Bridging the Policy–Practice Divide in English Language Teaching and Education: Challenges and Strategic Pathways for Bangladeshi Colleges

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Abstract*:* English language teaching (ELT) has remained a national priority in Bangladesh, yet the shift from the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been fraught with difficulties, particularly at the college level. This study critically examines the obstacles to effective English instruction and explores strategies for sustainable improvement. Drawing on a qualitative design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and questionnaires with six English teachers in urban colleges in Dhaka. Thematic analysis identified three interrelated layers of challenge: student-level barriers, teacher-level limitations, and institutional or systemic constraints. Students' reluctance, low motivation, and exam-oriented learning restricted authentic communicative practice, while teachers contended with heavy workloads, limited preparation time, and uneven professional training. At the institutional level, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching aids, and weak administrative responsiveness further undermined the enactment of CLT. Despite these obstacles, teachers demonstrated agency through interactive classroom practices, pragmatic use of Bangla as a scaffold, and calls for systemic reforms in curriculum, resources, and professional development. The findings highlight a persistent policy–practice gap in Bangladeshi ELT and underscore the need for reforms that align curriculum, assessment, teacher welfare, and institutional investment. By situating Bangladeshi experiences within broader debates on Global South education reform, the study contributes to scholarship on context-sensitive pedagogy and offers practical implications for policymakers, administrators, and educators seeking to enhance instructional effectiveness and learner outcomes.

Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); Policy–practice gap; English language teaching reform; Teacher agency and development; Higher education in Bangladesh.*

Introduction

Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, successive Education Commissions have underscored the importance of English in national education. The language has consistently remained part of the curriculum at both school and college levels (Milon, 2016; Al Nahar et al., 2024), and its significance.

has intensified in an increasingly globalized world where English proficiency is framed as a prerequisite for economic progress and workforce development (Milon et al., 2023). Yet despite its high policy visibility, English remains largely confined to academic contexts and has not become an integral part of everyday communication. For many students, English is perceived primarily as a high-stakes examination subject rather than a practical communicative resource, a perception that undermines motivation and restricts opportunities for authentic engagement (Milon et al., 2018a, 2018b).

Historically, English teaching in Bangladesh was dominated by the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) until the curricular shift to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in 2001 (Milon, 2016). This reform represented a major change, particularly at the college level (Ahmed, 2012; Milon & Ali, 2023). However, the implementation of CLT has been fraught with challenges, including insufficient teacher preparation, limited infrastructure, inadequate resources, and entrenched examination-driven practices that continue to shape classroom culture (Alam et al., 2018; Al Nahar et al., 2024). Consequently, college students' proficiency in English remains well below expectations, with speaking and listening skills particularly neglected in assessment-driven contexts (Milon et al., 2024).

At the systemic level, Bangladesh still lacks a coherent language-in-education policy that connects the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors (Alam et al., 2025). This policy vacuum produces discontinuity in language learning trajectories and weakens overall accountability. Classroom practices, therefore, often lack clarity, coherence, and alignment with national objectives (Golam & Kusakabe, 2018). Structural barriers within colleges further compound the problem: a shortage of qualified teachers, opaque recruitment practices, and limited investment in professional development continue to erode institutional capacity (Milon, 2016).

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that balances the four core skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—through engaging and contextually relevant pedagogy (Ahmed, 2012; Alam et al., 2021). Such an approach would include the integration of authentic listening resources (e.g., films, documentaries), consistent English-medium interaction in class, diversification of reading materials beyond textbooks, and writing tasks tied to learners' real-world needs (Ahmed, 2012). Equally, curriculum, assessment, and classroom practice must be aligned to reinforce communicative competence rather than rote memorization (Milon et al., 2024).

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the enduring challenges of implementing effective English teaching practices at the college level in Bangladesh. It also explores potential remedies by drawing on empirical research and policy-oriented discussions (Ahmed, 2012; Alam et al., 2018, 2021, 2025; Milon, 2016; Milon & Ali, 2023; Milon et al., 2018a, 2018b, 2023, 2024; Al Nahar et al., 2024; Golam & Kusakabe, 2018). By critically engaging with these issues, the study contributes to wider debates on language education reform in the Global South, underscoring the urgent need for coherent policy frameworks, sustainable teacher training, and context-sensitive instructional reforms in Bangladeshi colleges.

Literature Review

The rapid expansion of globalization has intensified the demand for citizens who can operate in a shared linguistic medium, with English increasingly positioned as the world's lingua franca. This global

trend has generated significant reforms in English education, and Bangladesh has been no exception (Ahmed, 2012; Alam et al., 2022b; Milon & Ali, 2023; Barman, 2020). Like many countries in the Global South, Bangladesh adopted Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as part of broader efforts to modernize its education system, introducing English instruction from primary through higher secondary levels (Ahmed, 2012; Milon & Ali, 2023). Within the Bengali sociolinguistic context, English occupies a prestigious position, permeating administration, mass communication, intellectual activity, and international relations (Alam et al., 2022b; Hasan et al., 2019).

However, despite these structural reforms and the socio-economic value attached to English, outcomes remain uneven. Research consistently shows that learners rarely attain balanced proficiency across the four macro-skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Barman, 2020). Scholars attribute this stagnation to systemic weaknesses in curriculum design, inadequate infrastructure, logistical constraints, and limited teacher training (Ahmed, 2012; Alam et al., 2021, 2022a; Nur, 2018). Learner-related issues—such as low motivation, reduced self-confidence, and minimal exposure to authentic language environments—further compound these institutional shortcomings (Nur, 2018).

Comparable evidence emerges from international contexts. Songbatumis (2017), in a study of Indonesian classrooms, identified barriers at three levels: student-related (e.g., limited vocabulary, weak concentration, reluctance to engage in spoken interaction), teacher-related (e.g., insufficient training, weak pedagogical knowledge, limited digital literacy), and structural (e.g., resource scarcity, poor facilities, time constraints). Solutions proposed included attitude change, resource enhancement, reflective pedagogy, and greater teacher motivation. Similarly, Straková's (2015) research in Slovak secondary schools emphasized that insufficient teacher preparation and weak English proficiency remain major impediments to effective teaching, underscoring that such challenges are systemic and not confined to Bangladesh.

Within Bangladesh, however, CLT reforms have yielded mixed results. While the policy intention was to shift the focus from rote learning to communicative competence, implementation has remained largely exam-centric and structurally constrained (Barman, 2020). Recommendations for improvement include revising assessment schemes, strengthening classroom infrastructure, enhancing teacher training, and mandating greater use of English in ELT classrooms. These findings reveal the persistent policy–practice gap, where reforms exist rhetorically but remain unsustainable in actual classroom practice.

Taken together, the literature highlights three critical gaps. First, although numerous studies have documented recurring barriers—from limited teacher training to low student motivation—few have systematically explored these challenges within the college-level context of Bangladesh, a sector crucial for preparing learners for higher education and the labor market. Second, while international research (Songbatumis, 2017; Straková, 2015) shows that similar barriers exist elsewhere, Bangladeshi experiences are rarely situated within these broader comparative frames, thereby limiting opportunities for cross-contextual insights. Third, much of the existing scholarship remains descriptive, diagnosing problems without sufficiently theorizing structural dynamics or proposing context-sensitive, actionable remedies.

In response, the present study moves beyond description to critically interrogate the specific obstacles teachers face in Bangladeshi colleges and to explore strategic remedies for enhancing ELT. It addresses three guiding questions: (a) What obstacles do teachers encounter in delivering effective English instruction at the college level in Bangladesh? (b) What strategies can be employed to overcome these challenges and enhance classroom effectiveness? and (c) What recommendations can be proposed to strengthen teacher competence and improve learners' proficiency? By situating college-level ELT in both national and international frames, this study seeks to bridge the policy–practice gap and contribute evidence-based, context-sensitive insights to ongoing debates on English language education reform.

Methodology of the Study

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate the current state of English language teaching in Bangladeshi colleges. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for exploring the complexities of educational practices, as it allows for a nuanced examination of the perspectives, challenges, and strategies of teachers—dimensions often overlooked in quantitative surveys (Milon, 2020). Qualitative inquiry also provides opportunities to interrogate the social actions, beliefs, and perceptions that shape classroom realities, thereby yielding deeper insights into the lived experiences of pedagogical reform (Alam et al., 2022b, 2025; Milon et al., 2017, 2024; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Given the study's focus on teachers' perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and its practical execution, qualitative methods were considered the most effective strategy. Data were gathered through a combination of open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to capture educators' views and document the contextual realities of ELT practice in Bangladesh (Cohen et al., 2002).

Participants and Selection Criteria

Six English teachers from six colleges participated in the study, selected through purposive sampling. The sample included three male and three female teachers, all of whom had prior exposure to CLT pedagogy. Selection was guided by the principle of information-rich cases, enabling the study to draw on the experiences of practitioners actively involved in classroom implementation. While purposive sampling formed the basis of selection, practical constraints such as accessibility and availability also influenced recruitment, aligning the process with convenience sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Such pragmatic strategies are common in qualitative research, where rapport-building and feasibility are essential (Morrison, 2000). To preserve anonymity, pseudonyms (T1–T6) were assigned to participants. The sample reflected diversity in both gender and professional experience, with teaching careers spanning 4 to 13 years and all participants holding postgraduate qualifications in English. This diversity was crucial for capturing varied perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of CLT implementation.

Table 1

The Demographic Information of Four Respondents

Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Highest Degree	Designation	Years of Teaching Experience
T1	Male	MA in English	Assistant Professor	13
T2	Female	MA in English	Lecturer	5
T3	Male	MA in English	Assistant Professor	12
T4	Female	MA in English	Assistant Professor	12
T5	Male	MA in English	Lecturer	4
T6	Female	MA in English	Lecturer	6

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection involved three complementary methods: semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews were selected for their flexibility, allowing researchers to probe participants' views in depth while maintaining comparability across cases (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Conducted in January 2025, the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and later verified by participants to enhance reliability (Denscombe, 2010). A questionnaire was administered to capture teachers' reflections on the obstacles they face, the strategies they employ, and their views on student learning outcomes. To ensure clarity and feasibility, a pilot study was conducted before full-scale data collection, allowing for the refinement of questionnaire items (Oppenheim, 1992; Wilson & McLean, 1994). The pilot confirmed the appropriateness of the instrument, which was subsequently finalized for use. Classroom observations were also undertaken across a 12-day period, with each teacher observed during three consecutive lessons of approximately 40 minutes. These observations provided opportunities to triangulate self-reported data with actual teaching practices, particularly in the use of CLT strategies. The combination of interviews, questionnaires, and observations ensured both breadth and depth in understanding the dynamics of ELT in colleges.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using an inductive thematic approach. Analysis began with close reading of interview transcripts and questionnaire responses, followed by the generation of initial codes based on recurring issues. These codes were then clustered into broader themes relating to barriers, strategies, and recommendations for English teaching (Cohen et al., 2007). Narrative accounts were organized manually, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in participants' voices while allowing for critical interpretation. The inclusion of classroom observation data strengthened the analysis by enabling comparisons between reported practices and actual classroom enactments. This triangulation enhanced the credibility of the findings and offered a holistic understanding of the systemic and classroom-level challenges in implementing CLT.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical guidelines throughout the research process. Approval was obtained from the relevant authorities, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Consent forms outlined the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and

participants' right to withdraw at any stage. To ensure clarity of expression, interviews were conducted in Bangla, allowing teachers to articulate their views comfortably (Milon et al., 2023). Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms, and interviews were scheduled at times and locations convenient to participants. The researchers also emphasized reflexivity, acknowledging their prior relationships with some participants and remaining attentive to how this might influence the research process. By foregrounding transparency and ethical rigor, the study sought to maintain integrity in both data collection and analysis.

Findings of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the obstacles to effective English instruction in Bangladeshi colleges and to identify potential strategies for improvement. Thematic analysis of teacher interviews, classroom observations, and questionnaires revealed a set of recurring challenges, which were organized into three broad categories: (a) student-level barriers, (b) teacher-level and pedagogical issues, and (c) institutional or classroom-level constraints. In addition to documenting challenges, the data also shed light on possible remedies, articulated through teachers' own practices, calls for institutional support, and proposals for strengthening teacher competence and student proficiency.

Challenges at the Student Level

Teachers consistently highlighted learner-related difficulties as the most pressing barrier to effective English instruction. A recurring theme was students' anxiety and reluctance to use English in communicative contexts. Many learners approached English primarily as an examination subject rather than a practical tool for communication, which fostered reliance on rote memorization and undermined confidence in oral interaction. This perception of English as a high-stakes test subject has long been documented in the Bangladeshi context, and the findings of this study reinforce its continuing impact on classroom practice.

Teachers described students as hesitant, inattentive, and unmotivated—patterns consistent with prior research on exam-driven English learning in South Asia. One participant observed that "many pupils hesitate or feel anxious when asked to communicate in English," noting that this reluctance often manifested in silence or disengagement (T1). Another explained that students "depend heavily on rote learning to secure exam marks rather than striving for genuine understanding" (T3). These comments illustrate how exam-oriented learning reinforces a cycle of disengagement: students avoid communicative tasks because they lack confidence, and their avoidance further reduces opportunities for skill development.

Vocabulary deficits were another recurrent concern. Teachers pointed out that students' restricted lexical repertoires constrained their ability to comprehend texts, engage in discussion, or participate in communicative tasks. "A restricted vocabulary hinders students' ability to participate in class activities, making them withdraw further" (T2). Such limited lexical competence not only reduced classroom participation but also amplified students' sense of inadequacy. The result was a reinforcing loop where low competence led to withdrawal, which in turn deepened language anxiety.

Finally, irregular attendance and lack of preparedness compounded these issues. Several teachers noted that students frequently came to class without textbooks or neglected to engage in activities. While such behavior could superficially be interpreted as indiscipline, teachers viewed it as symptomatic of broader disengagement born of frustration and low proficiency. In this sense,

attendance patterns and lack of preparation can be seen less as disciplinary problems and more as indicators of the alienation students feel toward English instruction.

Teacher-Level and Pedagogical Challenges

Teachers themselves reported significant difficulties in adapting pedagogy to student needs within the CLT framework. A common concern was the challenge of adjusting instruction to suit learners with very low English proficiency. As one participant explained, "It is very difficult to adjust instruction when students cannot follow even the basics of English. Time is lost trying to bridge the gaps" (T5). This statement reflects the tension teachers face between maintaining a communicative approach and ensuring that learners with limited skills are not left behind.

Workload and time pressures further constrained effective pedagogy. Teachers were responsible for large numbers of classes alongside administrative duties, leaving them with limited preparation time. The brevity of class periods (typically 40–60 minutes) exacerbated this issue, especially when coupled with large class sizes. Under such conditions, interactive activities central to CLT were often replaced by lecture-based delivery, not because teachers rejected CLT but because structural realities made it impractical.

The findings also highlight uneven teacher preparation. While all participants had attended some form of CLT training, they acknowledged that professional development opportunities were infrequent, heavily theoretical, and lacked follow-up mentoring. As a result, CLT principles were frequently diluted in practice. Under pressure, teachers reverted to more traditional grammar-focused methods, reinforcing exam-oriented habits. This reflects a broader pattern in Bangladesh where the rhetoric of CLT reform has not been matched by sustained investment in teacher development or classroom support.

Institutional and Classroom-Level Challenges

At the institutional level, large class sizes emerged as the most significant obstacle to effective English teaching. Teachers reported classes of more than 60 students, where managing seating, ensuring active participation, and providing feedback were nearly impossible. As one teacher remarked, "Managing a class of 60 or more undermines any attempt at interactive learning" (T6). Such overcrowding directly contradicts the learner-centered ethos of CLT, which depends on smaller groups to facilitate participation.

Equally problematic was the lack of resources and facilities. Teachers repeatedly emphasized the absence of audio devices, multimedia equipment, and supplementary reading materials. One participant stated bluntly, "We cannot develop listening skills without proper devices, yet these are never provided" (T5). Without institutional investment, teachers' ability to implement communicative methods was severely curtailed.

Administrative inertia further compounded these challenges. Teachers reported that requests for teaching aids, extended lesson times, or better seating arrangements were rarely addressed by college authorities. This lack of responsiveness created a culture of minimal institutional support, reinforcing teachers' sense that they were left to improvise within deeply inadequate conditions.

Proposed Remedies: Teachers' Perspectives

Despite these barriers, teachers demonstrated resourcefulness in identifying strategies for improvement. Their proposals clustered into three main areas: pedagogical practices, institutional support, and motivational encouragement.

Effective Pedagogical Practices

Teachers emphasized the importance of clear explanations, coupled with interactive strategies such as pair work, group discussions, debates, and presentations. These activities were seen as critical for sustaining attention and reducing anxiety. As one participant explained, "I try to vary activities— exercises, illustrations, group tasks—so that students remain attentive" (T5). Another emphasized the role of "a friendly and cheerful classroom environment" (T6), highlighting the affective dimension of communicative learning.

Interestingly, several teachers advocated for the judicious use of Bangla as a scaffold to aid comprehension. While CLT traditionally prioritizes target-language immersion, participants viewed strategic use of L1 as a pragmatic means of making lessons accessible to students with low proficiency. This points to the need for **context-sensitive adaptations** of CLT in Bangladesh, rather than wholesale adoption of external models.

Institutional Support

Teachers also underscored the necessity of systemic reforms, particularly reducing class sizes, extending lesson durations, and providing adequate teaching aids. One participant insisted, "Without projectors, tape recorders, and other aids, our efforts to teach communicatively are undermined" (T3). These calls for support reflect teachers' recognition that individual effort alone cannot compensate for structural deficiencies.

Motivational Encouragement

Finally, motivational strategies emerged as a crucial complement to pedagogy and institutional change. Teachers emphasized the importance of reducing exam-related anxiety, encouraging extensive reading and practice beyond the classroom, and offering personalized attention to weaker learners. As one participant reflected, "My goal is to help students see English as part of everyday life, not just an exam subject" (T4). These accounts underscore the interplay between affective support and pedagogical effectiveness.

Enhancing Teacher Competence

A further theme concerned the professional growth of teachers themselves. Participants strongly agreed that continuous training, workshops, and peer exchange are indispensable for sustaining pedagogical effectiveness. "There is no alternative to continuous training if we want to improve teaching competencies" (T2). Beyond training, teachers called for curriculum reform to align assessments with communicative objectives, noting that current exams perpetuate rote learning and marginalize speaking and listening.

Teacher welfare also emerged as a neglected but crucial factor. Participants argued that remuneration, recognition, and job satisfaction directly influence motivation and teaching quality. As one teacher explained, "Better salary and benefits motivate us to give our best, which ultimately

benefits the learners" (T6). This perspective highlights the intersection between professional well-being and classroom outcomes, a dimension often absent in ELT reform discourse.

Strategies for Improving Student Proficiency

In terms of student outcomes, teachers recommended multiple strategies: structured textbook use, grammar instruction embedded within communicative tasks, vocabulary expansion, and practice across the four skills. Homework and frequent assessments were seen as useful, provided they discouraged rote memorization and prioritized skill development. Above all, teachers argued that students must be encouraged to use English actively in class rather than treating it as a subject to be memorized. These recommendations reflect a deliberate move toward competence-driven rather than exam-driven learning.

Critical Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that the challenges of English language teaching in Bangladeshi colleges are multi-layered and mutually reinforcing. At the student level, reluctance to engage in English was rooted in anxiety, limited vocabulary, and dependence on rote learning. These patterns were further compounded by irregular attendance and low motivation, which undermined learners' ability to develop communicative competence. At the teacher level, obstacles were both pedagogical and structural: heavy workloads, short class durations, and limited preparation time constrained teachers' capacity to implement CLT effectively. Moreover, uneven professional training weakened implementation, leaving many educators to revert to grammar-based methods when faced with pressure. At the institutional level, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources, and administrative inertia created systemic barriers that individual teachers alone could not overcome. Collectively, these constraints revealed a stark disjuncture between policy rhetoric and classroom realities.

Nevertheless, the findings also illustrate teachers' agency and resilience. Through interactive pedagogical strategies, context-sensitive use of Bangla, and motivational practices, teachers actively sought to mitigate barriers. Furthermore, their calls for systemic reform—particularly in curriculum revision, professional development, resource provision, and recognition of teacher welfare—signal that meaningful improvement requires structural as well as pedagogical change. Taken together, the findings underscore a persistent policy–practice gap in Bangladeshi ELT: while CLT is firmly enshrined in policy, its enactment is constrained by student affective factors, teacher workload and uneven training, and institutional shortcomings. Even so, the remedies proposed by teachers offer a valuable roadmap for context-sensitive reform. If supported by systemic investment and coherent policy, these strategies could bridge the gap between aspiration and practice, ultimately strengthening both teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

Discussion

This study set out to investigate the persistent obstacles confronting English language teaching (ELT) in Bangladeshi colleges and to identify possible solutions from the perspective of classroom practitioners. The findings reveal that, despite more than two decades of policy endorsement of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), its implementation remains fragmented and uneven. Teachers' accounts underscore the interplay of student-level barriers, teacher-level limitations, and institutional or systemic deficiencies. These insights resonate with wider debates in the Global South,

where ambitious ELT reforms frequently falter at the level of practice due to structural, cultural, and institutional constraints (Emery, 2012; Songbatumis, 2017; Milon, 2016; Yasmin et al., 2024).

Student-level challenges as sociolinguistic issues

One of the most salient findings of this study concerns students' reluctance and anxiety in learning English, which teachers consistently identified as a barrier to communicative engagement. Learners' hesitation to speak, their dependence on rote memorization, and their limited vocabulary reflect dynamics noted in other contexts where English functions as a foreign or additional language (Fatiloro, 2015; Oktavia et al., 2022). Oktavia et al. (2022) suggest that such reluctance is a predictable outcome when English remains outside students' lived linguistic repertoires. In Bangladesh, where English is positioned primarily as an academic and economic tool rather than as a community language, this detachment is particularly pronounced.

The data therefore highlight that English learning cannot be reduced to a pedagogical matter alone; it is also a sociolinguistic issue shaped by ideologies of language, the symbolic capital attached to English, and the entrenched culture of examinations. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital, students' reluctance to use English communicatively may be understood as a rational response to an education system that rewards written reproduction rather than oral competence. This analysis underscores the importance of situating classroom practices within the broader cultural and ideological environment in which English circulates.

Teacher-level constraints and the dilution of CLT

At the teacher level, the findings reveal persistent challenges in sustaining interactive, student-centered pedagogy. Although participants were aware of CLT principles, their enactment was constrained by large workloads, short class periods, and inadequate professional preparation. These realities mirror findings from Straková (2015) in Slovakia and Songbatumis (2017) in Indonesia, who also observed that teacher proficiency and training act as bottlenecks in CLT adoption. In Bangladesh, the situation is exacerbated by the sporadic and theory-heavy nature of training opportunities, which rarely provide practical guidance for handling overcrowded classrooms or learners with very low proficiency (Alam et al., 2022a; Milon, 2016). Under such conditions, teachers often revert to grammar translation or lecture-based methods—approaches that contradict the communicative aims of the curriculum but appear more manageable given the constraints. This highlights a central paradox of ELT reform: teachers are positioned as the implementers of CLT, yet they are insufficiently supported with the training, resources, and structural conditions necessary for success. Without addressing this disconnect, policy reforms risk being performative rather than transformative.

Institutional inertia and structural barriers

The institutional challenges identified in this study further illustrate the difficulty of operationalizing CLT in resource-constrained contexts. Teachers' accounts of overcrowded classes, poor seating arrangements, and inadequate teaching aids are consistent with earlier studies of infrastructural barriers in Bangladesh (Milon, 2016; Alam et al., 2024) and comparable contexts across Asia and Africa (Ajibola, 2010; Garton et al., 2011). Baker and Westrup's (2000) observation that overcrowded classrooms not only restrict mobility but also create auditory distractions that undermine communication was directly echoed in teachers' experiences here. The persistence of these conditions after decades of policy reform underscores the structural inertia of educational institutions in

Bangladesh. While policies frequently emphasize communicative competence, resource allocation, teacher recruitment, and classroom design remain peripheral. This mismatch reinforces the policy–practice gap, revealing that reforms cannot succeed in the absence of systemic investment in educational infrastructure.

Teacher agency and context-sensitive pedagogy

Despite these challenges, the findings also reveal teachers' agency and resilience. Participants emphasized the value of varied interactive practices—group work, pair work, debates, and presentations—which reflect the ethos of CLT. Their advocacy for the judicious use of Bangla as a scaffold is particularly significant. While orthodox CLT discourages the use of the first language, scholars such as Cook (2001) and García and Wei (2014) argue that bilingual resources can be pedagogically productive, especially in contexts where students' English proficiency is low. The teachers' pragmatic approach thus represents a localized adaptation of CLT, not a rejection of it, and aligns with Kumaravadivelu's (2006) call for postmethod pedagogy that privileges contextual responsiveness over imported orthodoxy. This adaptation highlights an important contribution of the study: CLT in Bangladesh cannot be judged solely by the yardstick of "pure" implementation. Instead, it must be understood through the ways teachers re-interpret and re-embed it within local realities. Such localized practices reflect a form of pedagogical hybridity that may, in fact, be more sustainable than rigid adherence to imported models.

Teacher welfare as a neglected dimension of reform

Another noteworthy theme concerns the relationship between teacher welfare and pedagogical effectiveness. Teachers underscored the importance of fair remuneration, manageable workloads, and recognition of professional contributions. This echoes Page and Page's (1982) early claim that teacher satisfaction directly shapes instructional quality and is consistent with contemporary research linking job conditions to classroom outcomes (Milon et al., 2023). By drawing attention to welfare, teachers in this study highlight a neglected dimension of reform discourse: pedagogical change cannot be divorced from material conditions. Without adequate salaries, resources, and recognition, teacher motivation and innovation remain difficult to sustain.

Contributions to scholarship and practice

The findings contribute to the literature in three critical ways. First, they foreground the perspectives of college-level teachers in Bangladesh, a group often overlooked in favor of secondary or tertiary-level studies. Second, they contextualize global debates on CLT implementation within the unique structural and cultural constraints of Bangladeshi institutions, highlighting both convergences with international patterns and divergences rooted in local realities. Third, they generate practitioner-driven solutions that emphasize agency, adaptability, and the centrality of teacher welfare. Taken together, these contributions reaffirm the need to move beyond rhetorical adoption of CLT policies toward reforms that are systemic, sustained, and context-sensitive. The study shows that meaningful change requires aligning pedagogy, assessment, institutional resources, and teacher welfare, and that reforms must be understood as sociocultural as well as pedagogical interventions.

Policy Implications of the Study

The findings of this study carry significant implications for policymakers, curriculum designers, and educational administrators in Bangladesh. Above all, they underscore the urgent need to close the enduring gap between policy and practice in English language teaching. While Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been formally embedded in the national curriculum since 2001, its classroom enactment remains partial and inconsistent due to systemic, institutional, and pedagogical barriers. For policy to be effective, it must extend beyond rhetorical curricular changes to address the material, structural, and human conditions that shape classroom realities.

At the curricular level, reforms must ensure stronger alignment between objectives, pedagogy, and assessment. Current examination practices continue to prioritize memorization and grammar-focused written tasks, which undermine the communicative goals of CLT (Milon et al., 2024). Without reforming assessment, teachers and students have little incentive to prioritize communicative competence. A reconfigured framework that assigns meaningful weight to listening and speaking would encourage a shift in both teaching and learning priorities. Such reforms should also introduce performance-based assessments that better capture learners' communicative abilities, thereby fostering practices that align with real-world language use.

At the institutional level, systemic measures are required to address structural barriers. Reducing class sizes, ensuring flexible seating arrangements, and equipping classrooms with multimedia projectors, audio devices, and supplementary reading materials are not optional add-ons but prerequisites for effective communicative pedagogy. Equally, extending class durations beyond the current 40–45 minutes would provide teachers with the necessary time to design and implement interactive lessons. Without such adjustments, even the most well-intentioned policies will continue to falter when translated into practice.

At the teacher development level, sustained and practice-oriented investment is critical. Professional learning opportunities—through workshops, seminars, and peer-learning forums—must be institutionalized, with a stronger emphasis on contextualized classroom strategies rather than abstract theory. Moreover, professional development should include mechanisms for reflection, collaboration, and mentoring, enabling teachers to share challenges and solutions. Recruitment policies also require reform: merit-based hiring, transparent selection procedures, and a stronger emphasis on subject-specific qualifications would enhance the overall quality of the teaching force.

Finally, teacher welfare must be recognized as integral to policy reform rather than as an afterthought. The study makes clear that pedagogical innovation cannot succeed if teachers remain overburdened, underpaid, and under-supported. Adequate remuneration, career incentives, and formal recognition of teachers' contributions are essential for sustaining motivation and professional commitment. Page and Page's (1982) claim that teacher satisfaction is directly linked to classroom effectiveness remains as relevant today as it was decades ago, particularly in contexts like Bangladesh where teachers face chronic material and professional constraints. In short, the policy implications of this study point toward a holistic approach to ELT reform. Bridging the policy–practice gap requires not only curricular realignment but also parallel reforms in assessment, institutional conditions, professional development, and teacher welfare. Only by addressing these dimensions in concert can Bangladesh move from rhetorical endorsement of CLT to its meaningful realization in the classroom.

Conclusion

This study examined the obstacles to effective English language teaching (ELT) in Bangladeshi colleges and identified potential solutions grounded in the perspectives of classroom practitioners. The findings underscore the multi-layered nature of these challenges. At the student level, reluctance and anxiety were pervasive, with learners treating English primarily as an examination subject and relying heavily on rote memorization. This reliance undermined opportunities for communicative engagement and limited the development of essential skills such as speaking and listening. At the teacher level, workloads, short class durations, and uneven professional training restricted the ability to sustain interactive, student-centered pedagogy. Finally, at the institutional level, overcrowded classes, inadequate resources, and administrative inertia created conditions in which even motivated and skilled teachers struggled to enact Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) effectively.

Yet the study also highlights teachers' resilience and resourcefulness. Despite structural constraints, participants proposed pragmatic solutions that included interactive pedagogies, scaffolding with Bangla to aid comprehension, and calls for systemic reforms in curriculum, resources, and teacher welfare. These findings illustrate that while CLT has been officially adopted in Bangladesh for more than two decades, its realization in classrooms remains limited by a persistent policy–practice gap. Bridging this divide requires coordinated reforms that link curriculum, assessment, teacher development, and institutional infrastructure. Equally, reforms must acknowledge that pedagogical effectiveness is inseparable from teacher well-being: adequate remuneration, recognition, and support are not luxuries but preconditions for sustained innovation.

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. Its scope was restricted to six teachers from urban colleges in Dhaka, leaving rural contexts unexplored. The reliance on questionnaires, interviews, and short-term classroom observations, while yielding rich insights, did not capture longitudinal dynamics of change or the complexities of teacher–student interaction over time. Future research could expand the sample to include rural institutions, employ mixed or ethnographic methods, and examine underexplored variables such as teacher identity, student diversity, and the role of digital technologies in reshaping communicative practice. Comparative research across South Asian or wider Global South contexts would also provide valuable insights into both shared challenges and innovative adaptations, thereby broadening the scope of context-sensitive ELT reform.

In conclusion, this study contributes to ongoing debates on English language education by foregrounding the perspectives of college teachers in Bangladesh—a group often overlooked in favor of secondary or tertiary-level studies. By situating their experiences within wider debates on CLT and policy reform, the study underscores the necessity of context-sensitive, systemic, and sustainable approaches to pedagogical change. Its implications extend beyond Bangladesh: many of the challenges identified here echo those found in resource-constrained environments across the Global South, where ambitious policies often falter without parallel investment in infrastructure and teacher support. By integrating teacher voices into reform agendas, policymakers and administrators can ensure that English instruction becomes not merely an examination-driven exercise but a more engaging, equitable, and effective endeavor for students. Ultimately, sustainable reform depends on treating teachers not as passive implementers of policy but as central actors whose agency, expertise, and welfare are vital for the transformation of ELT in Bangladesh and beyond.

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