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TESOL AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4: EXPLORING EFL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES IN KPK, PAKISTAN

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Abstract
The study examined the relationship between English language teaching and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aimed to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. The study recognizes the important role of English in Pakistan's higher education, social and professional context.
The study identified a research gap concerning the limited empirical investigation of EFL teachers about understanding TESOL principals and translating its practices into SDG 4. It will be focused specifically on selected higher education institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) to provide context-specific and a feasible investigation. The research explored teachers' perspectives on quality, inclusion, and equity; their TESOL practices; and the contextual, professional, institutional, and pedagogical challenges affecting implementation.
The theoretical framework integrated Communicative Language Teaching, Sociocultural Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Inclusive Pedagogy**,** providing perspectives on interaction, communication, participation, equity, learner diversity, and social justice. The conceptual framework connected teachers' perspectives and understanding of SDG 4 with TESOL practices, learner participation, quality and equitable English language learning, and ultimately SDG 4.
A mixed-methods design is used, combining a questionnaire of approximately 100–120 EFL teachers in selected institution across KPK. The quantitative component

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involves semi-structured interviews of about 15–20 EFL teachers drawn from the survey participants. The interviews provided an insight into teachers' perspectives of their professional and classroom practices that influence their efforts to promote inclusive equitable and quality education. Quantitative data is analysed using SPSS. The qualitative data undergo thematic analysis. The study is expected to contribute empirically, theoretically, practically, institutionally, methodologically and at policy levels to strengthening TESOL and quality English language education in Pakistan. Practically, institutionally and methodologically the findings identify effective professional development needs, teaching practices and institutional support required to promote inclusive and learner-centred TESOL. At the policy level, the study provide evidence to inform curriculum development, teacher education and educational policies aimed at improving the quality, equity, and accessibility of English language education in Pakistan.

1.Introduction

Education is recognized as a fundamental right of every human and an essential driver of sustainable development. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) tries to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote(s) lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). Achieving this goal requires not only access to education but also attention to the quality of teaching, learning opportunities, equity, participation and professional capacity of teachers.

English language education carries an important position in Pakistani education system. English is widely used in higher education, government administration, professional settings, and academic communication. So, English language proficiency has considerable implications for students' academic progression, employment opportunities, and participation in social and professional life. However, access to quality English language education and opportunities to develop English proficiency remain uneven throughout Pakistan. (Raza et al., 2026) Differences in geographical location, socioeconomic conditions, institutional resources, educational backgrounds, and teacher preparation influence the quality of English language teaching (Syed, 2024)

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) has developed considerably beyond traditional teacher-centered and teacher-dominated approaches. Contemporary TESOL increasingly emphasizes learner centered meaningful instruction, communicative competence, differentiated learning opportunities, cultural responsiveness, inclusion, and the development of learners as active participants in the learning process (Richards & Rodgers, 2024). These developments have important implications for SDG 4 because the quality and inclusiveness of classroom teaching are central to the provision of equitable educational opportunities.

Teachers play a central position in translating educational policies and pedagogical principles into classroom practices. The understanding of teachers in quality education, professional beliefs, and pedagogical decisions may influence how effectively English language classrooms respond to learner diversity and educational inequalities. Consequently, examining EFL teachers' perspectives and practices can provide important insights into how TESOL may contribute to the broader objectives of SDG 4.

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In Pakistan, existing research has examined English language teaching methodologies, curriculum, teacher education, language policy, and challenges in English language teaching. In contrast relatively, limited attention has been given to the relationship between TESOL practices and SDG 4 from the perspectives of EFL teachers and their practices**.** Particularly there is a need to understand how teachers conceptualize quality, inclusive and equitable education of English language. The practices which these teachers employ in their classroom. What institutional and contextual challenges they experience and how they perceive the contribution of TESOL to SDG 4.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) provides a particularly relevant context for such an investigation because its educational institutions represent diverse geographical, linguistic, socioeconomic, and institutional contexts. (Pakistan Institute of Education [PIE], 2025; Sultan et al., 2026). Focusing the investigation on selected universities in KPK will make the study feasible while allowing an in-depth exploration of teachers' perspectives and practices. The study will therefore examine how EFL teachers understand and implement TESOL practices that are potentially relevant or irrelevant to the principles of SDG 4.

2. Statement of the Problem

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is a call for inclusive, equitable, and quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Despite Pakistan's commitment to SDG 4, there are significant challenges related to equity, and access across regions and educational contexts to affect the educational quality. The (UNESCO,2025) highlights the need for accelerated progress in improving the quality, inclusiveness, and equity of education and strengthening institutional capacity to address persistent educational disparities. English language education is particularly important in Pakistan because English proficiency is closely associated with academic, and professional opportunities. However, the effectiveness and quality of English language teaching may vary according to teachers' pedagogical preparation, institutional resources, curriculum demands, and classroom contexts. Although TESOL has increasingly emphasized communicative, inclusive, learner-centered, and responsive approaches, but limited empirical attention has been given to how EFL teachers understand SDG 4 and how these understandings are reflected in their teaching practices. There is also insufficient evidence regarding the extent to which EFL teachers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa perceive their TESOL practices as contributing to equitable, quality, and inclusive education, and what professional and institutional factors facilitate or constrain such practices. (Sultan, W., Ullah, Y., & Fatima, S. A, 2026) Therefore, this study would seek to explore EFL teachers' perspectives and practices concerning TESOL and SDG 4 in selected higher education institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan**,** thereby generating context-specific evidence that may contribute to TESOL teacher education, professional development, institutional practice, and the broader implementation of SDG 4.

3. Research Gap

Previous research studies in Pakistan have examined various dimensions of English language teaching. An updated volume on *English Language Teaching in Pakistan*, for example, demonstrates that considerable research study has been conducted on English language teaching, learning, assessment, and teacher development in the Pakistani context (Raza & Coombe, 2022). These areas have generally been investigated as separate dimensions of English language education,

with comparatively limited attention to their relationship primarily with TESOL and with the broader objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)**.** SDG 4 emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. UNESCO has highlighted the need for education systems to address barriers associated with poverty, geographical location, language, disability, and other forms of learner diversity (UNESCO, 2020). The SDG 4 Mid-Term Review, in Pakistan identifies continuing challenges related to educational quality, inclusion, equity, and disparities in educational opportunities (UNESCO, 2025). Despite this broader policy emphasis, there remains a call for empirical research examining how these principles are understood and translated into English language teaching practices at the classroom level.

More specifically, limited research has examined EFL teachers' understanding of SDG4 and its relevance to English language teaching, their perceptions of the relationship between quality education and TESOL. Further, the extent to which their classroom practices reflect principles of quality, equity, inclusion, meaningful participation, and learner-centered education. This gap is important because teachers are central to translating educational goals and pedagogical principles into classroom practice. Existing research may discuss inclusive education, sustainable development, or effective English language teaching independently. But there is insufficient evidence concerning how EFL teachers themselves understand the connection between these areas and how such understanding influences their pedagogical results. In addition, greater attention is needed to the institutional and professional factors that may facilitate or constrain the implementation of TESOL practices associated with SDG 4. Research on English language teaching in Pakistan has identified the importance of pedagogical improvement and teacher development but the specific relationship between teachers' professional contexts and their capacity to implement TESOL practices aligned with SDG 4 remains under explored (Raza & Coombe, 2022).

A concern is the distinction between teachers' perspectives and their actual and reported practices. Teachers may express strong support for learner-centered, communicative, inclusive, and equitable education while they may experience practical constraints that prevent them from consistently implementing such approaches. Recent research in Pakistan, including research conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has continued to identify tensions between learner-centered and teacher-centered approaches and has pointed to the importance of teacher training (Asad et al., 2025) and pedagogical support in promoting more interactive English language teaching. There is limited research that examines these pedagogical practices specifically through the lens of SDG 4 and asks whether and in what ways, EFL teachers perceive their teaching as contributing to quality, inclusive, and equitable education.

Furthermore, the existing literature tends to treat TESOL, educational inclusion, teacher education and sustainable development as relatively distinct areas of inquiry. So, there is a need for research that brings these dimensions together and investigates their intersection from the perspective of EFL teachers. The present study would address this gap by exploring EFL teachers' perspectives on TESOL and SDG 4, examining their reported teaching practices, and investigating the professional, institutional, and contextual factors that influence those practices. The study would be geographically delimited to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan, thereby allowing an in-

depth and manageable investigation of the issue within a specific educational context rather than making an unsupported claim about all EFL teachers across Pakistan.

4. Research Objectives

The study will specifically aim

I. To explore perspectives of EFL teachers on the relationship between TESOL and Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.
II. To examine understanding of EFL teachers about quality, inclusive, and equitable English language education in relation to SDG 4.
III. To investigate the TESOL practices employed by EFL teachers in selected higher education institutions in KPK.
IV. To examine the extent to which EFL teachers reported TESOL practices reflect the principles of SDG 4.
V. To identify the institutional, professional, pedagogical, and contextual challenges that influence teachers' implementation of TESOL practices related to SDG 4.

5. Research Questions

The study will address the following research questions:

I. What are the perspectives of EFL teachers on the relationship between TESOL and Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan?
II. What is the understanding of EFL teachers about quality, inclusive, and equitable English language education in relation to SDG 4 in KPK?
III. How are TESOL practices employed by EFL teachers in selected higher education institutions in KPK?
IV. To what extent are EFL teachers' practices reflected in the principles of SDG 4?
V. What are the challenges faced by EFL teachers in implementing TESOL practices that support quality, inclusive, and equitable education?

6. Significance of the Study

This study shall be important because it will examine the relationship between TESOL and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) from the perspectives and practices of EFL teachers in selected higher education institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study will contribute to TESOL scholarship by providing a conceptual understanding of how quality, equity, inclusion and learner-centered teaching can be connected with SDG 4. It will empirically generate context-specific evidence on EFL teachers' perspectives and practices and contribute to the limited literature on the relationship between TESOL and sustainable development in Pakistan. The findings may help teachers identify effective approaches for promoting meaningful results. The study may further highlight institutional factors like resources, curriculum requirements, class size, professional development, and administrative support that facilitate or constrain effective TESOL practices. Although the study will be geographically limited to KPK but its findings may provide useful implications for institutional practice and educational policy aimed at strengthening English language education in support of SDG 4 in Pakistan.

7. Literature Review

The literature highlights Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) as an important global framework for achieving inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). Within

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this framework, UNESCO (2020) emphasises that inclusion and equity require education systems to identify and remove barriers that restrict learners' achievement and participation. The Pakistan SDG 4 Mid-Term Review similarly demonstrates continuing challenges related to educational quality, equity, inclusion, and participation, particularly the disparities that persist across different educational contexts (UNESCO, 2025). These challenges provide an important basis for examining the role of English language teaching in contributing to broader educational quality and equity objectives in Pakistan.

Within TESOL, contemporary approaches increasingly emphasise learner participation, learner-centredness, meaningful interaction and responsiveness to learner diversity. learner-centred and Communicative approaches can provide opportunities for learners to participate actively in classroom interaction and develop language through meaningful use (Richards & Rodgers, 2024). Similarly, differentiated and inclusive pedagogies seek to respond to learner variability and reduce factors limiting participation (Florian, 2017). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) advocates the design of flexible learning environments through multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression (CAST, 2024). These approaches suggest potential connections between TESOL and the principles of SDG 4, particularly quality, inclusion, participation, and equity. Further, the literature also suggests that the adoption of contemporary pedagogical approaches does not automatically result in inclusive or equitable educational outcomes. Their effectiveness depends on teachers' knowledge, beliefs, professional preparation, institutional resources, curriculum requirements, assessment practices, and classroom conditions.

Teachers are therefore central to understanding how principles of quality, inclusion, and equity are implemented into classroom practice. Research on language teaching has highlighted the influence of teachers' beliefs, professional development, pedagogical knowledge and decision-making on classroom practices. Importantly, teachers' stated support for inclusive approaches may not always correspond to their actual classroom practices because implementation can be constrained by contextual factors. In Pakistan, research has identified continuing challenges in English language teacher education and professional development, demonstrating the need to strengthen teachers' pedagogical preparation and professional learning (Tahira et al., 2020). Similarly, research on English language teaching in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has examined learner-centred and teacher-centred pedagogical practices and has highlighted the significance of teacher preparation and classroom pedagogy (Asad et al., 2025). These studies indicate the importance of investigating not only what teachers believe about effective and inclusive English language teaching but also what they report doing in their classrooms and what factors constrain or facilitate their practices.

The Pakistani context is particularly significant because English occupies an important position in higher education, education and professional life, while access to quality English language learning remains uneven. Research has examined English language education in Pakistan from perspectives including teacher education, language policy, curriculum, assessment, teaching methodologies, and professional development (Raza & Coombe, 2022). More recent research has also drawn attention to linguistic inequality and the ways in which English can function as a form of educational and cultural capital and potentially creating unequal opportunities for learners (Amin et al., 2025; Raza et al., 2026). Consequently, examining TESOL

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through the lens of SDG 4 requires attention not only to classroom methodology but also to the wider social and institutional conditions in which English language teaching takes place

8. Theoretical Framework

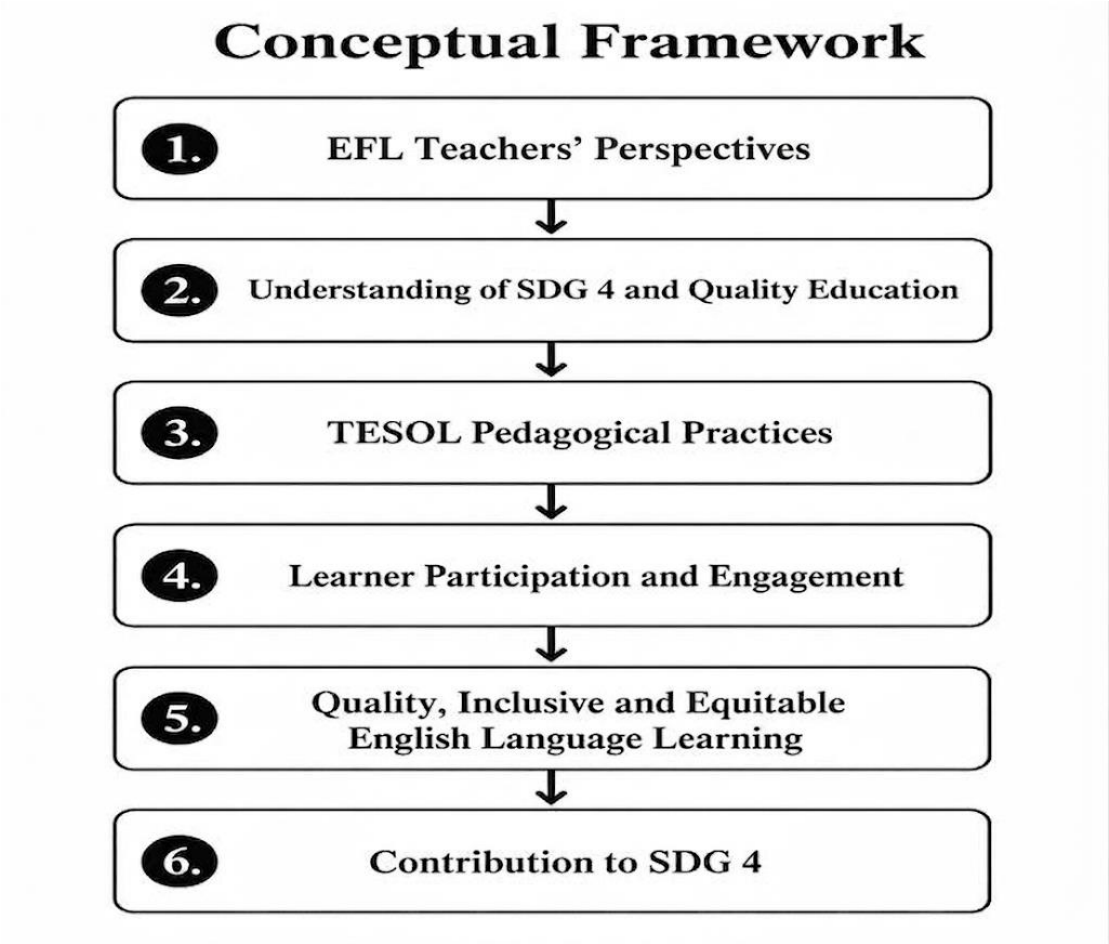
English can provide access to academic, professional, and cultural opportunities, but unequal access may also contribute to linguistic and educational disparity (Amin et al., 2025). This study uses SDG 4 as its overarching framework, particularly its focus on meaningful participation, quality, equity and inclusion. (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2020). Four prevailing TESOL perspectives—Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Sociocultural Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Inclusive Pedagogy—are used to examine EFL teachers' perspectives and practices. CLT focuses on meaningful communication and learner participation (Richards & Rodgers, 2024). Sociocultural Theory emphasizes on interaction, collaboration, scaffolding, and social learning (Poehner and Lantolf ,2024). Critical Pedagogy presents a lens for examining inequality, learner voice and social justice (Freire, 2018) and Inclusive Pedagogy focuses on learner diversity and equitable participation (Florian, 2014; UNESCO, 2020).

Together, these perspectives offer an integrated analytical framework for the study. As mentioned, CLT addresses communication and participation, Sociocultural Theory examines interaction and support, Critical Pedagogy focuses on equity and learner agency and Inclusive Pedagogy addresses diversity and barriers to participation. Their synthesis will help examine how EFL teachers translate their understandings of quality and equitable education into classroom practices and how contextual factors influence implementation. The framework therefore connects TESOL practices with the broader educational aims of SDG 4 in the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

9. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework will have a special focus on the relationship between EFL teachers' perspectives, TESOL practices, contextual factors, and contribution to SDG 4**.** The proposed conceptual relationship is:

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The framework will therefore allow the study to examine not simply whether teachers support SDG 4, but how their understanding is translated into teaching practices and what are challenges that influence process**.**

3. Research Methodology and Results

The study employed a mixed-methods research design within a pragmatist research paradigm to investigate practices and perspectives of EFL teachers concerning Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. The mixed-methods approach was adopted to combine quantitative evidence regarding methods of teachers' perspectives and reported classroom practices with qualitative insights into their challenged, experiences interpretations and understanding of SDG 4. This design enabled the researchers to obtain both depth and breadth of information regarding the relationship between English language teaching practices and the principles of quality, equity and inclusion its association with SDG 4.

The study was geographically delimited to selected private and public universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Although Pakistan provided the broader contextual setting for the study, KPK was constituted the empirical study area. Therefore, the findings were interpreted within the specific institutional and educational context of KPK. They were not intended to provide statistical generalization to all EFL teachers in Pakistan.

The population comprised EFL teachers working in selected private and public universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These were teachers who taught English language courses at undergraduate or postgraduate levels. Total of approximately

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100–120 EFL teachers participated in the quantitative component of the study. The qualitative component included approximately 15–20 teachers selected from among the questionnaire participants to provide more detailed accounts of their perspectives, classroom practices, experiences, and challenges.

Convenience sampling was employed for the selection of participating institutions and interview participants. It was because of accessibility, institutional permissions, and the practical feasibility of data collection. Efforts were also made to include teachers from different institutional contexts, including both private and public universities, in order to obtain variation in teachers' experiences and working environments.

Data were collected through two primary instruments: a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

The Questionnaire for EFL teachers was designed to examine understanding and perceptions of teachers about SDG 4 and their reported English language teaching practices. The questionnaire covered several dimensions, including perceptions of quality English language education, teachers' understanding of SDG 4, classroom practices, equity and inclusion, learner-centred and communicative teaching, classroom participation, differentiated teaching practices, assessment, teaching resources, professional development, institutional support, and barriers to effective implementation of inclusive and equitable teaching practices. Most of the questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement.

The second instrument was semi-structured interviews conducted with selected EFL teachers. The interviews explored teachers' interpretation of quality English language education, understanding of SDG 4, examples of their TESOL practices, approaches to learner diversity, classroom challenges, institutional constraints, professional development needs, and perceptions of how English language teaching can contribute to the achievement of SDG 4.

The research instruments were developed with reference to relevant literature on SDG 4, TESOL, communicative and learner-centred language teaching, educational quality, inclusive pedagogy, and teachers' perspectives and practices. The appropriate, relevant items from existing instruments were e also adapted to suit the linguistic, educational and institutional context of the study. The questionnaire was reviewed by experts in applied linguistics and TESOLs to establish content validity. The experts examined the alignment, clarity, relevance and wording of the questionnaire items with the objectives and research questions of the study. Necessary modifications were made based on their feedback.

A pilot study was also subsequently conducted with a small group of EFL teachers who were not included in the main sample. The pilot study was undertaken to assess the relevance and clarity of the questionnaire items, evaluate the internal consistency of the questionnaire scale and estimate the time required for completion. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the relevant scales and items requiring modification were revised before the main data collection.

Data collection was conducted after obtaining the necessary institutional permissions and ethical approval. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study. The voluntary nature of their participation, and the procedures involved in completing the questionnaire and participating in interviews was considered.

The questionnaire was administered to EFL teachers working in the selected universities. After the survey through the questionnaire, teachers who were willing to participate in the qualitative component were invited for semi-structured interviews.

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The interviews provided an opportunity to explore issues that could not be adequately captured through closed-ended questionnaire. A special attention was given to teachers' actual experiences, perceived institutional constraints, approaches to learner diversity, and their understanding of the relationship between English language teaching and SDG 4.

Quantitative data WAS analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, standard deviation, percentages, means, were calculated to summarise teachers' perspectives and reported teaching practices.

Where appropriate, inferential statistical techniques were employed to examine relationships and differences within the data. Depending on the characteristics of the variables and the fulfilment of relevant statistical assumptions, correlation, group-comparison, and regression analyses were considered to examine the relationships among teachers' understanding of SDG 4, TESOL practices, teaching experience, professional development, institutional support, and perceptions of quality, equity, and inclusion.

The qualitative interview data were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis involved several stages, including familiarisation with the interview data, generation of initial codes, organisation of codes into categories, identification of potential themes, review and refinement of themes, and interpretation of the final thematic structure.

The qualitative analysis focused particularly on teachers' understanding of SDG 4, their experiences of implementing learner-centred and inclusive teaching practices, their approaches to learner diversity, institutional and classroom challenges, professional development needs, and their perceptions of the contribution of English language teaching to quality, equitable, and inclusive education.

The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during interpretation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of EFL teachers' perspectives and practices. Questionnaire findings provided an overview of patterns in teachers' reported practices and perspectives, while interview findings provided contextual explanations of those patterns.

The integration of the two forms of evidence was particularly useful in examining the relationship between teachers' reported practices and their beliefs about quality, equity, inclusion and participation. The qualitative findings also helped explain the contextual factors, including institutional support, professional development, resources and classroom challenges, that influenced teachers' ability to implement practices consistent with the principles of SDG 4.

Ethical principles were maintained throughout the process of research. Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study before providing informed consent. Participation was voluntary. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study without providing a reason.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of codes or pseudonyms rather than participants' actual names. The collected data were securely stored. The data were accessible only for research purposes. Formal permission and ethical approval both were obtained from the relevant institutions before data collection.

Particular attention was given to protecting the identity of teachers and institutions for participants discussion of institutional challenges, limitations, or shortcomings.

Reporting was therefore undertaken in a manner that avoided the unnecessary identification of individual institution or participants.

The mixed-methods methodology provided a comprehensive framework for investigating EFL teachers' practices and perspectives concerning TESOL and SDG 4 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The questionnaire generated quantitative evidence concerning teachers' perceptions, understanding and reported practices. The semi-structured interviews provided deeper insights into their experiences, challenges, and contextual realities. The integration of both forms of evidence strengthened the interpretation of the findings and enabled the study to examine not only what teachers reported but also how and why contextual factors influenced the implementation of equitable, inclusive and quality English language teaching practices.

11. Expected Contribution of the Study

The study is expected to contribute to the field of TESOL and sustainable development at theoretical, empirical, practical, professional. methodological and policy levels. Theoretically, it will strengthen the understanding of the relationship between TESOL and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) by examining how equity, inclusion, quality and meaningful participation can be reflected in English language teaching. Empirically, the study will provide context-specific evidence on EFL teachers' perspectives and practices in selected higher education institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, contributing to the relatively limited research on the intersection of TESOL and SDG 4 in Pakistan. Methodologically, the mixed-methods design will provide both quantitative evidence of teachers' perspectives and reported practices and qualitative insights into their experiences, contextual realities and challenges. Practically, the findings are expected to identify TESOL practices that may promote learner-centered, inclusive, equitable and communicative English language education and may highlight areas for strengthening teachers' professional development. At the institutional and policy levels, the study may provide evidence to support teacher education, institutional planning, professional development and educational policies aimed at aligning English language teaching more effectively with the objectives of SDG 4. Although the empirical investigation will be limited to selected institutions in KPK. The findings may provide transferable insights and contextually relevant recommendations for strengthening TESOL and supporting quality, inclusive, equitable and quality English language education in the wider Pakistani context.

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