



ALIGNING ELT TEXTBOOKS WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4: A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF SECONDARY ENGLISH CURRICULUM IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) has become a central driver of contemporary global education reforms, highlighting the need for inclusive and equitable educational transformation. Within this context, English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks serve as key sites where global policy commitments are interpreted and enacted. In Pakistan, recent secondary curriculum reforms signal responsiveness to competency-based and globally oriented education; however, the depth of their pedagogical realization remains insufficiently examined. This study therefore critically examines the Grade 9 English textbook to assess how SDG 4 is reflected in its themes, task design, and learner representation, drawing on SDG targets and constructivist principles to evaluate its transformative potential. The findings reflect meaningful reform progress and incorporation of sustainability, gender equity, and civic responsibility themes. However, inquiry-based integration and sustained learner agency remain uneven. The study concludes that a deeper restructuring is necessary to achieve

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1. Introduction

In recent years, global education reform has increasingly been framed within the agenda of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2025). Unlike earlier education initiatives that focused primarily on access and enrollment, SDG 4 places significant emphasis on the quality, relevance, and transformative potential of learning experiences. Incorporating SDG 4 targets into ELT textbooks necessitates the paradigm shift to the more learner-centered, inquiry-based, and creativity-building pedagogies. When developing curricula or texts, curriculum developers and textbook writers must team up with the goal of creating content that ensures language competencies and facilitates the achievement of knowledge and skills regarding sustainable development and global citizenship as stipulated in SDG 4.

1.1. Global Education Reform and SDG 4

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) promotes learner-centered, participatory, and inquiry-based pedagogies. Research indicates that increased access to schooling does not automatically ensure educational quality or equity unless learning materials and instructional practices engage learners in meaningful, inclusive, and critical ways (Khalil et al., 2023). In this sense, SDG 4 represents both a policy commitment and a pedagogical benchmark.

Sustainability Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the United Nations is focused on making sure that everybody has access to inclusive and equal quality education and enjoys lifelong learning opportunities (United Nations, 2025).

In particular, Target 4.1 is concerned with the issue of ensuring that every youth, as well as a large percentage of adults (both men and women), become literate and numerate, whereas Target 4.7 note that all learners should obtain the knowledge and competencies necessary to facilitate a sustainable development, including through education on sustainable development and global citizenship. SDG 4.1 recommends the use of literacy and numeracy as the core skills of lifelong learning. Textbooks are imperative in the ELT whereby they help in the enhancement of these skills. But research has identified that most ELT textbooks continue to follow the traditional teacher centered methods where most emphasis is placed on grammar and vocabulary expansion as opposed to higher order thinking and creativity (Rehman, 2004).

The global target 4.7 involves the incorporation of sustainable development and global citizenship education in curriculums. It has been found that although certain ELT textbooks do contain elements of themes connected to SDG 4.7, whether they are environmental sustainability or issues of social justice, they tend to be very shallow in their coverage and lack consistency (Annamalai et al., 2025). This lapse implies that there is a

call to a more initiative-taking and regular inclusion of SDG 4.7 themes into ELT documents.

1.2. ELT as a Tool for Global Citizenship

Within this reform landscape, English Language Teaching (ELT) holds particular significance. As a global medium of communication, English mediates access to international discourse, intercultural exchange, and global knowledge systems. Consequently, ELT textbooks are no longer confined to developing linguistic proficiency alone; they increasingly function as sites where learners encounter social, environmental, and ethical issues.

Through content selection, task design, and activity structure, ELT textbooks can cultivate learner autonomy, creativity, collaboration, and social responsibility. When thoughtfully constructed, they have the potential to contribute to the competencies envisioned under SDG 4.7, including critical thinking and global citizenship. However, the inclusion of themes such as sustainability, poverty, or environmental protection does not guarantee meaningful alignment with SDG 4. The educational value of such themes depends on how they are pedagogically structured. A distinction therefore emerges between thematic exposure and pedagogical operationalization. While exposure introduces learners to global concerns, operationalization requires structured opportunities for inquiry, reflection, dialogue, and agency. This distinction is particularly relevant in contexts where textbooks continue to prioritize grammar-focused exercises and controlled responses over exploratory and learner-driven tasks (Rehman, 2004; Annamalai et al., 2025).

1.3. Curriculum Reform in Pakistan

Pakistan's secondary English curriculum has undergone several revisions, notably following reforms initiated after 2006 and more recently under competency-based frameworks. These reforms reflect a policy shift toward skills development, learner engagement, and alignment with international educational standards. In principle, such reforms resonate with the broader objectives of SDG 4, particularly in their emphasis on quality and inclusivity. Given the centralized nature of textbook development in Pakistan, textbooks serve as primary vehicles through which curriculum policy is translated into classroom practice. They do not merely function as instructional tools; they also transmit cultural values, social narratives, and ideological orientations (Aslam & Malik, 2022). As such, evaluating textbook content and structure becomes essential in assessing whether national curriculum reforms substantively reflect global educational commitments.

1.4. Problem Statement

Although recent ELT textbooks at the secondary level incorporate themes related to sustainability, social responsibility, and global awareness, the extent to which these themes are embedded within transformative pedagogical structures remains uncertain. The

presence of SDG-related topics may indicate policy responsiveness; however, meaningful alignment with SDG 4 requires more than thematic representation.

A critical question, therefore, concerns how learners are positioned within textbook activities. In most cases, learners are guided toward recall-based comprehension and controlled language practice, with fewer opportunities to question ideas, analyze issues in depth, collaborate meaningfully, or propose their own solutions. Because inquiry-based and agency-oriented tasks are not consistently embedded across units, global themes tend to remain at the level of information and discussion rather than developing into genuinely transformative learning experiences. This tension between policy discourse and pedagogical design underscores the need for systematic evaluation of ELT textbooks within the Pakistani secondary education context.

1.5. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the extent to which secondary-level ELT textbooks in Pakistan align with Sustainable Development Goal 4 in both thematic representation and pedagogical design. The study seeks to determine whether references to sustainability and global citizenship are accompanied by learner-centered, inquiry-driven, and creativity-oriented instructional structures. It further examines the extent to which themes of cultural inclusion, diversity, and equitable representation are meaningfully integrated into the content, and whether global citizenship is framed as an inclusive, dialogic construct rather than a generalized or abstract ideal. In doing so, the analysis evaluates not only the presence of such themes but also the depth of their integration across discourse, pedagogy, and learner positioning.

1.6. Research Questions

This study addresses the following questions:

1. To what extent do secondary ELT textbooks in Pakistan reflect themes associated with SDG 4?
2. Do textbook tasks promote learner agency and transformative competencies consistent with the aspirations of SDG 4?

1.7. Significance of Study

By grounding textbook evaluation in the framework of SDG 4, this study contributes to ongoing conversations on ELT materials and curriculum reform. Rather than engaging with global education agendas at a purely rhetorical level, it examines how these commitments are translated into the practical design and structure of national curriculum materials. In doing so, the study offers context-sensitive insight into how global policy priorities particularly those related to quality education, inclusion, and transformative learning are interpreted, adapted, and enacted within the Pakistani secondary education context. The findings aim to inform curriculum planners, textbook developers, and policymakers about the degree of alignment between SDG-oriented educational

aspirations and actual textbook design. In doing so, the study seeks to bridge global policy discourse and classroom realities, supporting more coherent and sustainable development of secondary ELT materials.

2. Literature Review

Recent educational research highlights that achieving SDG 4 entails both content inclusion and pedagogical transformation. A global scoping review of SDG-aligned curricula found that while many educational systems incorporate SDG terminology into learning content, the deeper integration of SDG principles into pedagogy, critical thinking and inclusive practices remains uneven (Pham & Lindqvist, 2025). This shift to transformative education stresses that learners must be actively engaged in reflective, collaborative, and contextual meaningful learning experiences to realize the goals of SDG 4.

2.1. Understanding SDG 4 and Transformative Education

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) represents a comprehensive global agenda for inclusive, equitable and quality education that goes beyond access to schooling, emphasizing transformative learning and lifelong competencies (United Nations, 2025). SDG 4 includes Target 4.1, which foregrounds foundational literacy and numeracy, and Target 4.7, which calls for education that fosters skills, values, and attitudes necessary for sustainable development, global citizenship, human rights, and cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2023). These targets indicate that quality education is not merely academic achievement, but also the development of critical thinking and civic competencies.

2.2. Education for Sustainable Development in ELT

The intersection of Sustainable Development Goals and English Language Teaching (ELT) is gaining prominence as scholars examine how language instruction can contribute to sustainability and global citizenship competencies. Kwee (2021) argues that Integrating SDG-related content in language classrooms has been shown to enhance student engagement, empathy, and critical awareness while also supporting language learning goals.

Studies in EFL contexts illustrate that embedding SDG-oriented themes (e.g., environmental sustainability, social justice) can enrich learners' critical perspectives and motivate deeper classroom participation (Sofiana & Haryati, 2025).

Moreover, recent research on sustainable development goals integration in English language and literature teaching emphasizes that active learner engagement with global issues enhances both skill acquisition and global citizenship values especially when instructional activities go beyond rote learning to include collaborative and reflective tasks.

2.3. Textbooks as Curriculum Implementers

The role of the English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks has changed and became particularly significant to teach not only linguistic proficiency, but also the ability to think critically and creatively as a global citizen. To achieve this goal, the Sustainable Development Goal 4 must be integrated into ELT textbooks. SDG 4 concentrates on inclusive and equitable quality education with Target 4.1 being referred to as literacy and the foundational skills, whereas Target 4.7 is related to the fostering of knowledge, values, and skills that are required to achieve sustainable development and global citizenship. Textbooks on ELT, being the most influential resource regarding the main teaching program, can become the key to achieving these objectives as they define the experience of learning that students gain.

Textbooks can promote the sense of learner autonomy, creativity and social responsibility through well-chosen content selection, task-design, and inquiry- and collaborative-based activities. Textbooks are powerful mechanisms for enacting curriculum policy, serving as both pedagogical tools and ideological artifacts. They carry implicit assumptions about language, culture and society that shape learners' worldviews (Aslam & Malik, 2022)

Nonetheless, studies report that teacher-oriented and grammar-based content in textbooks, especially in developing nations, remains strong with little to no incorporation of the alignment with SDGs learning outcomes. Formal and table-based content analysis of ELT textbooks forms a methodological basis to demonstrate how far the texts in the classroom texts reflect the principles of SDG 4, which can support curricular planning, textbook writing, and educational policy to be more holistic, learner-focused, and sustainable in the future.

Recent studies have applied content analysis to evaluate Sustainable Development Goals in ELT textbooks. For instance, research conducted on Moroccan EFL textbooks found that themes related to sustainability and global citizenship were present but varied widely in depth and instructional support across materials, often reflecting surface-level inclusion rather than transformative integration. (El Gourari & ED-DALI, 2024)

Similarly, studies of sustainability representation in English textbooks in Pakistan highlight gaps between global expectations and textbook content: even where SDGs are mentioned, relationships between global goals and learning activities remain underdeveloped, suggesting a need for intentional curriculum design rather than incidental inclusion. (Hameed et al., 2024). These findings corroborate the notion that alignment between policy and textbooks cannot be judged by thematic presence alone but requires attention to pedagogical coherence and learner-oriented task design.

2.4. Pakistani ELT Curriculum Context

The Pakistani ELT context has historically been dominated by grammar-translation methods and exam-oriented pedagogy, with textbooks emphasizing structural accuracy over critical use of language. Recent curriculum reforms, influenced by competency-based paradigms, seek to modernize instructional objectives and align them with global frameworks like SDG 4. Empirical studies reveal that although SDG-related content appears in textbooks and curriculum documents, in many cases this inclusion remains thematic rather than pedagogical, with limited engagement mechanisms for students to develop higher-order skills or global competencies (Hameed et al., 2024).

Moreover, research in related Pakistani educational domains highlights gaps in textbook design and classroom practice that constrain students' development of critical thinking, intercultural awareness, and sustainable responses elements central to SDG 4 aspirations. These findings point to a consistent pattern: policy reforms may articulate global aspirations, but textbook implementation lags in operationalizing the deeper competencies associated with SDG 4.

2.5. Literature Gap

Although research on SDG integration in ELT and curriculum alignment is growing, there remains limited empirical evaluation of SDG 4 operationalization in Pakistani secondary ELT textbooks that examines not only thematic presence but also pedagogical coherence, learner agency, and task design. This study addresses that gap by critically analyzing textbook content, activities, and instructional structures aligned with SDG 4's transformative ambitions.

3. Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a policy-informed yet pedagogically grounded conceptual framework to evaluate the extent to which the Grade 9 ELT textbook aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Rather than treating SDG 4 as a symbolic reference, the framework operationalizes selected sub-targets 4.1 and 4.7 as evaluative criteria linked to the study's research questions concerning thematic inclusion, pedagogical depth, and learner agency. The framework therefore moves beyond identifying whether global themes are present to interrogating how they are structurally embedded within textbook design.

3.1. SDG 4 as an Evaluative Lens

SDG 4.1 foregrounds the achievement of relevant and effective learning outcomes. In relation to Research Question 2, which examines the pedagogical structuring of themes, this target serves as a benchmark for assessing cognitive rigor. The analysis therefore considers whether tasks promote higher-order thinking, authentic language use, and meaningful communication, or whether they remain confined to recall-based comprehension and controlled practice. The underlying assumption is that effective

learning outcomes require more than linguistic accuracy; they demand opportunities for analysis, interpretation, and application.

SDG 4 informs Research Question 1, which investigates thematic representation and inclusion. Here, the focus shifts to the extent to which cultural diversity, gender sensitivity, and equitable representation are meaningfully integrated into the content. Inclusion is treated critically rather than superficially. The framework therefore questions whether diverse identities are positioned as active contributors within narratives or merely referenced symbolically.

SDG 4.7 directly informs Research Question 3 concerning learner positioning and transformative engagement. While sustainability and global citizenship may appear as thematic topics, the central concern is whether they are accompanied by critical inquiry, ethical reflection, and solution-oriented thinking. Without these elements, global themes risk functioning as descriptive content rather than vehicles for transformative learning.

3.2. Constructivist Pedagogy as a Mediating Principle

Constructivist pedagogy, as conceptualized by foundational educational theorists, positions learning as an active and socially mediated process rather than the passive absorption of transmitted knowledge. Dewey (1938) emphasized experiential learning and reflective inquiry as central to democratic education, arguing that learners develop understanding through engagement with meaningful problems. Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) foregrounded the social nature of cognition, introducing the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development to explain how dialogue and collaboration scaffold higher-order thinking. Bruner (1960) further advanced discovery learning, proposing that knowledge becomes transferable when learners participate in inquiry and meaning making rather than rote reception. Together, these perspectives frame constructivism not merely as a methodological preference but as an epistemological stance that values learner agency, dialogic interaction, and contextualized problem-solving. Within this study, constructivism serves as the pedagogical lens through which SDG 4's aspirations for quality and transformative education are interpreted and operationalized in textbook analysis.

To bridge policy aspirations and instructional practice, the framework draws on constructivist and learner-centered principles. Constructivism views learning as an active process shaped by dialogue, collaboration, and contextual engagement. This perspective sharpens the study's analytical stance by framing inquiry-based tasks, reflective writing, and problem-solving activities as indicators of deeper alignment with SDG 4.

The framework therefore assumes that transformative education cannot occur through transmission-oriented instruction alone. If learners are positioned primarily as responders to predetermined questions, opportunities for agency remain limited. Constructivist

pedagogy thus functions as the mediating principle through which SDG targets are translated into observable instructional structures.

3.3. Operationalizing the Framework: Analytical Dimensions

The conceptual model is operationalized through three analytical dimensions corresponding directly to the research questions. The first dimension, thematic alignment, examines the presence and representation of sustainability, global citizenship, and inclusion. The second dimension, pedagogical depth, evaluates the cognitive level and structure of tasks. The third dimension, learner agency, assesses how students are positioned within activities, including opportunities for voice, collaboration, and solution-building.

This layered structure enables the study to assess degrees of alignment rather than issuing binary judgments. It allows for a critical evaluation of whether SDG discourse is integrated substantively or remains at a surface level.

3.4. Conceptual Positioning of the Study

By grounding textbook evaluation in SDG 4 while interrogating pedagogical enactment through constructivist theory, this framework advances a critical perspective on curriculum reform. It argues that thematic inclusion alone does not constitute alignment. Genuine operationalization requires structural coherence across content, pedagogy, and learner empowerment.

In this way, the framework directly supports the study's central claim: although SDG-related themes are visible in the Grade 9 ELT textbook, their transformative potential depends on the depth of pedagogical integration and the degree to which learners are positioned as active agents rather than passive recipients.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative critical curriculum analysis to examine how Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is operationalized within a secondary-level English Language Teaching (ELT) textbook in Pakistan. Rather than treating the textbook as a neutral instructional tool, the study approaches it as a policy artifact that reflects broader ideological, pedagogical, and reform-oriented commitments.

4.1. Research Design

Critical curriculum analysis allows for interpretive examination of how global policy discourses particularly those related to quality education, inclusion, and global citizenship are translated into national curriculum materials. The purpose is not merely to identify the presence of SDG-related themes but to interrogate the depth, coherence, and transformative potential of their integration. This approach aligns directly with the study's conceptual framework, which positions SDG 4 sub-targets (4.1, and 4.7) as evaluative lenses mediated through constructivist pedagogy.

4.2. Research Context and Text Selection

The study focuses on the Grade 9 English textbook prescribed for public secondary schools in Pakistan. This level was selected because it represents a critical stage in the secondary education cycle where learners are expected to engage in higher-order thinking, abstract reasoning, and socially responsive dialogue. As a reform-era publication, the textbook reflects contemporary curriculum priorities emphasizing competency-based learning and global responsiveness. The analysis encompasses the full textbook, including reading passages, comprehension exercises, writing prompts, speaking activities, grammar sections, and visual elements. Examining the complete corpus allows for assessment of structural coherence rather than isolated thematic instances.

4.3. Analytical Orientation

The analysis is guided by the three interrelated dimensions established in the conceptual framework: thematic alignment, pedagogical depth, and learner agency. However, within a critical curriculum approach, these dimensions function not as rigid coding categories but as interpretive lenses. First, thematic alignment is examined to determine how sustainability, equity, and global citizenship are represented and framed. The analysis considers whether such themes are embedded within meaningful narrative contexts or presented as surface-level inclusions aligned with reform rhetoric. Second, pedagogical depth is analyzed through the cognitive structure of tasks and activities. Attention is given to whether instructional design promotes inquiry, collaboration, and higher-order thinking consistent with SDG 4.1, or whether it remains transmission-oriented. Third, learner agency is examined to assess how students are positioned within the curriculum. The analysis explores whether learners are invited to articulate perspectives, engage critically with social issues, and connect global themes to local realities. This dimension is central to evaluating the transformative aspirations of SDG 4.7. Rather than quantifying instances, the study emphasizes qualitative interpretation of patterns, tensions, and inconsistencies across units.

4.4 Analytical Procedure and Rigor

The analysis proceeded through iterative reading and thematic interpretation of the textbook, guided by SDG sub-targets and constructivist principles. Emerging patterns were examined in relation to broader reform discourses, with particular attention to areas of alignment and divergence.

Methodological rigor was strengthened through sustained engagement with the text, transparent articulation of analytical lenses, and clear alignment between research questions, theoretical framework, and interpretive claims. While the approach is interpretive, it remains systematic in its application of consistent evaluative criteria across the full corpus.

4.5. Ethical Considerations

The study analyzes publicly available curriculum materials and does not involve human participants. The analysis remains academic and evidence-based, avoiding normative critique beyond the scope of the established framework.

4.6. Methodological Contribution

By translating SDG 4 sub-targets into operational analytical dimensions, this study contributes a structured model for evaluating textbook integration of global education goals. The framework enables assessment not only of thematic presence but also of pedagogical structure and transformative potential. This approach advances textbook research beyond rhetorical alignment and provides a replicable model for policy-informed curriculum evaluation.

4.7. Scope and Delimitations

This study focuses exclusively on the structural design and pedagogical composition of the Grade 9 English textbook prescribed in Pakistan. The analysis is limited to textual content, task types, thematic representation, visual elements, and instructional organization embedded within the textbook itself. Classroom implementation, teacher mediation, student interpretation, and institutional assessment practices are not examined. While these dimensions may significantly influence the realization of SDG-oriented pedagogy, they fall beyond the scope of the present investigation. Grade 9 was selected for its representativeness within the secondary education cycle and its reflection of contemporary reform priorities. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as an evaluation of curriculum design potential rather than a direct measure of classroom practice or learner outcomes.

5. Findings

The findings are presented in alignment with the research questions and the interpretive lenses established in the conceptual framework: thematic alignment, pedagogical depth, and learner agency. The analysis examines patterns, continuities, and tensions across the textbook. The results indicate that while SDG-related themes are visibly embedded within the Grade 9 English textbook, their pedagogical integration remains uneven and structurally inconsistent.

5.1. Thematic Representation of SDG-Related Content

Research Question 1 examined how SDG 4 themes are represented and framed within the textbook. The analysis reveals strong thematic visibility, particularly in relation to quality education, global citizenship, women's empowerment, and community development. Sustainability and social responsibility are not peripheral inclusions; they are embedded in several central units and positioned as socially relevant concerns. For example, the chapter on quality education links schooling to national development and invites students to reflect on how education contributes to social progress. Similarly, units

addressing entrepreneurship situate economic participation within broader discussions of poverty alleviation and social welfare. The representation of female entrepreneurs and community leaders reflects a deliberate effort to foreground gender inclusion and regional diversity. However, while thematic inclusion is evident, continuity across units is less consistent. Certain chapters strongly foreground equity and citizenship, whereas others revert to neutral or decontextualized linguistic content. As a result, SDG-related themes appear integrated at the level of discourse but are not uniformly scaffolded throughout the textbook. Thematic alignment is therefore visible yet episodic rather than systematically cumulative.

Cultural inclusion demonstrates meaningful progress compared to earlier textbook models characterized by limited diversity. Female figures and locally grounded narratives signal movement toward broader representation. Nevertheless, multicultural engagement is not consistently extended into deeper intercultural dialogue. Inclusion is present, but it does not always translate into sustained critical exploration of pluralism.

5.2. Pedagogical Structuring of Themes

The analysis reveals a tension between reform-oriented thematic content and traditional instructional design. Several chapters incorporate collaborative tasks, guided discussions, and reflective writing activities that align with constructivist principles. Role-plays, group debates, and brainstorming exercises suggest movement toward learner-centered pedagogy. These elements indicate that reform discourse has influenced textbook design beyond symbolic thematic inclusion. However, pedagogical depths vary significantly across units. Grammar-focused sections frequently rely on controlled practice and discrete skill exercises. While such tasks are central to language learning, their structural separation from thematic inquiry creates a dual instructional pattern. Progressive thematic units coexist with conventional accuracy-driven drills, resulting in inconsistent cognitive engagement.

Inquiry-based learning appears intermittently rather than as a coherent pedagogical philosophy. Students are occasionally encouraged to reflect on social issues or propose improvements, but extended inquiry cycles comprising problem identification, research, collaborative solution development, and reflection are not systematically embedded. Consequently, while constructivist tendencies are emerging, pedagogical transformation remains partial and chapter dependent.

5.3. Learner Positioning and Agency

The analysis reveals a dual construction of the learner. In grammar and comprehension exercises, learners are primarily positioned as responders expected to supply correct answers. These sections emphasize accuracy and controlled reproduction of knowledge. In contrast, thematic units often invite learners to articulate perspectives, engage in simulated civic roles, and connect global themes to local contexts. For instance,

students are asked to propose improvements to school systems, reflect on women's empowerment in their communities, or interview entrepreneurial figures. Such tasks suggest an emerging emphasis on voice and participation. However, this agency remains discursive. Students are encouraged to speak and write about change, yet structured opportunities for sustained project-based engagement or community-oriented action are limited. As a result, learner agency is present but not fully institutionalized within the textbook's pedagogical architecture. The capacity for transformative engagement is suggested, but it is not consistently embedded across instructional sequences.

5.4. Synthesis of Findings

Across the three interpretive lenses, the textbook reflects meaningful reform progress alongside structural inconsistency. SDG-related themes are visibly incorporated and locally contextualized. Pedagogical practices demonstrate emerging constructivist influence. Learner agency is encouraged in selected units. Yet thematic visibility does not always translate into sustained inquiry or transformative practice. The textbook signals responsiveness to global education discourse, but the integration of policy aspirations into pedagogical structure remains incomplete. The findings therefore support the central claim of this study: SDG 4 is present in discourse, partially reflected in pedagogy, and unevenly operationalized in practice.

6. Discussion

The findings position the Grade 9 textbook within a broader reform trajectory in Pakistani ELT curriculum. Compared to earlier grammar-dominant models, the current edition demonstrates substantive progress. Socially relevant themes, collaborative tasks, and contextualized narratives indicate responsiveness to contemporary educational priorities. The content of Grade 9 was related to global and local relevance, cultural inclusion and equity and empowerment and citizenship. The findings reveal Grade 9 textbook exhibits a visible attempt to be aligned with the goal of SDG 4.1 in terms of providing quality education as well as SDG 4.7 in terms of providing socially conscious-oriented and culturally sensitive pedagogy. As an example, the chapter of Women Empowerment through entrepreneurship communicates to real Pakistani women entrepreneurs like Tanzila Khan and Parveen Saeed, thus the local authenticity, gender inclusivity, including global relevance is corresponded. The writing and speaking activities ask students to research on change agents within the community and provide information on the effect of entrepreneurship to the alleviation of poverty relationship of personal learning to developmental efforts. Similarly, in Patriotism and Hazrat Asma, students interactively discuss service, justice, and responsibility based on values, which creates identity relating to the civics and ethical judgment. Notably, the Grade 9 textbook contains a number of chapters that foster learner agency by asking the students to apply the ethical values to their lives and societies. As an example, the tasks like, write about a person in

your life who speaks up on behalf of others|| or the task of or describe how a woman in your community has helped make a positive changell encourages students to think about real-life experiences, connect with their immediate worlds and give personal opinions.

These are the immediate practices that lead to SDG 4.7 which is aimed at education as means to raise new potentially responsible citizens, ethically involved, and culturally informed (UNESCO, 2023). This result is also contrary to what has previously been evaluated in Pakistan in textbooks.

Rabbani, Mahmood, and Asghar (2023), in their socio-semiotic multimodal analysis of an English textbook used in Punjab, have discovered that in most cases visual and textual elements were used to show moral themes, but did not imply moral tasks that prompt students to think, reason ethically, or apply their citizenship skills. They concluded that no opportunities to internalize values by means of personal narrative or actual research appear in Pakistani ELT materials traditionally. Whereas the grade 9 textbook reviewed in this study integrates such opportunities on a regular basis especially via narrative writing, peer interviewing, and open-ended moralistic stimuli. This is an interesting idea of an essential change in material design, a shift in the way of translating the value into symbolic representations to a more practical turning of value onto the inside.

The uneven operationalization of inquiry and learner agency observed in the textbook may also be understood through the lens of transformative learning theory and critical pedagogy. Mezirow (1991) conceptualizes transformative learning as a process through which individuals critically examine underlying assumptions, engage in reflective discourse, and reconstruct meaning perspectives. Such transformation requires structured opportunities for critical questioning and dialogic engagement elements that appear intermittently rather than systematically within the textbook analyzed. Similarly, Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy critiques transmission-oriented education as a "banking model" that limits learner agency, advocating instead for problem-posing education that positions students as co-constructors of knowledge capable of social action. When examined against these theoretical benchmarks, the textbook demonstrates movement toward dialogic engagement but stops short of fully institutionalizing critical inquiry as sustained pedagogical architecture. This perspective reinforces the study's central claim that thematic inclusion alone does not guarantee transformative educational practice.

However, the analysis also reveals a persistent policy pedagogical gap. SDG 4 emphasizes transformative learning, critical thinking, and active citizenship. While the textbook incorporates development-oriented themes, pedagogical restructuring remains uneven. Sustainability and empowerment are often introduced descriptively rather than explored through sustained inquiry cycles. This tension reflects a broader challenge in curriculum reform and integrating global policy discourse into deeply embedded instructional traditions. Grammar-driven sections continue to operate independently of

thematic inquiry, reinforcing a dual structure in which innovation coexists with continuity. The textbook can therefore be characterized as a reform-in-progress model. It demonstrates commitment to SDG-aligned discourse and incorporates participatory elements. Yet full operationalization, particularly sustained inquiry, integrated language-content design, and institutionalized learner agency requires further structural refinement.

7. Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates visible engagement with SDG 4 themes within the Grade 9 ELT textbook. Sustainability, equity, and civic responsibility are integrated at the level of discourse. Participatory tasks signal a reform movement. Structural coherence, however, remains under development. Inquiry-based cycles are not consistently sustained, and grammar-content integration is partial. Learner agency appears episodic rather than systematically embedded. Meaningful SDG alignment requires more than thematic visibility. It demands integrated language-content design, dialogic continuity, and institutionalized inquiry structures. Only through such restructuring can ELT textbooks move beyond reform rhetoric toward transformative educational practice.

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