Exploring the Implementation of the Integrated Foreign Languages Curriculum in the Greek EFL Context

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Abstract

This article examines Greek EFL teachers' beliefs, training experiences and reported classroom practices in implementing the Integrated Foreign Languages Curriculum (IFLC, hereafter) — a nationwide curriculum innovation introduced in Greek state schools as part of a broader reform agenda to modernize foreign language education. Drawing on English foreign language (EFL, hereafter) teachers' beliefs, training and practices, the study explores how teachers mediate top-down curricular change within complex institutional realities. Employing a mixed-methods design, quantitative data from 370 EFL teachers were triangulated with semi-structured interviews with 16 EFL teachers and 8 school advisors, alongside the analysis of 12 lesson plans. The findings reveal limited awareness and fragmented training, resulting in partial and uneven implementation of the IFLC. While many teachers endorse the innovation's communicative and learner-centered philosophy, deeply entrenched beliefs, contextual constraints, and insufficient professional support hinder full implementation. Nonetheless, emerging evidence of adaptive and selective agency suggests teachers' gradual movement toward more reflective and context-responsive practices. The study also highlights the importance of sustained, collaborative professional learning and participatory curriculum design in promoting meaningful educational innovation. Implications are discussed for teacher education, curriculum policy as well as scholarship on agency and innovation in global educational contexts.

Keywords: EFL education; teacher agency; curriculum; innovation; implementation

1. Introduction

1.1. Context of the Research

Within the past half-century, profound social, technological and geopolitical shifts have transformed the purposes and practices of education worldwide, prompting governments to

invest in the reform of education in order to prepare future generations to operate within a constantly evolving environment. In this vein, 21st-century societies demand new forms of literacy, flexibility and intercultural competence, compelling educational systems to align with the needs of a globalized and multilingual world (Fullan, 2016; OECD, 2017). These reform pressures are especially visible in FL education, where curricula increasingly emphasize communicative competence, critical thinking, digital literacy and intercultural awareness (Dendrinos et al., 2014; Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). As such, FL (FL, hereafter) curriculum innovation has become a crucial arena for examining how teachers negotiate policy change, exercise professional judgment and implement new pedagogical paradigms in their classrooms. In this landscape, the teacher's role is no longer limited to delivering prescribed content but extends to interpreting, adapting, and reconstructing curricular guidelines — a process central to understanding teacher agency in curriculum innovation (Priestley & Biesta, 2013).

A salient example of such large-scale curriculum reform is the Integrated Foreign Languages Curriculum (IFLC), introduced in Greek state education as part of the broader "New School" (2011) reform agenda and formally institutionalized in 2016. The IFLC represents a significant departure from previous FL curricula in Greece, as it proposes a unified, level-based framework for all foreign languages taught across primary and secondary education. Grounded in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the IFLC emphasizes communicative competence, plurilingualism, mediation, learner autonomy and differentiated instruction, while granting teachers increased responsibility for syllabus design and material selection.

Its aims are ambitious. It purports to offer autonomy to teachers in the development of their own syllabi alongside their design and selection of material or tasks using multiple sources of information to break the one-textbook-per-subject rule (Karavas, 2018). It is for the first time ever that Greek FL teachers are called upon to undertake the role of a designer rather than being mere implementers of standard syllabi. It also aspires to promote differentiated instruction to accommodate students' diverse needs and styles, develop learners' plurilingualism and multiliteracies, foster the contextualized use of language in a variety of real-world settings to serve specific communicative purposes (Karavas, 2018), enhance experiential and collaborative learning as well as cultivate learner autonomy through alternative assessment and mediation tasks (Dendrinos et al., 2013; Mitsikopoulou et al., 2018). The IFLC therefore represents not merely a technical adjustment to content but a paradigmatic redefinition of teachers' professional roles — from knowledge transmitters to designers of communicative, learner-centered experiences. Realizing these aspirations, however, presupposes teachers' deep understanding of curriculum principles and their capacity to reinterpret them in context.

1.2. Rationale and Purpose of the Research

The present study investigates the dynamics of curriculum innovation through the lens of teacher agency, focusing on how EFL teachers understand, negotiate and implement the IFLC in everyday practice. Specifically, the study explores a) the key factors influencing Greek EFL teachers' implementation of the IFLC innovation, b) the extent to which their beliefs and reported practices align with the IFLC principles, and c) how training and professional support

shape their capacity to act as agents of curriculum innovation. Drawing on a mixed-methods design, the research triangulates quantitative data from a nationwide questionnaire with qualitative insights from teacher and advisor interviews and lesson-plan analysis. In doing so, it addresses a central question for innovation scholarship: *How do teachers interpret and recontextualize top-down reforms within their situated pedagogical realities?* By empirically examining teachers' beliefs and reported practices, the study contributes to ongoing debates on teacher professional development, curriculum mediation and agency in FL contexts.

This investigation is significant in both empirical and conceptual terms. Empirically, it constitutes the first large-scale, systematic analysis of IFLC implementation since its adoption as the national FL curriculum in Greek education. Conceptually, it bridges the micro-level of teacher agency with the macro-level of curriculum change, illustrating how individual sense-making shapes policy realization. By situating the IFLC within global conversations on educational innovation and teacher professionalism, the study aims to advance understanding of how agency, belief systems, and contextual constraints intersect in the enactment of curriculum innovations. In doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of how educational changes are interpreted, negotiated, and recontextualized at the intersection of policy and practice — an issue of long-standing interest for policymakers, educators, and researchers worldwide.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Agency in Curriculum Innovation

Over the past three decades, curriculum developers have often assumed that educational innovations would succeed simply by instructing teachers how to implement them. However, current perspectives recognize that teachers should not act as passive executors of centrally imposed curricula but as active agents shaping the teaching and learning process (Fullan, 2016). In an era marked by rapid educational change and increasingly diverse classrooms, teacher involvement in curriculum design has become essential.

In this context, the IFLC represents a significant shift in Greek education, granting teachers the autonomy to draw on multiple knowledge sources and design syllabi responsive to their students' needs (Dendrinos et al., 2014; IFLC, 2016). Teachers are thus positioned as facilitators of learning, responsible for selecting differentiated tasks aligned with students' interests and learning styles, rather than relying exclusively on prescribed textbooks. As the IFLC emphasizes, no textbook can meet the specific needs of a class or support differentiated instruction on its own.

Accordingly, while the IFLC descriptors outline expected learning outcomes at various proficiency levels, decisions regarding sequencing, methodology, and instructional materials are left to teachers' discretion, in line with their learners' profiles and school contexts (IFLC, 2016). Differentiated instruction, therefore, entails recognizing learner diversity and promoting equitable participation, enabling all students to progress according to their potential. Such an approach demands pedagogical expertise and reflective practice, both of which are grounded

in teachers' intimate knowledge of their students and teaching environments (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Tomlinson, 2017).

Teachers also play a pivotal role in identifying the limitations of curriculum innovations and assessing their classroom feasibility. Their experiential knowledge allows them to evaluate and adapt new curricula more effectively than external experts or authorities. As Karavas (2018) notes, motivated FL teachers tend to welcome the IFLC's flexibility and learner-centeredness, which enhance professional autonomy and encourage context-sensitive curriculum design.

Overall, the IFLC marks a paradigm shift toward recognizing teachers as curriculum co-designers rather than implementers of top-down directives. By enabling educators to use CEFR-based descriptors to develop syllabi, design differentiated activities and establish clear assessment criteria — often supported by ICT tools — the IFLC empowers teachers to cultivate inclusive, adaptive, and reflective learning environments that prioritize students' needs and promote ongoing pedagogical innovation.

2.2. The Current Philosophy of the Greek Educational Context

As mentioned above, educational innovations are inseparable from their socio-political and cultural context. Hence, assessing the feasibility of an innovation in Greece necessitates an understanding of the broader educational and administrative framework (Karavas, 2012).

In principle, Greek education aims to promote students' personal and social development and ultimately social welfare. Article 16 of the Greek Constitution defines education as a state responsibility that fosters students' moral, intellectual, professional and physical growth, as well as their national consciousness and civic responsibility (Flouris & Pasias, 2008; OECD, 2017). Despite these high aspirations, modernization efforts have largely failed (Verdis, 2002), as the system remains exam-oriented — particularly at the secondary level — encouraging utilitarian learning and superficial knowledge acquisition (Sifakis, 2012; Kassotakis & Verdis, 2013).

Another defining feature of Greek education is the prevalence of shadow education. Private supplementary schools (*frontisteria*) operate alongside public institutions, preparing students for university entrance exams and foreign language certifications. Their proliferation stems from extensive exam syllabi, limited classroom preparation time and the widespread belief that private institutions offer superior language instruction. Consequently, *frontisteria* have evolved into a lucrative industry aligned with market dynamics, reinforcing a results-driven, utilitarian view of learning.

Politically, education in Greece is highly politicized, with every governmental change triggering new reforms. This lack of continuity, compounded by the influence of teacher unions and political patronage networks, hinders sustainable reform (Dimitropoulos & Kindi, 2017). Given the close ties between unions and political parties, policy initiatives are often met with mistrust and resistance (Verdis, 2002).

Institutionally, the system remains highly centralized and bureaucratic, leaving little scope for regional autonomy (OECD, 2017). The Ministry of Education retains control over legislation,

curricula, staffing, and resource allocation (Kassotakis & Verdis, 2013). This excessive centralization has produced reforms detached from school realities (Sifakis, 2012) and a distorted model of quality control governance. Overall, the aforementioned overview highlights structural, political and cultural factors that constrain educational innovation in Greece, without implying uniform adherence to these patterns by all teachers or students. Rather, it underscores the systemic challenges that any reform must confront.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design Overview

This study employed a mixed-method design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture both the breadth and depth of implementation dynamics surrounding the IFLC in Greece. The specific design encompassed the use of three different research instruments, namely (a) a questionnaire, (b) semi-structured interviews and (c) lesson plan analysis. By integrating survey trends with rich qualitative accounts and classroom artefacts (Dörnyei, 2007; Bell, 2010; Thomas, 2013), the study sought to reveal the interaction between structural conditions and human agency in curriculum innovation. The overall aim was not only to document the extent of IFLC implementation but also to interpret the processes and meanings teachers attached to the reform. The mixed-method approach thus aligned with a constructivist paradigm, recognizing that curriculum innovation is mediated by the perceptions, experiences, and professional identities of those expected to implement it (Cohen et al., 2007; Nachmias et al., 2014).

3.2. Participants, Instruments and Analytical Procedures

The study employed a mixed-methods design, drawing on data from three complementary sources: (a) a nationwide questionnaire completed by 370 EFL teachers, (b) semi-structured interviews with 16 EFL teachers and 8 regional EFL school advisors, and (c) a corpus of 12 lesson plans developed by the teachers who were interviewed for the study. The participants were drawn from a population of approximately 8,000 EFL teachers across primary and secondary education in Greece, representing urban, semi-urban and rural areas to ensure geographical and demographic representativeness.

A stratified random sampling method (Dörnyei, 2007; Robson, 2011; Nachmias et al., 2014) was used for the questionnaire to capture variation in school type, region, and teaching experience. The final sample included 207 primary and 163 secondary teachers with teaching experience ranging from 1 to over 20 years. For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2007; Briggs et al., 2012) identified teachers and advisors representing diverse teaching contexts and professional backgrounds, with advisors included as key informants due to their supervisory and supporting roles.

The teacher questionnaire consisted of 50 items combining closed questions, a five-point Likert scale and open-ended questions on implementation challenges and professional development needs. Piloted with 20 EFL teachers, it demonstrated clarity and content validity. The semi-structured interviews explored teachers' and advisors' understanding of the IFLC's aims, feasibility, institutional constraints, and support mechanisms, as well as the tensions between

policy expectations and classroom realities. The lesson plan analysis focused on three components — lesson objectives, learning activities, and instructional materials. The aim was to triangulate self-reported data with observed pedagogical design and to assess how curriculum principles were translated into practice.

Data analysis followed a sequential explanatory approach (Dörnyei, 2007), where quantitative findings informed the qualitative phase. Questionnaire data were analyzed using SPSS (version 26.0). Descriptive statistics summarized EFL teachers' awareness, attitudes, and practices, while correlation tests (i.e. Chi-square, Fisher's exact, Mann-Whitney, Kruskall-Wallis) explored relationships between demographic variables and implementation patterns, with significance set at $p < 0.05$. Interview transcripts underwent thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) through iterative stages of coding and theme refinement, combining deductive categories from the theoretical framework with inductive insights from participants' narratives. Lesson plans were analyzed using criteria derived from IFLC principles (Dendrinos et al., 2014). Specifically, the lesson plans were assessed for (a) the alignment of objectives with "can-do" descriptors and communicative outcomes, (b) the use of authentic, multimodal, and ICT-supported materials responsive to learner diversity, and (c) the design of learning activities fostering interaction, digital literacy, and intercultural mediation.

Together, these procedures provided a robust, multilayered perspective on how the IFLC was interpreted and enacted across individual, institutional, and systemic levels of the Greek EFL context.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

All participants received detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Furthermore, written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data were anonymized through the use of pseudonyms and code identifiers. Digital files were stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher. Given the study's focus on teachers' professional experiences, particular care was taken to ensure that participants' views would not be used evaluatively or reported in a way that could identify individual schools or regions.

4. Research Findings

4.1. Awareness and Training Experiences

Overall, the teachers in the sample reported low to moderate awareness of the IFLC. While over half had heard of the curriculum, fewer than one-third had read the framework in detail or felt confident with its CEFR-based descriptors. Awareness of key principles — plurilingualism, mediation, multimodality, and project-based learning — was similarly partial, suggesting that the reform's conceptual underpinnings had not been widely internalised.

Training emerged as the weakest aspect of implementation. Only 41% of respondents had attended any IFLC-related session since 2016, and these were typically brief, theoretical and disconnected from classroom realities. Teachers characterised the training as "informative but impractical", emphasising the absence of hands-on guidance, examples of lesson design, or

opportunities for follow-up support. Rural teachers in particular, reported even fewer training opportunities, indicating structural inequity in access.

The EFL school advisors reinforced these impressions, noting that training provision was fragmented and that no sustained professional development model had accompanied the reform. The lack of mentoring, school-based coaching, or collaborative learning opportunities left teachers to interpret the curriculum independently. Such findings echo international studies showing that innovation often outpaces teacher preparedness when systemic support structures are weak (Guskey, 2002; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011).

4.2. Teachers' Beliefs about Innovation

Teachers expressed highly favourable attitudes towards educational innovation in principle. Over 70% agreed that the IFLC's communicative and learner-centered orientation aligned with contemporary pedagogical needs. Many valued the shift away from a single-textbook model and welcomed the emphasis on authenticity, differentiated instruction, and experiential learning.

However, this general optimism contrasted sharply with beliefs about feasibility. The majority described the IFLC as difficult or unrealistic to implement within Greek schools. Overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, restricted ICT access, rigid timetables, and exam-oriented expectations were repeatedly cited as barriers. Experienced teachers were more sceptical than newer colleagues, suggesting that entrenched institutional norms heavily shape perceptions of practicability (see Table 1).

Table 1: IFLC adaptation to Greek education relating to teachers' experience

	Years of teaching experience						H
	1-15 years		16-20 years		21+ years		
	mean (SD)	median (IQR)	mean (SD)	median (IQR)	mean (SD)	median (IQR)	
The IFLC is flexible enough to be used in different school environments[1]	3.45 (0.82)	3 (3 − 4)	*3.51* (0.8)	4 (3 − 4)	*3.25* (0.94)	3 (3 − 4)	6.46*
The content of the IFLC is compatible with the philosophy of the Greek educational context[1]	2.92 (0.94)	3 (2 − 4)	3.03 (0.87)	3 (2 − 4)	2.97 (0.91)	3 (2 − 4)	0.32
The IFLC presents a feasible and realistic programme which can be implemented in the current Greek educational system[1]	3.16 (0.94)	3 (3 − 4)	3.09 (0.83)	3 (3 − 4)	3.02 (0.96)	3 (2 − 4)	1.73

[1] in a 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) scale; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; H: test statistic from Kruskal-Wallis test

4.3. Reported Classroom Practices

Self-reported pedagogical practices revealed partial, selective alignment with IFLC principles. Communicative activities, pair work, use of authentic materials, and task-based elements were fairly widespread, reflecting long-standing shifts in Greek EFL pedagogy. However, practices specifically foregrounded in the IFLC, such as mediation, multimodality, plurilingual awareness, project-based learning and formative assessment, were implemented far less frequently.

Only about one-fifth of respondents regularly used mediation tasks or multimodal resources, and fewer integrated digital literacy in a structured way. Teachers attributed this to limited training, insufficient time, exam pressures, and uncertainty about how to design such tasks. Evidence from lesson plans corroborated these self-reports, showing a tendency to anchor lessons around the textbook, with IFLC elements added selectively.

Notably, teachers who had attended any IFLC-related training reported greater use of interactive, learner-centered practices, suggesting that even limited professional development can positively influence uptake.

4.4. Teacher Agency: Mediation over Compliance

Interviews highlighted a consistent pattern: teachers saw themselves not as implementers of a prescriptive curriculum but as mediators negotiating between policy ideals and classroom realities. Many had only superficial familiarity with the IFLC document yet attempted to translate its general philosophy into practice through selective adoption. Teachers described "borrowing ideas", "trying small changes" or "adapting descriptors to fit the textbook".

This adaptive stance reflects what Datnow et al. (2002) term "principled adaptation", whereby teachers integrate innovation through contextualised judgement rather than mechanical compliance. Although the IFLC frames teachers as autonomous syllabus designers, the institutional culture—centralised policy, textbook dependency, limited school-level flexibility—restricts the extent of agency teachers can exercise. Nonetheless, teachers actively appropriated aspects of the reform, suggesting emergent agency despite structural constraints.

4.5. Training and Support: Systemic Fragmentation

Teacher narratives consistently emphasised that the absence of coherent, sustained support significantly undermined their ability to integrate IFLC principles. Participants described the available professional development as sporadic "lecture-style" events rather than iterative, practice-based learning (see Figure 1). Many noted that they had not received any follow-up opportunities to experiment with IFLC-aligned tasks, observe colleagues or gain feedback from advisors.

This lack of structured support produced feelings of uncertainty and at times frustration, particularly among teachers with limited experience of syllabus design. Several interviewees stated that they were willing to experiment but felt "left alone to figure it out". Advisors acknowledged that although they attempted to provide guidance, the scale of their responsibilities and absence of institutionalised mentoring mechanisms prevented systematic engagement. Without collaborative spaces for peer exchange, teachers were left to engage in isolated, individualised efforts to interpret the curriculum.
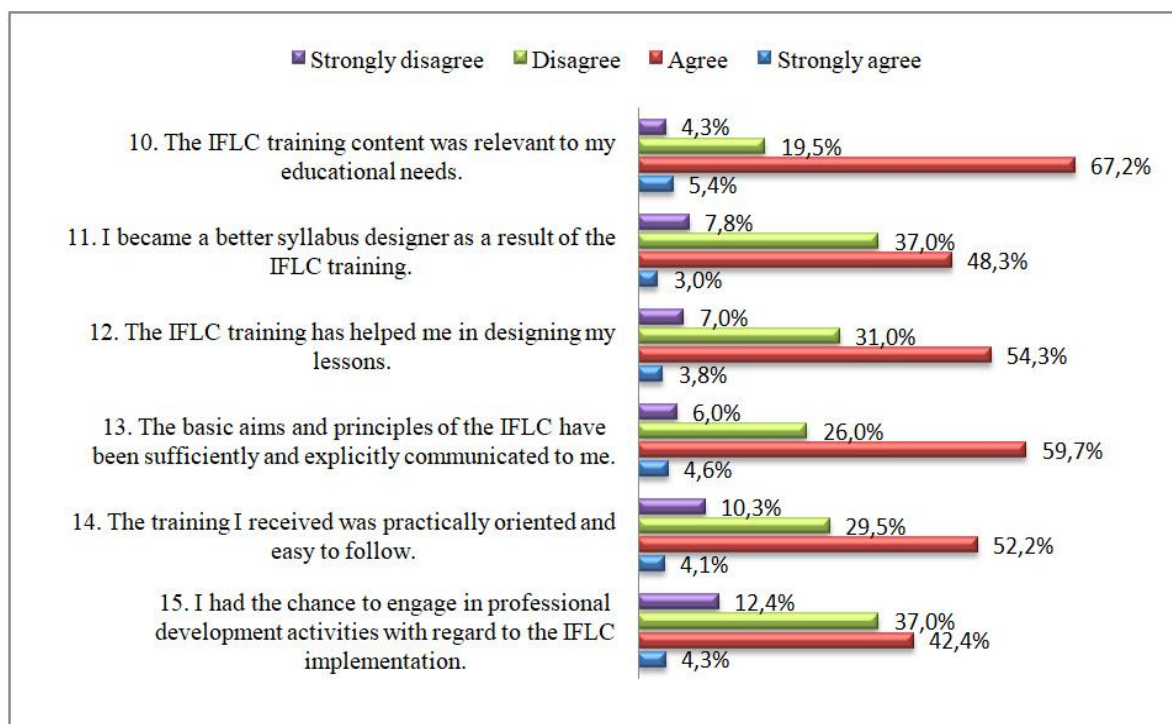
Figure 1: Teachers' opinions in relation to their IFLC training

These findings echo wider evidence that sustainable reform depends on professional learning communities, coaching, and ongoing dialogue rather than one-off training (Knight, 2007; Fullan & Quinn, 2015). In the Greek context, the absence of such structures curtailed teachers' capacity to act as the autonomous curriculum designers envisioned by the IFLC.

4.6. Adaptive Strategies and Selective Alignment

Despite limited support, many teachers demonstrated adaptive problem-solving. Rather than wholly rejecting the reform, they selectively incorporated IFLC-inspired practices where feasible. This included embedding group work within textbook-based lessons, drawing on CEFR descriptors to frame lesson objectives, and integrating small-scale projects linked to textbook topics. Teachers described such strategies as pragmatic compromises that allowed them to enrich lessons without disrupting established routines.

One teacher illustrated this approach by explaining that while full project-based learning was unrealistic due to time constraints, designing short collaborative tasks enabled students to engage more actively. Similarly, teachers reported integrating digital tools in limited ways

(such as videos or simple online exercises) where resources permitted, even if broader digital literacy objectives remained unmet (see Table 2).

This "innovation filtering" reflects an incremental approach whereby teachers integrate elements compatible with their beliefs and contextual constraints. Although these adaptations may not fully embody the IFLC's transformative vision, they represent meaningful steps towards pedagogical evolution.

Table 2: Teachers' digital literacy practices relating to their qualifications

		Qualifications				χ^2 (d.f.)
		BA in English Language and Literature		MA/ PhD		
		N	%	N	%	
My lessons include activities which involve hyperlinks and audiovisual elements.	No	49	24.6	23	13.3	7.61 (1)**
	Yes	150	75.4	150	86.7	
I systematically incorporate ICT tools in my lessons.	No	68	34.3	40	23.1	5.63 (1)*
	Yes	130	65.7	133	76.9	
I provide my learners with a variety of online sources to help them complete their projects.	No	81	40.9	51	29.7	5.08 (1)*
	Yes	117	59.1	121	70.3	

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; df: Degrees of freedom; χ^2: test statistic from Pearson's chi-square test

4.7. Emerging Pedagogical Shifts

Analysis of lesson plans and interview accounts suggested that the IFLC has initiated early-stage pedagogical shifts for some teachers. Several reported becoming more reflective about their teaching, questioning the limitations of traditional textbook-based instruction, and experimenting with more communicative, learner-centered tasks. Lesson plans showed instances of thematically engaging activities, modest use of multimodal materials, and attempts to incorporate learners' prior knowledge.

Teachers who had begun to explore descriptors found them helpful for clarifying learning objectives and structuring progression. Although these practices were limited and uneven, they indicate a gradual internalisation of key IFLC principles. Advisors corroborated this, noting increased awareness and experimentation compared to the period immediately following the reform's introduction.

Such changes, though modest, suggest that the IFLC has acted as a catalyst for reflective practice and professional growth. They also highlight agency as a dynamic, evolving process rather than a fixed state.

5. Discussion of Research Findings

5.1. Partial Implementation and Constrained Agency

The study reveals a consistent pattern of partial implementation shaped by constrained agency. Teachers broadly endorsed the IFLC's pedagogical principles yet struggled to operationalise them fully. This pattern is unsurprising in centralised systems where reforms are introduced top-down without corresponding investment in teacher learning or school-level flexibility. Teachers' attempts to mediate the reform demonstrate agency, but such agency is circumscribed by structural, cultural, and resource-related limitations.

International scholarship similarly documents that innovations often become selectively adopted or transformed during implementation, not because teachers resist change but because systemic conditions impede comprehensive uptake (Hu, 2005; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). The Greek case reinforces this view, illustrating how ambitious curricular visions confront entrenched institutional realities.

5.2. Belief–practice Tensions

A striking finding is the discrepancy between teachers' positive beliefs about innovation and the persistence of traditional practices. This reflects the powerful influence of pre-existing teacher cognition, which is often shaped by personal learning histories, professional cultures, and evaluative pressures (Borg, 2015). Without sustained, experiential professional development, teachers are likely to interpret new curricula through existing pedagogical frames.

Moreover, external pressures—particularly the dominance of examinations—reinforce traditional approaches even when teachers value communicative, learner-centered pedagogy. The IFLC's emphasis on mediation, plurilingualism, and multiliteracies requires deep conceptual change; yet without aligned assessment systems and institutional support, such change is difficult to realise.

5.3. Structural Barriers and Institutional Inertia

Systemic factors played a central role in shaping implementation. Limited ICT access, large class sizes, rigid timetables, and the requirement to follow national textbooks constrained teachers' ability to design flexible, differentiated syllabi. The absence of a coherent professional development infrastructure exacerbated these barriers, leaving teachers without the resources or guidance needed to enact innovation.

Greek educational governance remains highly centralised, with limited school autonomy and limited professional ownership of curricular decisions (Dimitropoulos & Kindi, 2017). In such a context, expecting teachers to function as designers and innovators without systemic reform is unrealistic. The findings therefore highlight the need for alignment between curriculum policy, assessment structures, and teacher support mechanisms if transformative change is to be achieved.

5.4. Teacher Agency as Dynamic and Negotiated

The study contributes to theoretical understandings of teacher agency by illustrating it as a negotiated, context-sensitive process rather than an individual attribute. Teachers demonstrated agency not through full enactment of the IFLC but through adaptive, selective integration that balanced professional ideals with contextual constraints. Their mediation reflects a pragmatic professionalism shaped by structural realities.

This nuanced perspective challenges simplistic binaries of compliance versus resistance. Instead, it underscores that agency emerges through teachers' ongoing efforts to reconcile policy expectations with local conditions, drawing on personal beliefs, practical experience, and available resources.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Embedded in the International Context: Implications for Practice and Policy

Situated within the global conversation on curriculum innovation and educational change, this study resonates with international efforts to align curriculum reform with the complex realities of classroom practice. Across diverse educational systems — from East Asia to Europe and Latin America — policy discourses inspired by global frameworks converge around similar imperatives: competence-based learning, multilingualism, and digital literacy. Yet, as comparative studies have shown, the translation of these global ideals into local practice remains uneven and contested. The Greek Integrated Foreign Languages Curriculum (IFLC) exemplifies this tension, offering a salient case of how global reform discourses are refracted through national traditions, institutional structures, and teacher agency.

The issues addressed in this study — the persistent policy–practice gap, the mediating role of teachers, and the systemic constraints on innovation — are not uniquely Greek but symptomatic of broader global dynamics. Curriculum reform is often conceived as a rational, linear process, while implementation proves recursive, negotiated, and contextually bounded. The IFLC case illuminates a recurrent pattern: conceptual acceptance but partial implementation of reform principles when teachers operate within centralized, exam-oriented, and bureaucratic systems. By situating these dynamics within the international literature on educational change, the study reinforces the view that sustainable innovation depends less on policy design than on the cultural and institutional conditions that enable teachers to exercise informed professional judgment.

From a methodological standpoint, the study employs a mixed-method design that advances international approaches to curriculum research by bridging macro-level policy analysis with micro-level pedagogical realities. The integration of large-scale questionnaire data, qualitative interviews, and lesson plan analysis provides a multi-level perspective on innovation processes — capturing both structural constraints and individual agency. This approach contributes to current methodological discussions in comparative curriculum studies, illustrating how triangulated, context-sensitive inquiry can reveal the mediating processes through which teachers interpret, adapt or resist innovation. In doing so, it responds to calls for research that moves beyond measuring reform "implementation" toward understanding reform "enactment."

Moreover, the findings carry significance beyond the Greek context. The shift from models of implementation fidelity to adaptive implementation reflects an international recognition of teachers as co-constructors rather than consumers of curriculum policy. By conceptualizing educational change as a negotiated process grounded in local agency, professional learning, and iterative feedback, the study contributes to a global rethinking of how innovation is sustained in practice. The IFLC experience demonstrates that even in centralized systems, curriculum innovation can evolve into meaningful change when teachers' interpretive work is acknowledged, supported, and systemically valued. As such, the IFLC is both a national case and a microcosm of the international struggle to reconcile global aspirations with local enactment. Its lessons affirm a broader truth evident across contemporary curriculum reform: innovation succeeds not through prescriptive design, but through coherence among vision, institutional support, and teacher agency.

In terms of theoretical significance, the study extends existing theorization of curriculum innovation and educational change in several ways. First, it contributes to the theory–practice interface by empirically demonstrating how teachers in centralized educational systems act as interpreters rather than implementers of innovation. While prior work on educational change has emphasized teacher agency, empirical studies illustrating how such agency materializes under restrictive institutional conditions remain limited. The IFLC case provides concrete evidence of adaptive agency—the ability of teachers to recontextualize reform principles within local realities—thereby enriching theoretical understandings of curriculum mediation in top-down systems.

Additionally, the study offers a context-sensitive model of innovation enactment, situating the IFLC within the broader discourse of global curriculum reforms. By juxtaposing policy intent with implementation processes, it exposes the dialectic between structural determinism and professional autonomy, extending the discussion of systemic coherence in curriculum studies (Priestley & Biesta, 2013; Fullan & Quinn, 2015). The findings suggest that successful innovation depends less on the novelty of curricular design and more on the alignment between institutional infrastructure, professional capacity, and cultural expectations, thereby advancing comparative perspectives on how educational innovations travel across sociocultural contexts (Rogan, 2007; Lai, 2010).

From a conceptual standpoint, the IFLC case refines the notion of "partial reform adoption" (Fullan, 2016) by introducing selective appropriation. Rather than a binary of success or failure, the data reveal a spectrum of adoption shaped by teachers' meaning-making processes. This contributes to contemporary theorization of curriculum innovation as nonlinear, recursive, and negotiated, challenging assumptions underlying traditional implementation models.

Together, these contributions enhance the theoretical discourse on curriculum innovation by framing it as a socially situated, agentive, and contextually mediated process rather than a technical exercise in policy delivery. They highlight that meaningful educational change emerges when institutional structures, cultural expectations and teacher agency converge to support adaptive, contextually informed enactment of curriculum reform.

6.2. Limitations of the Study

Despite the overall robustness of the research design and the methodological triangulation employed, the findings of the present study should be interpreted in the light of certain limitations. Firstly, although the questionnaire enabled the collection of large-scale and generalizable data, some responses — particularly to open-ended items — were superficial or appeared socially desirable, resulting in occasional inconsistencies. Moreover, the Likert attitude scale used could only provide approximate estimations of teachers' beliefs, as such scales tend to capture attitudes more effectively when these are stable and clearly defined. Consequently, the attitudinal findings should be regarded as indicative rather than definitive.

Secondly, although the analysis of the lesson plans revealed the teachers' intended instructional practices, the findings were deficient because they were not supported by classroom observations. Without direct evidence of classroom interaction, student engagement, and the actual enactment of planned activities, conclusions regarding the alignment of teaching practices with IFLC principles remain tentative. Therefore, the study primarily captures reported and planned practices rather than observed instructional behaviour. That said, these limitations do not undermine the value of the study but delineate the boundaries within which its findings can be interpreted, while also pointing to fruitful directions for future research.

In the light of the findings, it is suggested that further research be undertaken while the results show that for their optimum effectiveness, teachers should study them carefully and try to implement the changes as far as possible. Since teachers are the instrument of change, they play a catalytic role in raising educational standards. As they are aware of their learners' needs, they are in the best position to implement any educational reform in class. For this reason, teachers should take on the role of change agents and serve as key drivers in the diffusion and implementation of the IFLC innovation to enhance students' learning experiences.

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