

# Evaluating the Grade 6 English Textbook in Bangladesh's Competency-Based Curriculum: A Step Towards Revitalizing Secondary Education

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## Abstract

This study critically evaluates the Grade 6 English textbook *English for Today* within the framework of Bangladesh's competency-based curriculum. It examines the extent to which curriculum intentions are translated into classroom practice and explores stakeholder experiences involving teachers, students, and parents. Using a qualitative research design and semi-structured interviews, the study reveals a partial alignment between policy goals and pedagogical implementation. While the curriculum successfully promotes communicative competence and learner engagement, persistent challenges such as inadequate teacher training, resource scarcity, large class sizes, and an imbalance between fluency and accuracy hinder effective implementation. Grounded in Gross's curriculum implementation theory and constructivist learning principles, the study argues that curriculum reform alone is insufficient without systemic transformation in teacher development, assessment practices, and resource equity. The findings contribute to ongoing debates on language curriculum reform in developing educational contexts.

**Keywords:** competency-based curriculum, English language teaching, textbook evaluation, Bangladesh, curriculum implementation, secondary education

## 1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, English has evolved into a global lingua franca, playing a pivotal role in communication, education, and economic development. Consequently, English language education has become a strategic priority for many non-English-speaking countries seeking to enhance global competitiveness. In Bangladesh, however, despite multiple curriculum reforms since independence, English language education has historically received inconsistent emphasis, often failing to meet evolving national and global demands.

The introduction of a competency-based curriculum marks a significant shift in the country's educational approach, aiming to move beyond rote learning toward the development of practical communication skills, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. This reform aligns with the National Education Policy (2010), which underscores the importance of equipping learners with the skills necessary to engage effectively in a globalized world.

Within this framework, the secondary-level English textbook *English for Today* serves as the primary instructional resource, particularly for Grade 6 students. Given the central role of textbooks in shaping classroom practices in Bangladesh, evaluating their effectiveness is essential for understanding the success of curriculum implementation.

This study, therefore, investigates the extent to which the Grade 6 English textbook reflects the principles of competency-based education and examines how these principles are enacted in real classroom contexts. It further explores the challenges faced by key stakeholders—teachers, students, and parents—in adapting to this pedagogical transition and identifies potential strategies for improving English language learning at the secondary level.

## 2. Literature Review

Curriculum reform in language education has been widely examined within applied linguistics and education research, particularly in relation to the shift from traditional grammar-based instruction to more skill-oriented and

learner-centered approaches. Competency-based education (CBE) represents one of the most significant developments in this field, as it emphasizes the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, with a strong focus on learners' ability to apply language in authentic, real-life situations (Richards, 2013). This approach moves beyond rote memorization and highlights functional language use, problem-solving, and communicative competence as central learning outcomes.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which forms the pedagogical foundation of many competency-based frameworks, prioritizes meaning-focused interaction, fluency development, and learner participation over structural accuracy alone (Hymes, 1972; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). CLT encourages learners to use language actively in meaningful contexts, thereby promoting natural language acquisition. However, research in South Asian educational contexts, including Bangladesh, consistently reveals a persistent gap between communicative curriculum design and traditional classroom realities (Chowdhury & Ha, 2008). In many cases, despite policy-level adoption of CLT principles, classroom practices continue to reflect teacher-centered instruction and examination-driven learning.

Another significant issue highlighted in the literature is the strong dependency on textbooks in many developing countries. Alam (2015) argues that textbooks often function as the "de facto curriculum," meaning they not only support instruction but also effectively define what is taught and how it is taught. This heavy reliance can limit teacher autonomy, restrict pedagogical innovation, and reduce flexibility in adapting lessons to learners' needs. Similarly, Islam and Stapa (2020) emphasize that without adequate teacher training and professional autonomy, curriculum reforms—no matter how well designed—tend to remain superficial in practice, with limited impact on actual classroom transformation.

In addition to pedagogical concerns, studies on curriculum implementation theory suggest that the success of educational reform is not determined solely by curriculum design, but also by the broader institutional and systemic environment. Fullan (2007) highlights that effective change requires alignment between policy intentions, institutional capacity, and practitioner readiness. Within this context, Gross's (1971) implementation model provides a useful analytical lens by emphasizing key factors such as teacher competence, clarity of curriculum objectives, availability of resources, and the level of institutional support. These factors collectively influence whether a curriculum is effectively translated into classroom practice or remains largely theoretical in nature.

Against this broader theoretical backdrop, the development of English language education in Bangladesh reflects a complex interaction between policy aspirations and practical constraints. The introduction of English during the colonial period primarily served administrative purposes, and its continued use during the Pakistan era reinforced its role in governance and elite education (Hoque, 2009). Following independence in 1971, English lost prominence as the national identity, and the promotion of Bangla became central. However, since 1974, successive education commissions have attempted to modernize the system and align it with global standards, though learning outcomes in English have remained below expectations.

A major pedagogical shift occurred in the 1990s with the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), followed by the experimental adoption of competency-based approaches at the primary level. This transition was further institutionalized through the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) in 1996, which introduced the *English for Today* textbooks and supported teacher development initiatives. Despite these efforts, English language teaching in Bangladesh continues to face significant challenges, including inconsistent policies, weak assessment practices, limited teacher training, and inadequate resources (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; Rahman & Pandian, 2018). As a result, traditional teaching practices and examination-oriented learning continue to dominate classroom environments (Rasheed, 2013; Podder, 2013).

Subsequent reforms, including the 1997 curriculum revision and the introduction of grammar-focused textbooks in 2000, attempted to address these issues but did not lead to substantial transformation in classroom practice. The National Education Policy (2010) later emphasized balanced development of all four language skills. Building on this, Bangladesh introduced a competency-based curriculum in 2020 under the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), aiming to foster creativity, communication, critical thinking, and collaboration among learners.

Within this framework, the Grade 6 textbook *English for Today* reflects the principles of competency-based education by promoting communicative skills and learner-centered activities. However, its implementation is constrained by structural challenges such as reliance on a single textbook nationwide, examination-oriented assessment systems, and limited integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. As Tomlinson (2018) notes, the effectiveness of instructional materials depends on their actual impact on learners, which is shaped by classroom realities and teacher practices. Consequently, despite ongoing curriculum reform, traditional

lecture-based teaching and written examination dominance continue to limit the full realization of competency-based objectives in Bangladesh.

Moreover, recent developments indicate that the English curriculum remains in a transitional phase, with ongoing revisions and phased implementation under NCTB. Emerging evidence suggests that the reform is still evolving in response to classroom feedback and systemic challenges, indicating that it has not yet reached a stable or fully institutionalized stage. This evolving nature contributes to inconsistencies in practice and uncertainty among stakeholders, further complicating effective implementation.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

A robust theoretical framework provides the conceptual foundation for interpreting research findings and guiding methodological decisions. In qualitative inquiry, theory plays a central role in shaping the research design, data collection, and analysis processes. As noted by Anfara and Mertz (2015), theory functions as an intellectual lens through which researchers understand and interpret complex educational phenomena.

This study is grounded in curriculum implementation theory, particularly the model proposed by Norman Gross (1971). Gross conceptualizes curriculum implementation as a multidimensional process influenced by several interrelated factors, including teacher competency, clarity of curriculum objectives, stakeholder support, and the level of awareness among implementers. Successful implementation, therefore, depends not only on the design of the curriculum but also on the readiness and capacity of those responsible for enacting it.

Within the context of Bangladesh's competency-based curriculum, this theoretical perspective is especially relevant. The framework emphasizes the importance of teacher preparedness, institutional support, and learner engagement—factors that directly influence the effectiveness of English language teaching at the secondary level.

Furthermore, the competency-based approach aligns with constructivist principles, where knowledge is actively constructed rather than passively received. Learners are expected to develop practical skills by engaging in meaningful tasks that integrate language use with real-life contexts. This perspective also resonates with Noam Chomsky's distinction between linguistic competence and performance, highlighting the need to bridge theoretical knowledge with actual language use.

By applying Gross's implementation theory, this study critically examines how the intended curriculum is translated into classroom practice and identifies the gaps that hinder effective realization of competency-based learning outcomes.

### **4. Research Design and Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the implementation of the competency-based English curriculum at the secondary level in Bangladesh. A qualitative approach is considered most appropriate for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of human experiences, perceptions, and contextual realities within natural educational settings. As noted by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research is particularly effective for understanding how individuals interpret and make meaning of social and educational phenomena, especially in complex classroom environments.

In the context of curriculum implementation, qualitative inquiry provides a rich and detailed understanding of how policy intentions are translated into classroom practice. It enables the researcher to move beyond surface-level descriptions and examine underlying issues such as teacher beliefs, student engagement, and parental perceptions, which are crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of the competency-based curriculum. This approach is particularly relevant in education systems where implementation is influenced by contextual constraints such as resources, training, and institutional support.

The primary data collection method used in this study is semi-structured interviews. This method was selected because it offers a balance between structure and flexibility. While a guiding set of questions ensures consistency across participants, the open-ended nature of the interviews allows participants to freely express their experiences, opinions, and challenges related to the English curriculum. This flexibility also enables the researcher to probe deeper into emerging themes and clarify responses where necessary, thereby enhancing the depth and reliability of the data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three key stakeholder groups: secondary-level English teachers, Grade 6 students, and parents, ensuring a multi-perspective understanding of curriculum implementation.

The collected data were analysed using thematic and discourse analysis techniques. This involved identifying recurring patterns, categorizing responses into key themes, and interpreting meanings in relation to the research objectives and theoretical framework. This analytical approach enabled a systematic examination of similarities and differences across participant groups while also capturing contextual nuances within their responses. Overall,

the qualitative design, combined with semi-structured interviews and rigorous thematic analysis, provides a robust methodological framework for understanding the complex realities of implementing the competency-based English curriculum in Bangladesh's secondary education system.

#### 4.1 Participants

The study involves three groups of participants:

- Secondary school English teachers
- Grade 6 students
- Parents of Grade 6 students

Participants were selected from both urban and rural schools to ensure diversity of perspectives. To maintain confidentiality, all participants were anonymized using numerical labels.

Table 1. Teacher Participants

Participant	Data Collection Tool	Designation
Teacher 1	Semi-structured interview	Assistant Teacher (English)
Teacher 2	Semi-structured interview	Assistant Teacher (English)
Teacher 3	Semi-structured interview	Assistant Teacher (English)
Teacher 4	Semi-structured interview	Assistant Teacher (English)
Teacher 5	Semi-structured interview	Assistant Teacher (English)

Table 2. Student Participants

Participant	Data Collection Tool	Description
Student 1	Semi-structured interview	Grade 6 student
Student 2	Semi-structured interview	Grade 6 student
Student 3	Semi-structured interview	Grade 6 student
Student 4	Semi-structured interview	Grade 6 student
Student 5	Semi-structured interview	Grade 6 student

Table 3. Parent Participants

Participant	Data Collection Tool
Parent 1	Semi-structured interview
Parent 2	Semi-structured interview
Parent 3	Semi-structured interview
Parent 4	Semi-structured interview
Parent 5	Semi-structured interview

#### 4.2 Data Collection & Analysis

##### 4.2.1 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted individually with each participant group, including teachers, students, and parents. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was audio-recorded with prior consent to ensure accuracy and authenticity of the responses. The recorded data were later transcribed

verbatim to maintain the integrity of participants' original expressions. This approach allowed participants to share their experiences, opinions, and challenges freely while ensuring that all relevant research questions were systematically addressed in a consistent manner.

#### 4.2.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a discourse and thematic analysis approach, focusing on identifying recurring patterns, key themes, and variations across participants' responses. This method enabled the researcher to interpret not only what participants said, but also how they constructed meaning around the implementation of the competency-based curriculum. Attention was given to language use, recurring concepts, and contextual explanations provided by participants, which helped in developing a deeper understanding of classroom realities and stakeholder perceptions.

The analysis further involved comparing responses across the three stakeholder groups to identify similarities and differences in their experiences of curriculum implementation. This comparative interpretation allowed for a more comprehensive view of how the competency-based curriculum is understood and practiced at different levels of the education system, thereby strengthening the overall validity and depth of the findings.

### 5. Findings

The findings reveal a complex interplay between policy intentions and classroom realities in the implementation of the competency-based English curriculum in Bangladesh. Across all participant groups—teachers, students, and parents—there is a general acknowledgment of the curriculum's progressive vision, particularly its emphasis on communicative competence, interactive learning, and reduced reliance on rote memorization.

However, this positive perception is accompanied by several persistent challenges. Teachers consistently identify inadequate professional training and limited access to instructional resources as major barriers to effective implementation. Although the curriculum encourages learner-centred pedagogies, many teachers report difficulty in operationalizing these approaches due to large class sizes, time constraints, and insufficient technological support.

Students, on the other hand, demonstrate a strong preference for interactive and collaborative learning environments. They report increased confidence and engagement in activities that promote communication and creativity. Nevertheless, significant difficulties remain in areas such as grammar, pronunciation, and listening comprehension, indicating an imbalance in the development of language skills.

Parents generally express satisfaction with the reduced academic pressure and the emphasis on communicative skills. However, they raise concerns regarding the limited focus on foundational linguistic accuracy, particularly grammar. Additionally, disparities in access to resources—especially in rural contexts—highlight systemic inequalities that affect learning outcomes.

Overall, the findings suggest that while the curriculum is conceptually aligned with contemporary educational goals, its effectiveness is constrained by gaps in implementation, resource allocation, and teacher preparedness.

### 6. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight a persistent and critical tension between the theoretical aspirations of competency-based education and its actual implementation within the Bangladeshi secondary education context. While the curriculum is conceptually aligned with contemporary global trends in language education—emphasizing communicative competence, learner autonomy, collaboration, and integrated skill development—its classroom enactment reveals significant structural, pedagogical, and institutional constraints that limit its effectiveness.

Drawing on Norman Gross's curriculum implementation theory, it becomes evident that successful educational reform depends not only on the clarity and strength of curriculum design but also on the readiness, competence, and motivation of implementers, particularly teachers. The findings of this study clearly indicate that insufficient teacher training, lack of continuous professional development, and limited exposure to competency-based pedagogical practices significantly weaken implementation outcomes. In addition, inadequate institutional support and a shortage of appropriate instructional materials further restrict teachers' ability to translate curriculum goals into effective classroom practices.

Another key issue emerging from the findings is the imbalance between fluency-oriented communicative activities and accuracy-focused language instruction. Although the curriculum strongly promotes communicative competence, excessive emphasis on fluency without sufficient attention to grammatical accuracy, vocabulary development, and structural understanding may lead to incomplete language acquisition. This imbalance reflects a

broader pedagogical challenge in competency-based language teaching, where functional communication is sometimes prioritized at the expense of linguistic precision. Such an approach may hinder learners' long-term academic language development, particularly in formal writing and examination contexts.

The study also highlights the influence of contextual and systemic factors on curriculum implementation. Large class sizes significantly reduce opportunities for interactive and learner-centred activities, making it difficult for teachers to apply communicative approaches effectively. Similarly, limited access to technological resources restricts exposure to authentic language input, particularly in listening and speaking skill development. Socio-economic disparities between urban and rural schools further exacerbate these challenges, resulting in unequal learning opportunities and inconsistent educational outcomes across different regions.

Furthermore, the persistence of examination-oriented assessment practices continues to shape classroom behaviour in ways that contradict the objectives of the competency-based curriculum. Teachers often feel pressured to prioritize test preparation over communicative activities, which reinforces traditional teaching methods. This misalignment between curriculum goals and assessment systems creates a structural barrier that undermines meaningful pedagogical transformation.

Inclusively, the findings suggest that curriculum reform in Bangladesh cannot achieve its intended impact through design changes alone. Effective implementation requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that addresses teacher capacity, resource availability, assessment alignment, and broader socio-economic inequalities within the education system. Without such systemic support, the gap between policy intentions and classroom realities is likely to persist.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study provides a critical evaluation of the Grade 6 English textbook within Bangladesh's competency-based curriculum, highlighting both its pedagogical strengths and its implementation challenges. The analysis shows that the curriculum represents a significant and timely shift from traditional rote-based education toward a more modern, skill-oriented, and learner-centered approach. In principle, it aligns with global trends in language education by emphasizing communicative competence, critical thinking, and the integration of language skills. However, its overall effectiveness is strongly dependent on how successfully these principles are translated into classroom practice.

The findings of the study demonstrate that although key stakeholders—including teachers, students, and parents—generally support the objectives of the competency-based curriculum, several persistent challenges continue to hinder its full implementation. These include inadequate teacher training, limited availability of instructional and technological resources, large class sizes, and an imbalance between communicative fluency and grammatical accuracy. Such factors collectively reduce the effectiveness of classroom practices and create a gap between curriculum intentions and actual learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the study highlights that curriculum reform alone is insufficient to bring about meaningful and sustainable transformation in English language education. Without adequate institutional support, continuous professional development for teachers, and alignment between curriculum goals and assessment practices, even well-designed reforms risk becoming partially implemented or symbolic in nature. Contextual constraints such as rural–urban disparities and an examination-oriented educational culture further complicate the realization of curriculum objectives.

Therefore, to fully realize the potential of competency-based English language education in Bangladesh, a more holistic and system-wide approach is required. This approach should integrate curriculum design with sustained teacher development, equitable resource distribution, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Only through coordinated efforts across policy, practice, and institutional support systems can the intended learning outcomes be effectively achieved and sustained over time. Given the ongoing revisions and phased implementation of the curriculum, continuous evaluation and adaptive policy responses will be essential to ensure its long-term effectiveness and stability.

## **8. Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, a set of expanded recommendations is proposed to support more effective implementation of the competency-based English curriculum in Bangladesh, particularly at the secondary level.

### *8.1 Strengthen Teacher Professional Development*

Teacher capacity is the most critical factor in the successful implementation of competency-based education. Therefore, professional development programs should be redesigned as continuous, structured, and

practice-oriented rather than one-off training sessions. These programs should focus on developing teachers' understanding of competency-based pedagogy, especially in relation to task-based learning, communicative language teaching, and formative assessment strategies.

In addition, training should include practical classroom demonstrations, peer observation, and reflective teaching practices. Teachers should also be trained in how to adapt textbook materials creatively to suit large and mixed-ability classrooms. Collaboration with universities and teacher training institutes could further enhance the quality and sustainability of such programs.

### *8.2 Enhance Instructional Resources*

The effectiveness of the Grade 6 English textbook is closely linked to the availability of supplementary teaching and learning materials. Schools should be provided with adequate audio-visual resources such as recorded listening passages, interactive digital content, flashcards, and visual aids to support multimodal learning.

Given that competency-based education emphasizes listening and speaking skills, investment in language laboratories or mobile-friendly digital platforms could significantly improve learners' exposure to authentic language use. Additionally, resource development should not be centralized only at the national level; localized teaching materials reflecting students' socio-cultural context should also be encouraged.

### *8.3 Ensure Balanced Skill Development*

One of the key findings of this study is the imbalance between communicative fluency and grammatical accuracy. To address this issue, the curriculum and classroom practices should be reviewed to ensure integrated skill development. While communicative competence should remain a priority, a structured focus on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and writing accuracy must not be neglected.

Textbook tasks should be designed in a way that naturally combines accuracy-focused activities with meaningful communication. Teachers should also be encouraged to allocate instructional time more strategically, ensuring that no single skill area is overemphasized at the expense of others.

### *8.4 Improve Assessment Practices*

Assessment is a powerful driver of classroom practice, and therefore, it must be fully aligned with competency-based learning objectives. Current assessment systems should be revised to include a balanced combination of formative and summative approaches.

Formative assessment techniques such as portfolios, peer assessment, group presentations, and classroom participation should be systematically integrated into evaluation frameworks. At the same time, summative assessments should be redesigned to test not only memorization but also practical language use in real-life contexts. Clear rubrics and standardized assessment guidelines should be provided to ensure fairness, consistency, and transparency across schools.

### *8.5 Promote Stakeholder Collaboration*

Effective curriculum implementation requires active collaboration among all educational stakeholders, including teachers, parents, school administrators, and policymakers. Schools should establish regular communication channels such as parent-teacher meetings, community awareness programs, and feedback systems to ensure shared understanding of curriculum goals.

Parents, in particular, should be made aware of the objectives of competency-based education so that they can support learning at home without overemphasizing rote memorization or exam-oriented practices. Policymakers should also incorporate teacher and parent feedback into future curriculum revisions to ensure that reforms are responsive to classroom realities.

### *8.6 Address Resource Inequality*

Significant disparities in educational resources between urban and rural schools continue to affect the equitable implementation of the curriculum. To address this gap, targeted policy interventions are necessary. Rural and under-resourced schools should be prioritized for infrastructure development, including access to internet connectivity, digital learning tools, and trained teachers.

In addition, incentive programs such as hardship allowances or professional recognition schemes may be introduced to attract qualified English teachers to rural areas. Mobile learning initiatives and offline digital content could also be used to bridge the gap where technological infrastructure is limited. Ensuring equity in resource distribution is essential for achieving national-level success in competency-based education reform.

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