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The school-wide pedagogical framework at an Australian primary school: experiences and perspectives of teachers

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Abstract

Teachers play a pivotal role in the implementation of school-based pedagogical reforms. The study reported here explored how participating teachers ($n=54$) viewed the pedagogical framework developed at their Australian primary school to improve teaching and learning. Responses to an online survey revealed that teachers understood the pedagogical components of the framework, were confident implementers of the framework, and strongly endorsed its use throughout their school. Strength-based properties were associated with school-wide consistency, increased learning, and the monitoring of student progress while implementation challenges were related to (a) time constraints and teacher performance demands, and (b) catering for the needs of specific student groups. Additionally, a list of improvements was offered, including practical ideas to address the identified challenges and recommendations related to increasing professional flexibility, professional wellbeing, and professional development. While these findings are site specific, they provide directions for further research into pedagogical reforms for school improvement.

Keywords Quality teaching and learning · Pedagogical framework · Primary school teachers · School improvement · School-wide pedagogy

Introduction

School improvement is not a passing fad; policymakers and system administrators around the globe have retained school-based development as a line item on the educational reform agenda for over 40 years (Murphy, 2013). Throughout the past 2 decades, the school improvement movement has been fuelled by the United Nations' continuing call for, and monitoring of, quality education for all students (e.g., UNESCO, 2000, 2007, 2015a, 2015b, 2017/18, 2020), together with the ongoing

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dissemination of cross-national performance data from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Therefore, it is not surprising to find in the international literature 'the many faces of school improvement' and a 'growing diversity of approaches to whole-school change' (Wrigley, 2014, p. 3). In the Australian context, some state education departments have used school-wide pedagogical frameworks as a quality assurance mechanism for promoting instructional change and increased implementation outcomes throughout their schools. Not surprisingly, teachers play a central role in this improvement process as they are tasked with the implementation of the framework in their classrooms on a day-to-day basis. In this paper, we present findings relating to teachers' viewpoints about the pedagogical framework used throughout their Australian primary school as a central pillar for ongoing improvement efforts.

Informing literature

When reviewing the school improvement literature, Hallinger and Heck (2011) classified studies according to the theoretical perspective adopted to investigate school-level change and development. In so doing, they identified three distinct perspectives: knowledge-based aspects related to schooling (e.g., leadership), change-based processes and frameworks (e.g., school-wide approach), and school and organisational culture (e.g., professional collaboration). Regardless of perspective taken, however, there tends to be broad agreement in the literature that school-level improvement efforts should involve bottom-up, school-led change (Cicchinelli et al., 2006; Crowther et al., 2012); account for local conditions and context (Harris, 2020; Hopkins, 2005); include a focus on the quality of teaching and learning (Gurr et al., 2021; Hopkins, 2005; Merrett, 2000); and incorporate evidence-informed practices (Brown et al., 2017; Graves & Moore, 2018).

These common features are strongly embedded in the National School Improvement Tool [NSIT; Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), 2012], which was developed as part of the National Plan for School Improvement (Australian Government, 2013) and continues to be widely used by government and nongovernment education systems and schools throughout Australia. The NSIT is predicated on the notion that schools are 'learning communities' in which teaching practices and student learning outcomes can be improved through ongoing 'collaborative, systematic, and school-wide efforts' (ACER, 2016, p. 2). To this end, the NSIT is designed with strategic content distributed across nine interrelated domains related to whole-of-school improvement in teaching and learning. This structure enables schools to be internally or externally assessed in one or all domains, with data being used by schools to set goals and monitor improvements over time. Since 2014, the Queensland Department of Education, through its Education Improvement Branch, has used the nine domains within the NSIT to review government schools at least once every 4 years in order to inform 4-year strategic improvement planning and yearly school improvement plans at each site.

Additionally, as part of ongoing school improvement efforts, the Queensland Department of Education mandated the development and implementation of a

research-validated pedagogical framework aimed at ensuring consistent and effective teaching and learning practices to enhance student achievement (Queensland Government, 2018). Recent adjustments to framework requirements, aligning with Domain 8 recommendations of *Effective pedagogical practices* in the NSIT, have sharpened the focus on school-wide, research-based pedagogy. Requirements clearly highlight the pivotal role of the framework in driving enhancements in teaching and learning outcomes at the school level, affirming its fundamental purpose as a catalyst for educational reform.

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2003) provides a valuable framework for understanding how reform initiatives, such as the development and implementation of a research-validated pedagogical framework, are adopted and disseminated within educational contexts. According to Rogers, diffusion is a gradual process wherein an innovation spreads throughout a social system over time, with individuals categorised as 'adopters' based on their acceptance of the innovation. He delineated adopter categories along a 5-point continuum, ranging from innovators, who swiftly endorse the innovation and serve as change agents, to laggards, who harbour suspicion and are resistant to change. Building upon Roger's work, Kaminski (2011) redefined these categories (innovators as enthusiasts, early adopters as visionaries, early majority as pragmatists, late majority as conservatives, and laggards as sceptics) and proposed the addition of a sixth category for non-adopters. Moreover, Dingfelder and Mandell (2011) emphasised the influence of adopter acceptance, highlighting the importance of compatibility between the innovation and adopters' belief systems, past experiences, and present needs, thereby providing valuable insights into the varied perspectives expressed by individuals involved in implementing reforms, such as the school-wide pedagogical framework.

A strong body of research on school-wide pedagogy (SWP) for school improvement has been established locally by a research group at the Leadership Research Institute (LRI), University of Southern Queensland. This group has partnered with education systems and schools in a comprehensive whole-school revitalisation process to establish a vision for learning and a research-based SWP at sites (Andrews & Conway, 2020). For over two decades, the LRI group has employed case study methodology to report on assorted conceptual frameworks, variables influencing implementation, and key outcomes related to the development and implementation of SWP within and across a large number of primary and secondary schools throughout Australia (e.g., Andrews, 2008; Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Andrews et al., 2017; Conway & Abawi, 2013; Crowther et al., 2012), and in Singapore (e.g., Chew & Andrews, 2010). Some noteworthy messages from the Innovative Design for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (IDEAS) research about implementing whole-school pedagogical frameworks in Australian schools include the importance of teachers (a) being involved in the leadership team, (b) partaking in ongoing professional development activities, and (c) having a common language and shared understandings of the agreed-upon pedagogical practices.

More recently, Simon and colleagues (2021) at the University of the Sunshine Coast undertook a case study within one of the Queensland Department of Education regions to explore the benefits and challenges of implementing school-wide pedagogical frameworks from the perspectives of regional administrators, school

principals, and teachers. First and foremost, all groups strongly endorsed the positive pedagogical change occurring within schools, particularly in relation to student learning and achievement. Principals agreed that the benefits associated with 'the consistent framework being used across classes and between teachers provides feedback structure, whilst a common language encourages teacher professional growth, consistency in delivery and understanding' (Simon et al., 2021, p. 278). While school leaders believed that teachers were predominately positive about implementing the framework within the context of whole-class instruction, many acknowledged the challenges related to 'teacher time, individual energy levels and workload considerations' (Simon et al., 2021, p. 279). Predictably, teachers confirmed the ongoing issues around time and the personal and professional resources required to sustain the approach on a daily basis. In addition, both teachers and principals emphasised the ongoing need for professional development in relation to this pedagogical reform.

According to Vassallo et al. (2017), scant research has been conducted into the types of pedagogies or teaching practices commonly used by Australian teachers. Regardless of this research gap, current discourse is dominated by deliberations on instructional approaches, particularly the dichotomy between inquiry-based learning and teacher-directed methodologies. On the one hand, inquiry-based learning is endorsed as the superior teaching approach for developing twenty-first century skills (Haynes et al., 2023; Makar & Fielding-Wells, 2018), with this approach being increasingly emphasised in the Australian National Curriculum (Kidman & Casinader, 2017). Yet, a meta-analysis of 72 studies into inquiry-based learning found that the effectiveness of this method is contingent upon the infusion of structure and guidance (e.g., prompts, explanations) into the learning cycle (Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016). In contrast, policymakers at national and systems levels continue to advocate for the heightened use of teacher-directed approaches to address Australia's declining performance in PISA results (Hammond & Moore, 2018). This advocacy may hinge on the assertion that teacher-directedness, with its emphasis on learning objectives, guided-practice, and feedback, has the potential to enhance student learning outcomes.

In the case of Australian state education departments, several prefer to encourage teachers to adopt strategies such as differentiation and explicit teaching. For example, on the New South Wales (NSW) departmental website, under professional learning for schools, there are several resources related to differentiated learning and explicit teaching strategies, including a guide for differentiating learning (https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/teacher-quality-and-accreditation/strong-start-great-teachers/refining-practice/differentiating-learning) and a research report providing evidence from NSW public schools about how explicit teaching practices can support student learning. (https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/cese/publications/research-reports/what-works-best-2020-update/explicit-teaching-wwb-research-update).

Differentiation is a student-centred, multi-practice approach in which teachers adapt curriculum and instruction, classroom organisation, and assessment and progress monitoring to maximise student learning (Deunk et al., 2018; Gibbs & Beamish, 2021).By comparison, explicit teaching is a teacher-centred, direct approach

to teaching (Bahr & Mellor, 2016). Reliant on specific behavioural goals and academic outcomes, this practice is strengthened by teaching strategies characterised by a series of scaffolds including teacher modelling, guided practice, class discussion, feedback, and monitoring of performance (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Hughes et al. (2022) have recently elaborated on earlier material by identifying 16 key elements embedded within the practice and spread across the instructional areas of content, planning, and lesson delivery.

An increasingly popular teaching practice being paired with explicit instruction is direct instruction: 'little di' (Mason & Otero, 2021; Stockard, 2020), which refers to a broad set of teacher behaviours from explicit and systematic instruction. According to Rosenshine (2012), examples of teacher behaviours include (a) presenting new content in small steps with student practice after each step, (b) using clear and concise instructions, (c) incorporating scaffolding and modelling into difficult tasks, (d) checking for student understanding with active student responding, (e) providing systematic feedback and correction, and (f) requiring and monitoring independent practice. This form of direct instruction is a key practice being recommended for use in Far North Queensland for schools within Indigenous communities and schools with a substantial Indigenous student population (Good to Great Schools Australia, 2013).

In a recent meta-analysis by Stockard et al. (2018), the efficacy of this approach was spotlighted by a substantial body of international research, affirming its effectiveness in educational practice. However, within the Australian context, the adoption of this approach has sparked considerable debate. While some researchers advocate strongly for its implementation (e.g., Buckingham, 2020; Pearson, 2021), others question its level of impact and overall effectiveness (e.g., Guenther & Osborne, 2020). Yet, these differing perspectives point to the need for a deep understanding of the complexities surrounding the adoption of the approach, recognising that contextual factors play a pivotal role in determining its impact on student learning and outcomes.

The current study

As indicated earlier, Queensland state schools were mandated to develop and implement an individualised, evidence-based pedagogical framework, aimed at fostering consistent and effective teaching practices across all classrooms to enhance student learning outcomes. The action taken by one primary school was to adopt a framework founded on the explicit and direct instruction being used within a Far North Queensland school. Over an 8-year period, the leadership team worked with teaching staff and the school community to adapt and refine the framework through implementation to suit the teaching and learning conditions within the school. This deliberate process shows the school's commitment to using the framework as a strategic reform tool to drive improvements in teaching and learning practices across the setting.

The pedagogical framework was labelled Targeted Teaching, which resonates strongly with the 'targeted strategies' embedded within 'the direct, explicit model

of instruction' being used (Moore, 2007, p. 1). Following several visits to the school by the Griffith researchers and an auditing process undertaken by the Education Improvement Branch, the school leadership and Griffith researchers decided to work in partnership to investigate staff perceptions of the school's pedagogical framework and potential areas for improvement within the context of whole-class instruction.

One of the research questions framing the study was: *What are teachers' general views of the pedagogical framework used for whole of school improvement in teaching and learning?* Gathering teachers' general views about the pedagogical framework was crucial for two key reasons. First, as teachers were required to consistently use the framework in their daily practice, they were best placed to collectively provide a broad spectrum of perspectives regarding the efficacy, usability, and impact of the SPF on teaching and learning throughout the school. Second, common views among teachers were seen as potentially providing a springboard to delve deeper into identified aspects of the framework's efficacy, usability, and impact needing refinement or adjustment by the leadership team and teaching staff. Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the researchers' university (Ref No: 2021/755) and the Queensland Department of Education.

Method

Setting

The setting for this study was a large government primary school located in southeast Queensland, Australia. By national assessment standards in literacy and numeracy, the school is one of Queensland's top performing primary institutions, particularly since 2014. At the time of the study, over 1,100 students aged 5–12 years from the local culturally diverse community attended the school. A leadership team with 10 members provided the overall direction, planning, and support for teaching and learning throughout the school, while a teaching team with 65 teachers and 27 teaching assistants focused on instruction and the monitoring of student performance. Study participants were drawn from a pool of 53 classrooms, 3 special education, and 9 specialist (physical education, music, and English as an additional language/dialect) teachers. Although the four heads of sub schools (Prep–Year 1, Year 2, Years 3–4, Years 5–6) had a part-time teaching load, they were not invited to participate as they were considered members of the leadership team.

Online survey development and administration

An online survey was constructed and administered using LimeSurvey, an open-source application hosted by the researchers' university. Survey content comprised seven demographic items targeting background information and teaching experience; three open-ended items concerning involvement in and conceptual knowledge of the school's pedagogical framework (hereafter SPF); five self-appraisal items (formatted on a 5-point Likert-type scale using categories from *very low* to

very high) for rating levels of understanding, confidence in implementation, satisfaction–personal perspective, satisfaction–student outcomes perspective, and overall endorsement in relation to the SPF; four open-ended items concerning the SPF and its strengths, implementation challenges, and areas for improvement associated with the school's Strategic Plan and recent School Review; and a final item to elicit any additional comments concerning the SPF. Information about the study and the survey, together with consent material, was then inserted as an introduction to the online material.

Next, a hard-copy of the survey was shared with the principal and several school leaders, amended according to feedback, and pilot tested (Creswell, 2014) by three primary teachers, which resulted in no additional revisions. Subsequently, the online survey was activated, and the link was emailed to the principal who invited teachers at a subsequent staff meeting to complete the survey via the link on the school intranet. A week later, an email indicating response numbers was sent to the deputy principal, and all teachers were reminded about survey completion to boost the overall return rate (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

Participants

A total of 56 teachers (86% response rate) were recorded as responding to the survey; of these, 54 provided workable responses. Table 1 shows that most participants

Table 1 Key characteristics of participating teachers ($n = 54$)

Characteristic	Count	%
Gender		
Female	44	81.5
Male	6	11.1
Prefer not to say	4	7.4
Age group		
Under 30 years	8	16.3
30–39 years	16	32.7
40–49 years	12	24.5
50+ years	13	26.5
Years of teaching experience		
1–2 years	3	5.9
3–5 years	10	19.6
6–10 years	11	21.6
11–20 years	18	35.3
21+ years	9	17.6
Years teaching at school		
<4 years	19	35.2
4+ years	32	59.3
Prefer not to say	3	5.6

Percentages are rounded and may sum to greater than 100

(81.5%) were female, with this gender distribution being representative of the teaching workforce throughout the state (Queensland College of Teachers, 2022). The majority were in their mid-career years (30–49 years), although a smaller number of younger (16.3%) and a sizable number of older (26.5%) teachers participated. Teaching experience was considerable, with just over half (53%) having taught for longer than 10 years, and 59% having taught at this primary school for 4 years or more. By and large, these data show that the sample comprised experienced, mid-career, female teachers who had implemented the SPF across the refinement period.

Data analysis

The quantitative components of the survey were analysed using SPSS Version 27.0 to produce descriptive statistics. Levels of understanding, confidence, satisfaction (two types), and overall endorsement in relation to the SPF were then examined using two interconnected methodological procedures. Typically, the number of categories for each Likert item is systematically collapsed to reduce the number of categories to three (e.g., *very high* and *high*, *moderate*, and *low and very low*) in order to improve the inferences about response patterns for each item (Grimbeek et al., 2005). In this study, this procedure resulted in only the categories *very high* and *high* being collapsed and relabelled as *high index* as there were no responses in the *very low* category. Next, two international benchmarking conventions, the traditional 50% criterion level and the more stringent 80% criterion level, were applied to the *high index* to gauge the strength of response to each item (see, e.g., Beamish et al., 2012).

The qualitative components (text from each of the seven open-ended items) of the survey were analysed using constant comparison method (Boeiji, 2002; Memon et al., 2017) to sort, organise, and code the data into thematic categories and then to explore relationships across categories to reveal similarities, differences, and consistencies of meanings. The second author conducted the detailed analysis, which was then cross-checked by the first author to verify the trustworthiness of the interpretation of the data. This process enabled any differences in coding or the assignment of categories to be discussed and adjusted in a systematic and iterative manner.

Results

Findings from this study are reported in a sequenced manner according to the presentation of items in the online survey. Teacher viewpoints are reported only if there were two or more similar responses to each survey item.

Key approaches and strategies embedded in SPF

Table 2 presents a summary of teacher responses to the question concerning conceptual knowledge of the SPF. By a large margin, *direct instruction* and *explicit instruction* was the most frequent response. Other approaches identified were *differentiation*

Table 2 Identified approaches and strategies by frequencies ($n=47$)

Approach or strategy	*f*
Direct instruction and Explicit instruction	40
Differentiation	5
Student engagement strategies (e.g., warm up, teach, consolidate)	5
Targeting teaching approach	3
Inclusion strategies	3
TAPPLE strategy (Pause, Pair-Share, Point)	3

Some teachers identified more than one approach or strategy

and *targeted teaching* while strategies related to student engagement, inclusion, and checking for understanding (TAPPLE) were pinpointed.

Self-appraisal ratings concerning the SPF

Table 3 summarises teacher responses to the self-appraisal items relating to level of understanding, confidence in implementation, satisfaction–personal perspective, satisfaction–student outcomes perspective, and overall endorsement of the SPF. Inspection of these data revealed a broadly consistent response pattern of *moderate* to *very high* ratings across items, with level of understanding being assigned a few *low* ratings.

Table 4 shows that all self-appraisal items exceeded the traditional 50% benchmark criterion. Additionally, the strength of response was sufficiently strong, with three of the five self-appraisal items (satisfaction–personal perspective,

Table 3 Summary of responses for self-appraisal items expressed as percentages ($n=54$)

Level	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Understanding		3.8	30.8	50.0	15.4
Confidence			20.8	49.1	30.2
Satisfaction (teaching)			18.5	57.4	24.1
Satisfaction (student outcomes)			11.5	55.8	32.7
Overall endorsement			11.5	53.8	34.6

Percentages are rounded and may sum to greater than 100

Table 4 Summary of responses for self-appraisal items by high index ($n=54$)

Level	% High + Very High
Understanding	65.4
Confidence	79.3
Satisfaction (teaching)	81.5
Satisfaction (student outcomes)	88.5
Overall endorsement	88.4

satisfaction–student outcomes perspective, and overall endorsement) meeting the stringent 80% criterion, and level of confidence just falling short of this criterion. Taken together, data in Tables 3 and 4 signal that participating teachers had a sound conceptual understanding of the pedagogical framework, were very confident in implementing the framework, were extremely satisfied with the framework from both professional and student outcomes perspectives, and strongly endorsed the use of the framework through their school.

Strengths, challenges, and areas of improvement

The strengths of the SPF that teachers identified were categorised into two major and one minor theme: *providing consistency for teaching* ($n=54$), *supporting all students* ($n=43$), and *tracking student progress* ($n=11$). Table 5 presents these themes together with associated sub-themes.

For the first theme, *providing consistency for teaching,* many teachers acknowledged that the SPF supported a whole school approach which gave 'consistency from year to year' and provided 'clear links between each year level'. Others highlighted that the approach provided a 'consistency of [teaching] practice'. Several teachers indicated that teaching using the SPF 'helps students who love structure and outline as the lessons are predictable', allowing for a 'breakdown of tasks' and a 'focus on critical content'. Moreover, quite a few teachers considered that this approach to teaching meant 'we all know the expectations—teachers and students'.

Comments made by many teachers in relation to the second theme, *supporting all students,* were predominately focused on the SPF enabling an inclusive approach. Comments supporting this view included: 'it's inclusive', 'everyone can participate', 'it provides support for individual student's inclusion', and 'the explicit teaching strategy supports all students'. It was noteworthy that several spoke positively about how students with a learning difficulty can participate, succeed academically, and work at a commensurate level. For example, one teacher stated: 'even students who struggle in the school environment, make more progress than they ever would in any

Table 5 Identified themes and sub-themes for strengths of SPF

Themes	Sub-themes
Providing consistency for teaching	A whole school approach
	Across year levels
	In teaching practice
	With lesson delivery
	Expectations for teachers and students
Supporting all students	Inclusion
	Student engagement and learning
	Student achievement
Tracking student progress	Streaming students
	Data driven

Several teachers provided responses across themes

other program'. Another typical comment was: 'the targeted approach ensures all students are learning and succeeding at their level and beyond every day'.

Of the group of teachers who spoke about the need for *tracking student progress* in the third theme, some commented about the academic benefits of streaming students whereas others focused on the importance of collecting data. While one teacher suggested that 'streamed classes allow students to be effectively challenged', another felt that the collection of data enabled student progress through programs to be 'clearly documented and available, assisting with planning in the effective pathway in literacy and numeracy'.

The challenges perceived by the teachers in implementing the SPF were clustered into two major themes: *teaching issues related to the structured approach* ($n=37$) and *catering for the needs of all students within the structured approach* ($n=32$). Table 6 displays sub-themes alongside the identified themes.

The first theme highlighted an array of *teaching issues* associated with using the structured approach. Several teachers suggested that SPF implementation across key learning areas 'crowded the curriculum' as more time was needed to enable effective lesson delivery. Others commented that time constraints made it challenging for them to include instruction in other important learning areas (e.g., ICT, science, and HASS) and that the 'lack of flexibility in the timetable' reduced their capacity to provide 'hands-on activities' or 'independent work' when delivering instruction. Further, a handful of teachers expressed concerns about their inability to provide 'inquiry-based learning' and 'project-based problem solving' experiences for their students. As one teacher pointed out: 'students find it difficult to think independently because so much of their learning is teacher directed. They do not get many opportunities to work in groups to develop teamwork skills'. Additionally, some teachers felt that using this approach throughout the day was challenging as they were 'constantly monitoring, giving feedback and teaching from the front of the room, which required 'high energy and can be demanding on your voice'.

Not all teachers considered *supporting all students* to be a strength of the SPF as reported earlier. An alternative view was shared by a number of teachers who perceived *catering for the needs of all students* to be an implementation challenge or constraint of the framework. Comments of a general nature were 'direct instruction

Table 6 Identified themes and sub-themes for challenges in SPF implementation

Themes	Sub-themes
Teaching issues related to the structured approach	Time constraints including timetabling
	Little attention to problem solving and decision making
	Performance demands
Catering for the needs of all students within the structured approach	Above grade level
	Below grade level
	Young children
	Upper year level

Several teachers provided responses across themes

does not cater to all learning styles which can inhibit the learning of some students, and 'it can become tedious for students who prefer a wider variety of ways of learning'. Particular attention was paid to high achieving students. For example, some teachers felt that 'students who are working above year level or performing very well get bored in DI lessons, especially if they covered the topic in previous years in extension classes, 'the highly repetitive processes become tedious for the high achievers who do not need the repetition, and 'as students progress through the year levels, there is potential for higher achieving students to become disengaged with the DI process'. To a lesser extent, a few teachers suggested that the SPF did not cater sufficiently for the needs of specific learners who were achieving below grade level, and were either commencing school or preparing to transition to high school. Associated comments included: 'low achieving students can fall behind in some areas,' 'younger children don't have as much time for play with such a structured teaching framework', and 'not allowing more time to develop skills and areas in preparation for high school'.

In response to the final question about ways to further enhance the implementation and sustainability of the SPF following the school's 2017–2020 Strategic Plan and 2020 School Review, teachers offered suggestions (see Table 7) across one major and three minor themes: *elevating teaching practice* ($n=38$), *strengthening teaching conditions* ($n=12$), *increasing professional development opportunities* ($n=6$), and *catering better for student need* ($n=5$).

A wide array of suggestions related to *elevating teaching practice* within the structured approach were put forward by participating teachers. Many of these ideas were concerned with making changes to the curriculum (e.g., increasing the focus on 'ACARA's general capabilities', and using 'a cross-curriculum approach') and to lesson delivery (e.g., providing more 'open-ended teaching/learning opportunities' and having students 'work more in groups and pairs'). Other proposals were related to student assessment (e.g., more 'year level and school assessment moderation' and

Table 7 Identified themes and sub-themes for improving the overall implementation and sustainability of SPF

Themes	Sub-themes
Elevating teaching practice	Changes to
	The curriculum
	Lesson delivery
	Student assessment
	Timetabling
Strengthening teaching conditions	Teacher well-being
	Leadership team and teaching
Increasing professional development opportunities	For new teachers
	For all teachers
Catering better for student need	Students above and below grade level
	Teacher influence in determining student need

Several teachers provided responses across themes

aligning 'our assessment and reporting' with the SPF), and timetabling (e.g., allowing 'timetabling be slightly flexible' and 'more time for other KLAs').

Issues concerning *strengthening teaching conditions* were also raised by a considerable number of teachers, with staff wellbeing and the leadership team's involvement in teaching being spotlighted. Examples of comments related to staff wellbeing included 'more time off for teachers to ensure there are not mass rates of burnout', and more time for 'collegial discussions', whereas those related to the leadership team's involvement in teaching covered aspects such as 'the admin should teach to understand what they are asking of teachers'. and 'perhaps more staff should actually teach'.

The final two sub-themes, *increasing professional development opportunities* and *catering better for student need* received attention from a smaller number of teachers. A few identified that ongoing professional development related to 'the research behind the pedagogy' would be especially beneficial for those (a) in their early career, and (b) new to the school. Others suggested the introduction of an 'orientation for new teachers', 'continued professional development by observing other teachers', and 'retaining experienced teachers for training'. As mentioned previously, many teachers identified *catering for the needs of all students within the structured approach* to be a substantial challenge. Not surprisingly, a handful of teachers again pinpointed the need to address the 'disengagement of high achievers' and to strengthen the 'focus on students with learning disabilities or difficulties'. Finally, one teacher summed up what several teachers thought when s/he said: 'Give teachers more flexibility to determine the needs of our students'.

Discussion

This study explored teachers' general views of the SPF used throughout their Australian primary school to improve teaching and learning. As reported in the Results, many teachers provided multi-pronged answers to the open-ended questions, indicating their active engagement with the survey and interest in commenting on the SPF. By and large, they expressed strong support for their SPF, with more than 88% of teachers assigning high-to-very high levels of endorsement to the framework in the self-appraisal section of the survey.

The implementation of SPFs in Queensland schools aligns well with the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2003) discussed previously. Within the context of this study, the SPF constitutes the innovation, initiating changes in teaching practices for teachers—the adopters—across the entire school, which forms the social system. Hence, the adoption of the SPF should vary across the different adopter categories. Innovators and early adopters would likely encompass those teachers who have eagerly embraced the framework since its introduction or upon their arrival at the school. The early and late majority adopters, constituting the bulk of teachers, would likely be individuals influenced over time by the positive experiences and persuasive efforts of their early adopting colleagues. Conversely, sceptics (Kaminski, 2011) would likely include teachers who reluctantly implement the framework while continuing to express reservations about its attributes and use.

Regardless of adopter categories, however, teachers' responses to the open-ended survey questions concerning conceptual knowledge of the SPF and the self-appraisal rating for level of understanding showed that participating teachers in the present study had shared and sound understandings of the SPF and its underpinning strategies, particularly in relation to direct instruction, explicit instruction, and differentiation. This finding is important as developing strong school-wide pedagogical understandings is highlighted as fundamental to the framework's effectiveness by the LRI group (e.g., Andrews et al., 2017; Conway & Abawi, 2013). Further, several teachers signalled the need for ongoing professional development, which also corroborates the findings of LRI researchers and Simon et al. (2021).

Additionally, the strength of teachers' self-appraisal ratings for level of satisfaction–personal perspective, satisfaction–student outcomes perspective, and overall endorsement exceeded expectations by meeting the stringent 80% international benchmark, with the level of confidence falling just short of this criterion at 79.3%. Teacher confidence or self-efficacy in implementing any pedagogical approach or framework is pivotal, as 'the level of efficacy affects the amount of effort a teacher will expend in a teaching situation and the persistence a teacher will show in the face of obstacles' (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 213). Moreover, teacher self-efficacy is correlated to teacher satisfaction, with both attributes contributing to teacher effectiveness (Clinton et al., 2017). Hence, findings in this study not only support the interconnection between teacher self-efficacy and teacher satisfaction but also signal that the broad majority of participating teachers viewed themselves as extremely effective practitioners seeking to influence student learning and achievement.

Furthermore, these high self-appraisal ratings of the SPF were bolstered by articulated strengths related to the SPF and its implementation. Identified strengths included facilitating (a) school-wide consistency of delivery, (b) a range of student and learning supports to increase the inclusion and achievements of all students, and (c) data-driven decision-making associated with tracking student progress. The finding related to school-wide pedagogies promoting consistent and shared understandings throughout the school and across grade levels as well as enhancing student learning and achievement confirm findings previously reported by other Australian researchers (Andrews, 2008; Crowther et al., 2012; Simon et al., 2021). Moreover, the finding related to the data-driven approach positively influencing student learning and success was predictable as explicit instruction is a core pedagogy within this school's SPF and the careful monitoring of student progress to make instructional decisions is fundamental to this practice (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Hughes et al., 2022).

However, the notion that this specific SPF can assist in including certain students in whole-of-class instruction represents a novel and important finding. As previously mentioned, the cornerstone elements of the SPF, namely explicit instruction and direct instruction, play pivotal roles in guiding and scaffolding learning, especially for students with varying capabilities and cultural backgrounds (Hughes et al., 2022; Stockard et al., 2018). This finding suggests the potential of the SPF to foster equitable access to education for all students. A more focused investigation into the implementation of this SPF with diverse learners within the school, therefore,

is warranted to understand the underlying mechanisms and determine its broader implications for educational practice.

By comparison, two critical and interconnected clusters of implementation challenges were put forward by participating teachers despite the wide endorsement of the SPF. The first cluster spotlighted issues around time constraints and performance demands experienced by teachers when implementing the structured approach. Both findings are corroborated by Queensland teachers and principals in the Simon et al. (2021) study. Further, time-related challenges have been widely reported by ongoing studies into schools using structured teaching approaches (e.g., Gaitas & Alves Martin, 2017; Gibbs & Beamish, 2021; Hewitt & Weckstein, 2012).

The second cluster of challenges identified by teachers was related to catering for the needs of specific student groups (viz., students achieving above and below grade level; those either commencing school or preparing for high school). As the SPF used within this school drives a very structured and somewhat repetitive teaching approach across key curriculum areas on a daily basis, it is credible and reasonable that some teachers reported that they found it challenging to continually motivate and engage high achievers as well as younger and older students. Several of these teachers may have belonged to Kaminski's (2011) sceptics category of adopters who had previously enjoyed teaching via the inquiry-based learning approach at their previous schools. Yet, it is interesting that a few teachers reported that the structured approach embedded within the SPF was insufficient for educating underachieving students, as this approach incorporating explicit instruction is frequently recommended for use with this student group (see, e.g., Hughes et al., 2022).

Finally, participating teachers offered wide-ranging recommendations and ideas for improving the overall implementation and sustainability of the SPF. The majority of suggestions pertained directly to the teaching cycle. Examples included broadening the curriculum, incorporating inquiry learning, problem solving, and hands-on activities into the pedagogical framework, increasing the moderation of student assessment, and providing more flexible timetabling. An inspection of the data set revealed that 50% of teachers who identified lack of inquiry-based learning as a teaching issue within 'challenges' went on to propose that this student-centred approach be incorporated into the SPF.

However, these teaching-oriented suggestions were somewhat overshadowed by a number of professional recommendations related to implementing a more personalised teaching approach, having staff wellbeing better supported, and teachers being afforded increased opportunities to facilitate professional conversations about the SPF and its continued development in the school. Personalised approaches, staff wellbeing and rejuvenation, and ongoing professional development were among the important messages voiced by teachers in the recent Queensland study by Simon et al. (2021). Additionally, the research reported here was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a number of Australian studies (e.g., Fray et al., 2022) and reports (e.g., Cahill et al., 2020) have spotlighted the substantial impact that the pandemic has had on teacher workload and wellbeing. As SPFs are mandated in Queensland government schools, these findings provide directions for follow-up research so that teachers are better supported in their SPF endeavours at systemic, regional, and institutional levels.

Limitations

We acknowledge that findings from the present study should be considered with two limitations in mind. First, teacher viewpoints were gathered from a single primary school and viewpoints were directly linked to the SPF that had been shaped to uniquely suit that school's local conditions and context. Accordingly, what teachers revealed about their SPF is site specific and should not be generalised to other SPFs being implemented at schools throughout Queensland or elsewhere without more extensive research being undertaken. Second, this study solely relied on survey methodology, which is commonly recognised for limitations in preventing further probing to gain deeper insights into responses. However, employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014), involving individual interviews subsequent to survey data analysis, could have allowed participants to elaborate further on their responses. For example, it could have provided an opportunity to explore in detail how the implementation of SPF specifically facilitates the inclusion of certain students.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated the vital role that teachers can play in providing a real-world appraisal of an SPF being used throughout a Queensland government primary school to enhance whole-class pedagogical practices. Teachers at this school predominantly shared mostly positive and constructive insights into the practical and professional realities associated with teaching according to a pedagogical framework tailored to their specific educational context. The substance of these bottom-up points of view show the value of incorporating teachers' experiences and perceptions into discussions surrounding educational reforms. Engaging teachers and affording them a platform to voice their insights not only informs reform processes and outcomes within individual schools but also fosters teacher commitment to, and confidence in, reform initiatives at large. This study thus highlights the importance of elevating teachers' voices as a pivotal strength in shaping meaningful and sustainable educational reforms.

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Declarations

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