



Professional Development and English Curriculum Implementation: A Case Study of Primary Teachers in Bagha Upazila, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

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This study forms part of a mixed-methods research, and this paper reports the qualitative findings only. The qualitative case study explores how professional development (PD) grounded in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) shaped the implementation of the English curriculum in primary schools across Bagha Upazila, Rajshahi District, Bangladesh. Data were collected in 2025 through semi-structured interviews with sixteen teachers from sixteen purposively selected rural schools and four focus group discussions involving thirty-five participants. Through a six-phase thematic analysis, five major themes emerged: limited and uneven professional development opportunities, difficulties in implementing CLT within crowded classrooms, lack of mentoring and structured follow-up, teachers' strong motivation and self-driven learning initiatives, and practical suggestions from teachers for improvement. The implications of these findings are important in that, although teachers have a good understanding of CLT and a desire to innovate, professional development in rural Bangladesh remains disjointed, top-down, and unsustainable in classroom practice; thus, participatory and context-sensitive professional development involving the active engagement of teachers in planning and follow-up is key to improving professional agency, classroom performance, and equitable access to English education. The findings are particularly relevant for primary English teachers, teacher educators, professional development providers, and education policymakers involved in rural and low-resource contexts.

Keywords: *Bangladesh; Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); Educational Reform; English Curriculum Implementation; Professional Development (PD); Rural Primary Schools; Teacher Change*

Background

Global education reforms increasingly emphasize communicative competence in second-and-foreign-language teaching. In Bangladesh, changes to the curriculum have made Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) a top priority in primary education. The goal is to improve students' speaking and listening skills as well as their reading and writing skills. Documents for the curriculum. Research from rural and resource-limited areas shows that there is still a big gap between what teachers are supposed to do and what they actually do. For example, they still use traditional grammar-based methods (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019).

Professional development (PD) for teachers is very important for closing this gap. But in rural areas like Bangladesh, professional development doesn't always match up with what happens in the classroom, which makes it harder to put CLT policy into practice on a regular basis. Teachers in rural primary schools have extra problems, like too many students in each class, students who don't speak English well, parents who don't help out much, not enough teaching materials, and a lot of administrative work. All of these things make PD less effective.

This study concentrates on Bagha Upazila in Rajshahi District, where these challenges are notably pronounced. Based on sixteen interviews with teachers and four focus group discussions with thirty-five people, it looks at teachers' experiences with professional development, the things that make it less effective, and their ideas for making professional learning opportunities that are more relevant to the situation and last longer.

Significance of Study

This study is significant as it offers comprehensive qualitative evidence regarding the experiences and implementation of professional development (PD) among English language teachers in sixteen rural government primary schools in Bangladesh—an under-represented context in existing literature.

The study provides insights into the classroom implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) by examining teachers' perspectives on institutional constraints, limited mentoring, and contextual realities, thereby elucidating the enduring disparity between policy intentions and actual practice. The results are useful for teacher educators, professional development (PD) providers, and school administrators because they show the flaws of standardized and short-term PD models and stress the need for long-term, context-sensitive, and practice-based support. At the policy level, the evidence can guide more pragmatic planning of professional development initiatives, curriculum implementation strategies, and resource distribution in rural primary education.

The study enhances the literature on teacher agency, curriculum reform, and professional learning in low-resource settings by illustrating how teachers interpret, adapt, and negotiate reform amidst structural constraints. In general, the research supports the creation of English language teacher professional development models in rural areas that are more participatory, fair, and long-lasting.

Research Questions

1. What are the experiences and perceptions of primary English teachers in Bagha Upazila regarding professional development opportunities?
2. What problems do teachers have when they try to use the CLT-based English curriculum after taking part in PD?
3. What suggestions from teachers come up for making PD more useful and relevant to the situation?

Literature Review

Research on teacher professional development (PD) in language education consistently indicates that effective support for professional learning is sustained, content-driven, practice-oriented, and tailored to specific school contexts, rather than being offered through brief, transmission-focused workshops (Avalos, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2017). Recent studies show that one of the biggest problems with making instruction better over time is that the design of professional development doesn't fit with the way teachers actually work, especially in places with few resources. Evidence from rural and resource-constrained settings indicates that while short-term professional development programs can enhance teachers' awareness of communicative strategies such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), they frequently do not mitigate institutional challenges, including large class sizes, limited resources, and administrative pressures.

Recent research in Bangladesh reveals that centrally planned and donor-funded teacher development initiatives fail to maintain their impact after the cessation of external support, thereby perpetuating policy-practice discrepancies in the English curriculum reform. In both older and more recent literature, teacher agency is shown to be an important middle ground in the implementation of reforms (Avalos, 2011).

This framework facilitates the examination of the interplay among professional development, contextual limitations, and teacher agency in influencing the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in rural Bangladesh.

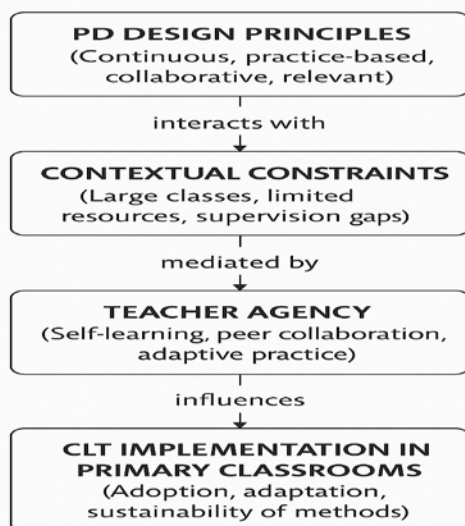


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Source: Developed by the researcher based on Avalos (2011); Guskey (2002); Kennedy (2005); Darling-Hammond, Hylar, & Gardner. (2017); Day (2017); Vescio, Ross & Adams (2008).

This figure (fig. 1) illustrates how professional development (PD) design principles interact with contextual constraints and teacher agency to influence the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in rural primary schools of Bangladesh.

Research Gap and Contribution

A lot of empirical work on professional development and CLT in Bangladesh sticks to surveys or watching just a handful of classrooms. Few studies go into great detail about the stories of teachers from

a number of rural schools. This study addresses that gap. It is based on what real primary school teachers say. It combines information from one-on-one interviews and group discussions to get both personal stories and common work conversations.

This work contributes to the existing body of knowledge. It connects the stories of teachers to the bigger policy issue, showing how personal experiences can show bigger problems and chances in making changes in education (Fullan, 2016). CLT is still on the edges of rural primary school classrooms. Even with official rules and regular training, this happens a lot because they don't always deal with the specific problems and needs of rural primary classrooms. The study focuses on what teachers see and how they think about things. It gives useful advice to people who make rules, build PD programs, and run schools. Their goal is to improve how the curriculum is taught in hard-to-reach places like rural Bangladesh, where resources are limited. They want to do this by using new teaching methods and getting the community involved to improve learning outcomes.

Methods

Research Design

This study utilised a qualitative case study design within a constructivist–interpretivist framework to examine teachers' lived experiences of professional development (PD) and curriculum implementation guided by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The qualitative methodology facilitated a more profound understanding of perspectives and realities within classrooms that are impracticable to evaluate through quantitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case focused on a cluster of rural primary schools in Bagha Upazila, Rajshahi District, where the teachers were involved in both the government and the NGO-led PD in accordance with the national curriculum objectives. We used semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to collect data because this method could show different points of view on experiences, problems, and suggested changes.

Study Context

Although multimedia classrooms exist, teachers receive limited training in the use of ICT. Professional development is mainly delivered through short, general training sessions with limited mentoring or classroom observation, while teachers work in overcrowded classrooms. This problematic situation informed the study's interest in the interpretations and experiences of teachers with PD.

Participants

There were 51 teachers in sixteen primary schools who participated in the study. Sixteen of them took part in individual interviews, and thirty-five in four FGDs (8-9 participants each). The selection of the participants was purposely based on the diversity in experience, grade level, and gender. All of them were certified government teachers who were in charge of teaching English, among other subjects.

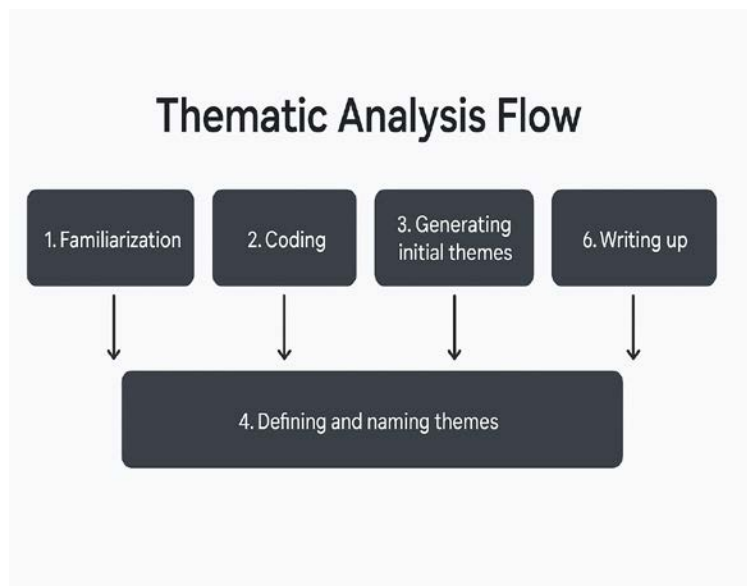


Figure 2: Data Analysis Flow Based on Braun and Clarke (2006)

This figure illustrates the sequential six-phase process of thematic analysis used to code, refine, and interpret data from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).

Note. The thematic analysis flow was developed by the researcher, based on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase model (*Using thematic analysis in psychology, Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101*).

During the analysis, data triangulation between interviews and FGDs improved the findings' credibility and strength. An audit trail was kept recording coding choices and analytical thoughts. Member checking was done by sharing summary interpretations with a few participants to make sure they were correct and made sense.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Following **Lincoln & Guba’s (1998)** framework, the study adopted four complementary strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative findings. These strategies and their applications are summarised in **Table 2**.

Table 1. Strategies to Ensure Trustworthiness

Criterion	Application	Outcome
Credibility	Triangulation across interviews and FGDs; member checking with participants	Authentic representation of participants’ perspectives
Transferability	Rich, contextual description of rural school environments	Enables comparison to similar low-resource educational settings
Dependability	Maintenance of a detailed audit trail documenting coding and theme refinement	Transparent and traceable analytical process
Confirmability	Reflexive journaling and systematic documentation of analytic decisions	Minimized researcher bias and enhanced interpretive neutrality

These measures collectively strengthened the study’s validity and ensured that the results authentically reflected teachers’ experiences within their specific educational contexts.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time, with written and verbal consent secured in Bangla. Confidentiality was ensured using pseudonyms and secure data storage, preventing any identifiable information from appearing in reports. The study adhered to the principles of beneficence, autonomy, and justice, maintaining a respectful and supportive environment throughout the process.

Researcher and Reflexivity Influence

The researcher adopted a dual perspective as both an insider and an outsider, balancing professional familiarity with analytical detachment. As the English teacher, the insider role created an environment that fostered trust, empathy, and openness, enabling participants to candidly reflect on their priorities concerning professional development practices. At the same time, keeping an outsider's perspective helped make sure that the interpretation was critical and that the chances of getting too involved in the participants' experiences were lower. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process to examine assumptions, emotional responses, and interpretations. This self-reflective practice allowed the researcher to recognise personal biases and maintain transparency in methodological choices. Consequently, the results more accurately reflected the authentic perspectives and contextual realities of teachers, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the study within rural Bangladeshi primary education settings.

Results & Discussion

Summary of Study Participants

Table 2. Summary of Study Participants

Participant Category	Number	Teaching Experience	Grades Taught	Gender
Interviewees	16	5–30 years	I–V	9 male, 7 female
FGD Participants	35	6–28 years	I–V	18 male, 17 female
Total	51	Average: 14.8 years	All primary grades	—

All participants were drawn from government primary schools in rural areas of the Rajshahi Division. Their teaching experience ranged from 5 to 30 years, with an average of 14.8 years. They represented all primary grades (I–V) with balanced gender participation, providing diverse perspectives on English language teaching in rural contexts.

Key Qualitative Findings

Five major themes emerged from the analysis: limited and inconsistent professional development opportunities, challenges in applying CLT in overcrowded classrooms, lack of mentoring and systematic follow-up, strong teacher motivation and self-directed learning efforts, and teacher-led suggestions for improvement.

Teachers reported that PD opportunities were infrequent and often irrelevant to their classroom needs. Overcrowded classes made it difficult to implement communicative methods effectively. Participants also highlighted the absence of mentoring and follow-up after training sessions. Despite these barriers, teachers showed high motivation and often engaged in self-learning to improve their practice. They also provided practical suggestions, such as smaller class sizes and regular training workshops, to strengthen English instruction.

These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the need for continuous, context-based professional support for teachers in resource-limited settings (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019).

Cross-Theme Integration

Table 3. Integration of Qualitative Themes

Theme	Integrated Insights
Limited PD opportunities	Teachers experience professional development as infrequent, generic, and disconnected from classroom realities, limiting its practical impact.
CLT implementation challenges	Overcrowded classes, low student proficiency, and a lack of teaching aids make communicative activities difficult to sustain.
Absence of mentoring and follow-up	Without continuous feedback or observation, teachers struggle to maintain new pedagogical practices learned during training.
Teacher motivation and self-directed learning	Despite systemic barriers, teachers demonstrate strong intrinsic motivation, self-initiative, and collaboration with peers to enhance their teaching.
Teacher-led suggestions for improvement	Teachers propose context-sensitive reforms such as smaller workshops, classroom-based mentoring, and peer learning communities.

Interpretive Summary

The overall results show a complicated but hopeful picture of the work situation for teachers in rural Bangladesh. The participants were very motivated, thought about what they were learning, and had a good understanding of communicative and learner-centred teaching methods. Their commitment to improving English teaching shows that they want to become better teachers. At the same time, the results show that there is a clear disconnect between the teachers and their goals and the rest of the systems. This difference shows that professional learning is influenced by more than just how ready a person is; it is also affected by how well the organization and administration work, how leaders act, and how long teachers get help.

According to Guskey (2002) and Kennedy (2005), new forms of support are vital for sustaining pedagogical change because new practices are reinforced by favorable environments in addition to formal training. In sum, the results highlight the significance of the long-lasting, collective, and situational professional development in accordance with the daily reality of educators. The strategies that focus on continuous support, reflective conversation, and collaboration at the school level are promising to enhance English language teaching in rural primary schools.

Professional Structural Gaps

The paper highlights the importance of fragmented PD opportunities that do not result in a sustainable impact. Training is still generalized, brief, and not related to classroom realities, and minimal mentoring or follow-up. The teachers find PD informative but not practical. Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) also indicated that a comparable tendency was observed in Saudi Arabia, where CLT training has been unable to surpass the contextual threat.

These problems are exacerbated by the teacher rotation policies, excessive workloads, and a dearth of time to reflect on their subject matter, leaving the teachers without time to consolidate their subject knowledge. PD thus functions within a scope in which continuity, mentoring, and reflection, which are the features of professional learning, are hard to maintain.

Implementation of CLT as an Ecological Challenge

The inability to implement CLT is not a problem of individual deficiency, but it is an ecological challenge, which is rooted in resource-deprived environments. The limitations facing the implementation of communicative pedagogy by the teachers are structural constraints, including large classes, a lack of materials, poor student proficiency, and poor parental involvement. One of the participants said that he had seventy students, and he could not make them all speak. These facts resonate with the argument by

Littlewood (2013), who claims that CLT relies on small-group interaction and flexible materials, which are not as readily available in a rural setting. The discord between imported pedagogy and local circumstances creates compensatory effects: translating, simplifying, or combining grammar and communicative activities. The hybrid strategies are described by Canagarajah (2012) as creative localization, as opposed to non-compliance.

Teacher Agency and Informal Learning

Within this set of limitations, one of the crucial powers becomes teacher agency. A large proportion of teachers undertake self-initiated professional learning, which may take the form of online lessons, reading materials independently, and sharing ideas during cluster meetings. Such informal habits can be explained by the concept of communities of practice, developed by Wenger (1999), according to which teamwork, mutual reflection, and support can contribute to the professional's development, instead of being taught. This agency indicates the perspective of Day & Gu (2010) regarding moral purpose as the driving force behind teacher commitment. But the system does not acknowledge such efforts very often. The teachers are still seen as passive observers of training instead of being knowledge co-builders.

One of the implications is that the teacher should be placed as a collaborator in the design of PD, indicating the identification of needs, the design of the content, and the results monitoring, which is in line with Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner. (2017) and Opfer & Pedder (2011).

Contextualized and Continuous Professional Development

Teachers' recommendations emphasize that professional development (PD) should be continuous, relevant to teachers' daily work, and focused on classroom practice rather than one-off workshops. In rural Bangladesh, effective PD should involve all teachers through approaches like peer observation, lesson study, and school-based mentoring, helping them reflect on and improve their teaching to meet students' needs. Strengthening Upazila Resource Centers and empowering headteachers as instructional leaders can support ongoing guidance and accountability. Overall, PD should be an ongoing cycle of mentoring, reflection, and collaboration, not isolated training events (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008).

Associating PD with Systemic Support

For PD to be meaningful and sustainable, it must be embedded within broader institutional and policy frameworks. Even well-designed programs cannot thrive without supportive supervision, sufficient resources, and alignment with school improvement strategies. Integrating PD with curriculum goals, assessment systems, and teacher appraisal mechanisms will create coherence between professional learning and classroom outcomes (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Schools should recognize and reward peer mentoring and collaborative practices, providing teachers with protected time for reflection and teamwork. Evaluation of PD should focus on its classroom impact-such as improved teaching strategies and learner engagement-rather than mere participation or attendance.

Digital Capacity Building

Given the government's push toward ICT integration, building teachers' digital competence is essential for modern language education. However, in rural Bangladeshi contexts, ICT training must be practical, affordable, and adaptable to local limitations. Feasible approaches include using mobile-based learning, offline video lessons, and low-bandwidth communication tools such as WhatsApp or Telegram groups to share lesson plans and teaching ideas.

Aligning ICT training with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles means focusing on communication-oriented uses of technology rather than on technical mastery alone. Teachers can use multimedia tools to create speaking and listening activities, enable peer feedback through recorded messages, or simulate authentic language interactions. Such ICT-supported practices enhance learner

engagement and help teachers implement CLT effectively even in resource-constrained classrooms. Therefore, ICT capacity building should emphasize pedagogical purpose, interactivity, and collaboration, bridge the digital divide while support communicative learning goals.

There are a few problems with this study that you should keep in mind when looking at the results. First, the results are only valid for the one upazila where the qualitative case study took place. They are not meant to be used to make generalisations about all primary schools in Bangladesh. Second, the study only uses data from interviews and focus groups at a small number of rural government primary schools, so the views may not fully reflect the range of experiences in different regions or types of schools. Third, the results are based on self-reported data, which could be affected by how the participants saw things and remembered them. Finally, while the overarching research utilised a mixed-methods design, this paper exclusively presents the qualitative findings; consequently, the results should be regarded as exploratory and explanatory rather than predictive. Even with these problems, the study gives us a lot of useful information about how to improve professionals and teach English in rural areas with few resources.

Conclusion

This paper analysed the impact of professional development (PD) on the implementation of the English curriculum in rural government primary schools in Bangladesh, as perceived by teachers. The results show that even though teachers have a good understanding of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and are willing to use learner-centred methods, their classroom practices are limited by structural and institutional factors like broken professional development (PD) programs, not enough mentoring, and problems that come up in the classroom. Simultaneously, educators' motivation, adaptability, and reflective methodologies surfaced as crucial assets for maintaining pedagogical transformation. The study underscores the significance of participatory and context-specific professional development models that accurately represent teachers' classroom experiences and facilitate continuous learning. Enhancing mentoring, collaboration, and adaptive professional development initiatives may facilitate more effective implementation of the English curriculum in rural and resource-limited contexts.

This study is qualitative and centred on teachers' perspectives; subsequent research may utilise a mixed-method or longitudinal design to investigate the enduring effects of professional development on classroom practices and student learning outcomes. These methods would help us better understand how professional development affects English learning over time in rural and low-resource settings.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate: All participants provided informed consent before data collection. Their participation was entirely voluntary, and their responses were kept strictly confidential throughout the study.

Conflicts of Interest: Not Applicable.

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