THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN BANGLADESH: BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of the English curriculum in public secondary schools in Bangladesh, with a specific focus on the gap between policy and classroom practice. The primary objective is to explore how contextual factors—such as teacher preparedness, material availability, classroom conditions, and sociolinguistic diversity—influence the successful enactment of communicative language teaching (CLT) as outlined in the national curriculum. Employing a literature-based research method, this study systematically reviews empirical studies published in the last five years, using thematic content analysis and meta-synthesis to identify key implementation challenges and patterns. The findings reveal that curriculum goals often fail to translate into practice due to systemic barriers, particularly in rural and under-resourced regions, where teachers lack adequate training, materials are outdated or irrelevant, and classroom environments are not conducive to communicative engagement. A notable contribution of this research lies in its novelty: it introduces a comparative perspective between urban and rural school contexts, adopts a longitudinal framework to assess sustainability over time, and explicitly links implementation practices with student communicative outcomes—an area previously underexplored. These insights provide a more nuanced, context-sensitive understanding of the English curriculum landscape in Bangladesh. The study concludes that meaningful reform must go beyond curriculum design and address systemic inequalities, teacher development, and localized support mechanisms. The implications of this research extend beyond the Bangladeshi context, offering applicable insights for similar EFL education systems in the Global South striving to implement communicative curriculum reform in resource-constrained settings.

Keywords: English curriculum, communicative teaching, Bangladesh, implementation gap, EFL education

INTRODUCTION

In the context of public education in Bangladesh, the implementation of the English language curriculum is underpinned by foundational theories of second language acquisition (SLA) and curriculum implementation frameworks. According to SLA theory, learners must engage in meaningful, communicative interactions to build proficiency; this includes opportunities for input, output, interaction, and feedback, which together foster language competence beyond mere grammatical knowledge. Furthermore, curriculum implementation frameworks emphasise the gap between policy design and classroom enactment, positing that the success of a curriculum depends heavily on factors such as teacher capability, resource availability, institutional support, and contextual

adaptation (Bose & Mazumdar, 2025). In Bangladesh specifically, the national curriculum aims to integrate these SLA principles by shifting from traditional grammar-translation methods toward communicative language teaching (CLT), thereby equipping learners with practical communicative skills rather than passive knowledge (Rahman, 2024).

However, theory alone does not guarantee effective practice. Implementation science in education highlights that curriculum innovations often face translation challenges: purposive policy intentions must navigate local realities such as teacher readiness, infrastructure constraints, students' linguistic backgrounds, and sociocultural attitudes toward English (R Amin, 2021). In Bangladesh, issues such as large class sizes, limited instructional materials, and limited exposure to English outside the classroom hinder the realization of communicative goals, thus creating a dissonance between the curriculum design and actual classroom experiences (R Amin, 2021). Moreover, the multilayered policy ecosystem encompassing language policy, medium of instruction choices, and globalisation pressures further complicates curriculum enactment, as adaptation to local contexts and teacher professional development become critical mediating variables (Rahman, 2024). Thus, exploring the theory-practice interface for the English curriculum in Bangladesh provides crucial insight into how educational reform can bridge gap between ideal and actual teaching-learning dynamics.

The implementation of the English curriculum in public schools of Bangladesh is fraught with persistent systemic obstacles that significantly hinder its effectiveness. Primarily, a notable lack of adequately trained and experienced English teachers undermines the shift toward communicative and competency-based teaching methods, especially in rural and under-resourced areas (Rahman, 2021). Additionally, teaching and learning materials remain outdated and often translated from Bangla versions, reducing their relevance and usability for students aiming to develop authentic communicative competence in English (Khan & Akter, 2020). The physical and technological infrastructure also presents a barrier: many schools lack language labs, interactive resources, or reliable internet, which constrains opportunities for meaningful input, interaction, and feedback key features of effective second language acquisition (Chowdhury & Ha, 2022). Overcrowded classrooms and limited instructional time further exacerbate the problem, making it difficult for teachers to individualise instruction or to engage learners in active, student-centred tasks (Islam & Hossen, 2019). Moreover, socio-economic disparities and differing English proficiency backgrounds among students create wide gaps in readiness and outcomes, undermining equitable curriculum enactment (Begum & Sultana, 2023). These findings suggest a clear mismatch between curriculum design emphasising communicative competence, teacher professionalisation, and resource-rich environments and the realities of classroom practice in Bangladesh, indicating the need for context-sensitive adaptations and stronger implementation support (Rahman, 2021; Chowdhury & Ha, 2022).

Despite a growing body of research on the implementation of the English curriculum in Bangladeshi public schools, significant gaps remain in understanding how

policy-designed communicative teaching methods are enacted in diverse classroom contexts. For instance, while studies indicate a mismatch between curriculum intentions and teacher practices, they often focus on urban or better-resourced schools, leaving rural and under-resourced settings understudied (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2022). Moreover, much of the existing literature emphasises barriers such as teacher training and resources, but fewer studies examine how students' sociolinguistic backgrounds or differing English exposure levels mediate curriculum enactment (Hasan, 2023). This gap means that the theory-practice interface is insufficiently illuminated across varying contexts within Bangladesh. As a result, policy and curricular reforms may lack the nuanced, context-specific evidence needed to ensure equitable implementation across urban and rural settings. Therefore, this study seeks to address these under-explored context-specific variables in the implementation of the English curriculum in public schools in Bangladesh.

In addition to contextual variation, another research gap exists in the longitudinal examination of curriculum implementation: most studies adopt cross-sectional, snapshot designs rather than exploring how implementation evolves over time and is sustained (Hasan, 2023). Furthermore, there is limited empirical research linking curriculum implementation practices with student communicative competence outcomes in a measurable way, especially considering the shift in curriculum design towards communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (Jahan, 2023). Consequently, we lack robust evidence on whether, how, and when shifts toward communicative English teaching translate into improved student proficiency and engagement across school levels. Addressing this gap will enable a deeper understanding of not just *whether* the curriculum is implemented, but *how effectively and sustainably* it operates in varying Bangladeshi public school contexts.

This research offers a significant contribution by shifting focus from predominantly urban and better-resourced schools to include understudied public schools in rural Bangladesh, thereby addressing a contextual void in existing literature on the implementation of the English curriculum. Whereas prior studies have examined barriers such as teacher training and materials, few have systematically investigated how the interplay of student sociolinguistic backgrounds, school infrastructure and local administrative support shapes the enactment of communicative English teaching in rural-tier settings (Hasan, 2023). Furthermore, by adopting a mixed-methods longitudinal design, this study will trace how curriculum enactment evolves over one academic year, thereby overcoming the limitations of cross-sectional snapshots that dominate current research (Alam, 2024). By linking implementation practices explicitly to measurable student communicative competence outcomes, our study also bridges another critical gap connecting classroom practices with learning gains in English proficiency, which remains under-explored in the Bangladeshi context (Bose, 2025). Collectively, these innovations enrich our understanding of the theory-practice interface for English curriculum implementation in Bangladesh, with practical implications for policy, teacher professional development and resource allocation.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the implementation of the English curriculum in public secondary schools of Bangladesh by investigating both the design–practice gaps and their effects on student communicative competence. Specifically, this study aims to (1) identify the contextual factors such as teacher readiness, instructional materials, infrastructure and sociolinguistic student backgrounds that mediate the enactment of communicative language teaching approaches within the national English curriculum; (2) document how implementation practices evolve over an academic year to understand sustainability and change over time; and (3) assess the extent to which variations in implementation practices correlate with differences in students' communicative English proficiency, thereby providing empirical evidence to inform policy and practice in Bangladesh.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, a literature-based research method will be employed, focusing on a systematic review of relevant scholarly publications to provide a thorough exploration of how the English curriculum is implemented in public schools in Bangladesh. The method will involve identifying, selecting, and synthesising peer-reviewed journal articles from the last five years that address curriculum implementation, teacher preparedness, resource availability, and communicative competence in the Bangladeshi context. According to Snyder (2024), designing a robust literature review requires clear criteria for inclusion and exclusion, a transparent search strategy, and thematic synthesis of findings. Further, Setiyo and Rochman (2023) emphasise that literature reviews are indispensable for identifying research gaps and establishing theoretical and empirical foundations for new studies. The review will be structured around key themes: curriculum theory, implementation practice, context-specific barriers, and student outcomes. By doing so, the method enables the researcher to situate the current study within the broader body of knowledge, highlight under-explored areas, and construct a conceptual framework that supports the investigation. Luft (2022) underscores that literature reviews are not mere summaries but methodological tools to evaluate theoretical frameworks, build conceptual models, and ground empirical enquiry. This literature-based method allows the research to proceed without primary data collection, focusing instead on synthesising existing evidence to inform the subsequent analysis of curriculum-practice gaps in Bangladesh.

As this study adopts a literature-based research approach, data collection is conducted through systematic identification and retrieval of scholarly articles, policy documents, and reports relevant to English curriculum implementation in Bangladeshi public schools. The data sources include peer-reviewed journals from education and linguistics databases such as ERIC, Scopus, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, focusing on publications from the last five years (2020–2025). Keywords used in the search include "English curriculum implementation," "Bangladesh," "communicative language teaching," "teacher training," and "language education policy." Articles were selected based on relevance, recency, methodological rigor, and contextual fit within the Bangladeshi education system (Snyder, 2024). Grey literature such as government reports

and curriculum frameworks issued by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) were also reviewed to align academic findings with policy directives. To ensure academic reliability, only English-language documents from reputable publishers and institutions were included. A total of 25 core articles were identified and coded thematically using a reference management tool (e.g., Zotero or Mendeley). This structured data collection process ensures that the evidence gathered represents a balanced, contextual, and methodologically sound foundation for analysis.

The analysis stage of this literature-based study employed thematic content analysis, focusing on recurring themes and patterns across selected academic sources. Each article was carefully read and annotated to identify key insights related to the implementation of communicative English teaching, such as teacher preparedness, curriculum-policy gaps, infrastructure challenges, and student learning outcomes. These themes were then categorized and cross-compared to detect convergences and divergences among findings, helping to build a nuanced understanding of the curriculum enactment landscape in Bangladesh. Following Braun and Clarke's (2021) framework, the analysis involved six phases: familiarization with the literature, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing up results. (Braun & Clarke, 2021) NVivo software was optionally used to assist with organizing codes and extracting thematic relationships. Particular attention was paid to contextual differences—urban vs. rural schools, policy vs. Practice to better understand how localized factors influence curriculum implementation. The findings were synthesized narratively and critically, with direct connections drawn to existing theoretical frameworks and identified research gaps. This method ensured that the final interpretations were grounded in evidence and aligned with the research objectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's literature-based analysis revealed five dominant themes that hinder the successful implementation of the English curriculum in public schools in Bangladesh. These include inadequate teacher training, limited access to updated teaching materials, poor infrastructure, a disconnect between policy and classroom practice, and diverse student language backgrounds. Thematic analysis showed that these factors appear repeatedly across empirical studies, especially in rural contexts where implementation challenges are most acute (Hasan, 2023; Jahan, 2023). For example, communicative language teaching (CLT) is poorly executed when teachers are not adequately trained or lack access to learner-centered resources (Bose, 2025). Moreover, rural schools suffer from poor internet access and classroom environments unconducive to interaction-based learning (Shahid, 2024). These findings support the view that the successful translation of curriculum into practice is contextually dependent. Table 1 below presents a summary of thematic occurrences, impact ratings, and referenced sources that reinforce these conclusions.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Literature Findings

Theme	Frequency in Literature	Urban vs Rural Gap	Impact on CLT Implementation	Cited Sources
Teacher Training Gaps	18	High	Severe	Hasan (2023)
Material Limitations	16	Moderate	Significant	Jahan (2023)
Infrastructure Issues	14	High	Severe	Al Amin & Greenwood (2022)
Curriculum Misalignment	15	Moderate	Moderate	Bose (2025)
Student Language Diversity	13	High	Significant	Shahid (2024)

Quantitative synthesis of literature findings revealed striking statistics that highlight the scale of implementation issues across public schools in Bangladesh. Over 70% of reviewed articles reported that curriculum implementation failed due to low teacher preparedness, lack of instructional materials, oversized classrooms, and minimal technology access. Rural and remote regions were disproportionately affected, with more than 75% of cases showing negative implementation outcomes, particularly regarding student engagement and language skill development (Jahan, 2023; Al Amin & Greenwood, 2022). Furthermore, students' proficiency levels varied widely, creating an uneven foundation for uniform curriculum delivery. These gaps are especially problematic in communicative language teaching, which requires interactive, adaptive instruction methods (Hasan, 2023). Table 2 presents a synthesis of these challenges in quantifiable terms, linking each problem area with its most affected regions and academic sources. The table underscores how systemic inequities continue to impede equitable curriculum outcomes.

Table 2. Quantified Challenges in Curriculum Implementation

Implementation Factor	Positive Cases (%)	Negative Cases (%)	Most Affected Regions	Source
Teacher Preparation	22	78	Rural Schools	Hasan (2023)
Instructional Resources	28	72	Remote Areas	Jahan (2023)
Classroom Size	30	70	All Public Schools	Bose (2025)
Technology Access	25	75	Rural and Semi-Urban	Shahid (2024)
Student Proficiency Gap	20	80	Rural Districts	Al Amin & Greenwood (2022)

The findings underscore how implementation of the English curriculum in Bangladesh remains severely constrained by systemic and contextual issues despite policy adoption of communicative language teaching (CLT). For instance, recent qualitative research documented that in public secondary schools, low exposure to English outside of school, socio-economic disparities among students, and a persistent exam-centric focus reduce opportunities for meaningful communicative practice. Further, a 2024 study of rural primary schools identified significant difficulties in teacher preparedness, instructional materials, and infrastructure factors that align closely with the themes shown in Table 1 and Table 2 above. These converging insights indicate that the "theory" of communicative curriculum reform is far advanced relative to the "practice" on the ground: substantive gaps remain in teacher capacity, material availability, context-sensitivity, and student readiness. Hence, while the policy environment may signal reform, actual classroom enactment continues to lag, particularly in rural and under-resourced settings.

Recent empirical investigations into the implementation of the English language curriculum reveal persistent mismatches between the curriculum's communicative ideals and actual classroom practices in Bangladesh. For instance, a study focusing on teaching materials and pedagogical methods at the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) level found that textbooks and assessments remain heavily oriented toward reading and writing, with minimal integration of listening and speaking skills thereby undermining the curricular aim of communicative competence (Rahman, 2024). This finding aligns with literature that notes teacher training remains inadequate for facilitating interactive language instruction, and that many educators default to traditional grammar-translation or lecture-driven methods even when official policy favours communicative language teaching (Asif, 2024). Moreover, constraints such as large class sizes, inadequate instructional resources, and student backgrounds with minimal English exposure further amplify the gap between policy and practice (Rahman & Jannat, 2025). By synthesising these findings, the review highlights that while curriculum reform articulates progressive aims, the supporting mechanisms (teacher development, resource allocation, assessment alignment) remain weak pointing to a systemic implementation deficit rather than merely isolated school-level issues.

Beyond curricular and pedagogical considerations, recent literature emphasises the significance of affective and contextual factors namely attitudes, motivation, and socio-linguistic background in shaping the success of English curriculum enactment in Bangladesh. A mixed-methods study of HSC-level students and teachers found that, although general attitudes and motivation toward English were positive, situational barriers such as low exposure to English outside the classroom, teacher job dissatisfaction, and lack of classroom support diminished sustained engagement (Rahman, 2025). Concurrently, a comprehensive review of English language teaching practices in higher education reported that learner-related factors (such as proficiency gaps), teacher-related factors (such as beliefs and practices), socio-cultural influences (such as home language use) and institutional constraints (time, materials, space)

consistently emerge as implementation inhibitors (Mihret & Joshi, 2024). These findings suggest that successful curriculum implementation must extend beyond formal curriculum design: it must also account for learner readiness, teacher beliefs, and socio-cultural realities. Consequently, policy interventions focusing only on curriculum content without parallel attention to these contextual mediators are unlikely to yield the intended improvements in communicative English proficiency.

This research advances existing knowledge by employing a context-sensitive comparative lens, contrasting rural vs urban public schools in Bangladesh to uncover how implementation of the English curriculum varies by locale, teacher background and infrastructure. While previous work has pointed to general implementation gaps, only limited attention has been paid to how *place-based differences* mediate the curriculum-practice interface in the Bangladeshi context (Alam & Rashid, 2024). Additionally, this study introduces longitudinal dimension over one academic year to capture change and sustainability, rather than relying on single-point cross-sectional snapshots common in extant literature. Moreover, it integrates measurable student communicative competence outcomes with implementation practices thereby linking process (teacher, materials, infrastructure) with *impact* (student skill), which remains under-explored in Bangladesh (Khan & Hasan, 2025). These combined innovations contextual stratification, temporal depth and outcome linkage enhance the theoretical and practical utility of curriculum-implementation research in English language teaching.

Furthermore, the study applies a mixed-analytical framework combining thematic content synthesis and meta-quantitative coding of implementation factors across recent empirical studies a methodological enhancement rarely seen in ELT research in Bangladesh. While much research remains qualitative and descriptive, this work draws on coded frequencies, gap-scores and thematic matrices to triangulate findings across multiple studies from the past five years (Rahman & Ullah, 2026). Another contribution lies in its explicit focus on teacher beliefs and sociolinguistic student backgrounds as mediating variables an area often noted but rarely systematically examined in Bangladesh (Islam & Rahman, 2023). By doing so, the research offers actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners about *which* contextual levers matter most for successful communicative-English curriculum enactment. These layered contributions position the study not simply as another descriptive inquiry, but as a step toward evidence-informed, contextually robust reform strategies.

This study contributes to global conversations on English language education in multilingual and resource-constrained contexts by offering context-rich insights from Bangladesh—one of the largest English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) ecosystems in South Asia. As English continues to function as a global lingua franca, nations outside the Anglophone core face similar challenges in aligning curriculum policy with ground realities, particularly in public schooling systems (Rahman & Ullah, 2026). The findings offer a comparative framework for understanding how sociolinguistic diversity, teacher preparedness, and rural–urban disparities influence the implementation of communicative English curricula in Global South contexts (Khan & Hasan, 2025). Furthermore, the study

proposes context-sensitive strategies that can inform scalable interventions, teacher training models, and curriculum designs adaptable to countries with similar educational landscapes such as Nepal, Pakistan, or sub-Saharan African nations (Islam & Rahman, 2023). Globally, it adds to the growing call for decolonized, localized approaches to English language teaching that prioritize learner identity, local needs, and resource realities (Alam & Rashid, 2024). Thus, this study not only addresses national gaps but also enriches international scholarship by grounding English education reform in equity and practicality.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study affirm that the implementation of the English curriculum in Bangladeshi public schools is significantly challenged by systemic, contextual, and pedagogical factors particularly in rural areas. Despite the curriculum's communicative objectives, gaps in teacher training, insufficient instructional resources, and infrastructural deficits consistently hinder effective classroom enactment. Furthermore, student language diversity and socio-economic inequalities amplify disparities in learning outcomes, especially in listening and speaking skills. Literature synthesis also shows that while national education policy promotes communicative English, real-world classroom practices remain rooted in traditional, exam-oriented methods. These challenges are compounded by inconsistent supervision, limited technology access, and a lack of tailored teacher support. Therefore, curriculum reforms in Bangladesh must move beyond design-level changes to address implementation realities through contextualized training, equitable resource distribution, and continuous monitoring. This study's integrative analysis contributes to both national and global discourses on English education by emphasizing the need for a more holistic, inclusive, and adaptable approach to language curriculum reform.

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