Teachers are main stakeholders, who plan, design, teach and implement or evaluate the curriculum Teachers play effective role to communicate their idea to administrative bodies, students and parents. if they take an ownership of change."

#### Another respondent shared her view, stating the following;

"Yes, collaboration and mutual cooperation is very necessary and mutual cooperation among different stakeholders, including administration, teachers, and parents lead to more successful implementation. The school administration will keep a complete check on teachers, if they are teaching well or not? And it is the duty of parents as well to pay full attention to their children. Parents, teachers, administration should work together; it is not only the work of teachers to teach the children, parents should also take interest in children's education." New curriculum needed the support of stakeholders in the community. R5 indicated that,

"We need the support of parents. Parents in this area do not attend to the challenges of their learners at school. They neither attend PTM meetings, nor respond to the invitation by the school principal when needed to resolve certain challenges of individual learners. We are frustrated and it really renders unproductive teaching in the institution". Another important question was asked from the respondents, that SNC is helpful in improving students learning or not? The respondent answered that;

"Yes, SNC is helpful in improving students learning because learning materials or concepts are activity based, and if teacher teach their lesson through activity, then students are fully engaged in learning process and also learn the concepts more effective manner and improve their potential skills."

#### Another respondent expressed her feeling;

"The updated SNC do help and improve the learning of students. It is related to the modern education system. Both students and teachers are doing their best. SNC is helping students to overcome their daily life problems. In other words, SNC reduces the concept of inferiority complex among public and private students."



## According to R9;

"Yes, it has practical activities, projects and investigations etc.it highlights the substance of creativity and curiosity in students, the dialogue has been added to build self-esteem in students, students have been exposed to Islamic teachings, contents are included to increase writing and reading capacity of students. it is very good and informative but due to large number of students in classrooms it becomes difficult to explain every aspect to the children."

One of the most important questions was asked from the respondents that share some suggestions for enhancing the implementation of SNC process that will ensure its successful adoption, in this regard the respondent R8 asserted the following suggestions;

Provide thorough teacher training
Ensure adequate resource allocation
Implementation of effective monitoring and evaluation
Engage communities and parents
R 10 mentioned that;

"If parental involvement and individual differences are taken into consideration, implementation can be ensured by making some changes."

#### **Results of Theme-1: Teachers' Perspectives**

Teachers are likely to have different concerns regarding the new curriculum and its implementation in schools. The teachers' concerns will determine the success or the failure of such an innovation (Handler, 2010). Furthermore, teachers may have different attitudes concerning the implementation of the new curriculum due to their experiences and the management conditions that they find in their schools (Khoboli & O'toole, 2012). For example, if the changes demand an innovation that is beyond their experiences, teachers may tend to be confused and/or resist such change and continue with the old way of doing things. However, as stated earlier, teachers are important driving forces intended for conveying alterations into the teaching and learning environment and therefore, they have to be the heart of analysis and foundations of validation concerning the foreword of any curriculum restructurings. There is a legitimate need to examine and study teachers' experience and concerns, especially at the time of implementing a new curriculum. Moreover, there is a need to follow-up and support them for the development of the reform during implementation (Leung, 2008).

Hoadley and Jansen (2009: 331) believe that staff development and training activities are critical elements of successful implementation, in order to equip educators with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values for the implementation process.

There is consensus that teacher's professional development is crucial for a successful curriculum implementation in fact, research suggests that learning opportunities aligned with new or redesigned curriculum are a key lever in attaining what Coburn (2003) describes as depth of scale, or changes to teachers' beliefs, norms of social interaction, and pedagogical principles.

For example, Kisa and Correnti (2015), through their survey research in the U.S., found that teachers were more likely to change their practices to match with the goal of the reform if the school provided relevant sustained professional development. Similarly, Garet et al. (2001) showed that enhanced knowledge and skills have substantial influence on changing teaching practices. Allen and Penuel (2015) see advantages of sustained professional development in increasing the likelihood of teachers engaging in instructional practices that are in line with the reformed standard. Desimone and others (2002) suggest that if the professional development focuses on a particular teaching practice, teachers are more likely to use that practice in the classroom, which supports the claim that professional development could effectively initiate changes concerning curriculum reform. Darling-Hammond (2012) points out that jurisdiction that often rank high in international rankings, such as Finland, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Japan, are also the ones that invest in teachers and support them throughout their careers.

# Result of Theme-2: Challenges in Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation in primary schools can face several challenges; such as resource constraints, teacher preparedness, overcrowded classrooms, curriculum relevance, assessment and evaluation, parental disinterest, infrastructure and basic facilities, policy changes.

Another challenge is the lack of resources. The Department of Education requires learners to participate actively in their learning. Learners have to take the responsibility for their own learning, individually as well as cooperatively, while teachers serve as coaches (Jacobs, Vakalisa & Gawe, 2008). Furthermore, due to the scarcity of support materials and resources such as books and other learning material, learners are deprived of the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning.



Primary school teachers often face difficulties in effectively implementing the curriculum due to limited resources and diverse learning needs of their students. They often deal with challenges such as classroom disruptions and ensuring every student grasps the lesson. They face challenges like managing large class sizes and adapting lessons to diverse learning needs. They sometimes struggle with noisy classrooms and helping students who find certain subjects difficult to understand.

An overloaded classroom in a primary school typically refers to a situation where there are too many students for a single teacher to effectively manage and educate. This can lead to various challenges, including reduced individual attention for students and difficulties in maintain classroom discipline.

To address this issue, schools' administrations should hire additional teachers that can help distribute the workload on teachers and provide more personalized instruction. If the school has the resources, dividing the class into smaller groups.

To address teacher workload, schools' administrations may consider the following;

Providing adequate planning time and resource.

Reducing administrative tasks through automation.

Offering professional development opportunities.

Ensuring manageable class sizes.

Encouraging a healthy work-life balance.

Providing support staff, such as teaching assistants.

A lack of parental engagement in their child's education can hinder the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Inadequate school facilities such as classrooms, libraries and laboratories can impede the practical aspects of curriculum delivery.

#### **DISCUSSION**

The findings indicate a significant gap between the policy's intentions and the on-the-ground reality of its implementation. While teachers are the principal agents of change (Handler, 2010), this study found they feel marginalized and under-supported, a situation that Kirk & MacDonald (2001) argue can prohibit them from operationalizing reform ideas.

The central finding that teachers feel inadequately trained directly challenges the assumption that they are ready to implement the SNC. This aligns with Hoadley & Jansen (2009), who identify staff development as a critical element for success. The reported challenges of overcrowding and resource scarcity are classic barriers to educational reform, creating a situation where teachers, despite understanding the new curriculum's goals, are forced into a "survival" mode rather than innovative practice (Fullan, 1993).

Furthermore, the language barrier and concerns about developmental appropriateness suggest that the curriculum may not have been sufficiently contextualized for the specific needs of the student population in government schools, potentially undermining the SNC's goal of equity.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Contrary to the assumption that teachers are ready implementers, this study concludes that primary school teachers in District Peshawar face profound challenges in implementing the SNC. They perceive a significant disconnect between the curriculum's ambitious, student-centered design and the practical realities of their classrooms, characterized by insufficient training, overwhelming workloads, and a lack of systemic support.

Therefore, the successful implementation of the SNC is not merely a matter of distributing new textbooks and syllabi. It requires a fundamental reassessment of the support structure for teachers. Policymakers must prioritize high-quality, sustained professional development, address infrastructural deficits like class size, and foster a collaborative ecosystem that includes parents and the community. Without this foundational support, the SNC risks becoming another well-intentioned reform that fails to translate into meaningful educational change in the classroom.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends:

- 1. Mandatory and Sustained Teacher Training: Move beyond one-off seminars to ongoing, hands-on workshops focused on pedagogical skills for the SNC.
- 2. Resource Allocation: Ensure schools are equipped with necessary teaching and learning materials, and urgently address the issue of overcrowded classrooms.
- 3. Curriculum Review: Establish a feedback mechanism for teachers to report on content pace and difficulty, leading to periodic, evidence-based revisions of the SNC.



4. Stakeholder Engagement Programs: Develop strategies to increase parental involvement and community ownership of the educational process.

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