

# Translanguaging steps in A context-sensitive response to Bangladesh's ELT crisis

## Shorter Article

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## Abstract

With over 17 million children learning English, Bangladesh has one of the world's largest English-learning populations. However, despite this, the country faces challenges in achieving the optimal level of English proficiency. English language teaching (ELT) initiatives in Bangladesh, which have evolved over time, can be broadly classified based on the Grammar-Translation Method, Communicative Language Teaching, and the English in Action project. These approaches predominantly reinforced traditional monolingual and bilingual frameworks while overlooking the rich metalinguistic, cultural, and intellectual resources that students bring to English classrooms. This article critically examines past ELT efforts, policies and their outcomes through a translanguaging lens, which challenges the rigid language separation ideology in traditional models and encourages the use of all linguistic repertoires in learning English as a target language. This article provides fresh perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of past initiatives, as well as suggestions for developing linguistically and culturally sustainable ELT models based on translanguaging scholarship.

## Introduction

Two decades of experience in Bangladesh with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) have pointed to its limitations as a viable language teaching method in the local context. Hamid and Baldauf (2008) aptly called the state of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Bangladesh 'bogged down', wondering whether CLT could 'bail out' this failing system. Their concern, particularly with respect to rural areas, regarding the feasibility of CLT within the socio-educational landscape of Bangladesh, is still relevant today. Ali and Walker (2014) further reinforced Hamid and Baldauf's (2008) claims, arguing that their predictions regarding the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) have largely materialised. ELTIP, intended to modernise English teaching practices, encountered systemic barriers such as inadequate teacher training, deep-rooted pedagogical traditions, and a lack of sustainable infrastructure. As a result, the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh has remained superficial, with many classrooms reverting to Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) under the guise of CLT (Abedin 2012). Rahman and Pandian (2018) pinpoint several core issues impeding the path of ELT reforms in Bangladesh, emphasising the misalignment between policy directives and classroom realities. They advocated to turn towards contextually responsive ELT curriculum reforms that cater to the particular needs of local learners and teachers while challenging the longstanding reliance on Western methodologies, and laying emphasis on sustainable, long-term solutions, including ongoing teacher training and local capacity building. These reforms should be grounded in the teachers' perspectives, emphasising the importance of local expertise and infrastructure development to create a more effective and equitable ELT system in Bangladesh.

Given these constraints, a major move towards more contextualised pedagogical reforms is needed. I propose innovations of translanguaging scholarship that capitalise on the local linguistic and pedagogical resources of teachers and students, offering viable alternatives to the imposition of rigid, externally developed methodologies. This study, in this context, examines the previous English language learning efforts, policies, and policy outcomes in Bangladesh through a translanguaging pedagogical perspective.

It builds on my earlier work (Rafi 2022), which argues that the implementation of previous approaches prioritised traditional monolingualism and bilingualism, neglecting the valuable metalinguistic, cultural, and intellectual resources that students bring to English language classrooms.

Expanding on this argument, this study explores translanguaging as a viable framework for ELT reform in Bangladesh. It begins with a review of translanguaging scholarship with a focus on its pedagogical application in multilingual contexts. Thereafter, it discusses the historical background of English language teaching in Bangladesh, positioning English as an integral part of the country's linguistic landscape. A critical appraisal of past ELT reforms and their limitations follows. Finally, it advocates for moving beyond traditional monolingual and bilingual paradigms, leveraging the translanguaging scholarship to propose a more inclusive and context-sensitive ELT framework for Bangladesh.

### Translanguaging scholarship

Cen Williams first introduced the concept of translanguaging, or *Trawsieithu*, as a pedagogical approach within Welsh–English bilingual education in 1994 (García and Kleyn 2016). Initially, translanguaging referred to students switching between languages for receptive or productive purposes, e.g., reading both Welsh and English texts on a topic and then writing on the topic in English, to deepen understanding and maximise bilingual proficiency. This early framework laid the foundation for García (2009), Makoni and Pennycook (2007), García and Wei (2014), Makalela (2015), and other translanguaging scholars to expand the concept of translanguaging into a fluid, strategic, and dynamic perspective on language and language learning, contextualised within wider linguistic and sociopolitical movements. Translanguaging rejects the traditional compartmentalised view of bilingualism that treats languages as separate, autonomous systems (García and Wei 2014). Rather than framing bilingual speakers as alternating between distinct linguistic codes, such as in Lambert's 'additive' and 'subtractive' bilingualism (Lambert 1974), Cummins' interdependence hypothesis (Cummins 1979), or code-switching (Heller 2013; Milroy 1995), recent translanguaging theories mark a significant epistemological shift by recognising bilingual discursive practices as integrated and hybrid; individuals draw fluidly from their full linguistic repertoires to construct meaning (Rafi 2023).

Grounded in a poststructuralist perspective (Blommaert 2010; Makoni and Pennycook 2007), translanguaging upsets dominant national language ideologies that propagate the 'one nation, one language' and instrumentalise the national language for the formation of collective identities (Shohamy 2011). Much in this way, it reclaims linguistic agency for minoritised communities (García and Kleyn 2016), with the potential to challenge hegemonic structures, as well as the legitimacy of language standardisation (Makoni and Pennycook 2007) alongside the native-speaker paradigm (May 2019; Rafi 2023). At its core, translanguaging moves beyond latently prescribed linguistic categories, viewing language as an embodied, emplaced, and ensembled

phenomenon determined by social and physical contexts (Hawkins and Mori 2018).

Translanguaging scholarship has important implications for language education models, contesting conventional frameworks in foreign language education, bilingual education, and English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English language teaching (ELT) instruction. García and Kleyn (2016) highlight the tension between modernist, structuralist language policies in schools and the more critical, poststructuralist stance of translanguaging. At the societal level, translanguaging highlights the dynamic and fluid nature of multilingualism, challenging the rigid maintenance of national languages as pure and autonomous entities (Blommaert 2010; Heller 2013; Kramsch 2010). In education, it foregrounds bilingual students' authentic linguistic repertoires against externally imposed language policies, destabilising the additive process often framed as 'English plus another language', or, in this context, *Bangla plus English* (Fishman 1966).

In this reconceptualised educational model, I advocate for translanguaging pedagogies that go beyond English-only or English-plus approaches in ESL and bilingual education. These pedagogies should maintain two dimensions: 'supporting and maintaining the students' entire language repertoire as paramount and making students aware of when and how to suppress (or activate) certain features of their repertoire to adjust to, and sometimes resist, external language education policies' (Rafi 2023). Instead of solely conforming to top-down language policies that reinforce nationalistic essentialism (Cole and Meadows 2013), pedagogic designs should recognise that language sustainability is driven by social interaction, not market-based preservationist policies alone. Positioning multilingualism as an evolving and relational process allows us to move beyond the traditional binary of native versus foreign and recognise English as an integral part of Bangladesh's multilingual repertoire.

### English in the Bangladeshi linguistic ecology

Bengal, now called Bangladesh, was part of British India until the partition in 1947. It became a Pakistani province in 1955 and gained independence in 1971. The presence of English in Bangladesh is rooted in the colonial history of the region and has evolved into an essential component of its linguistic fabric. English was introduced in the Indian subcontinent with British colonial influence. In 1600, Queen Elizabeth I granted a monopoly to the East India Company (the EIC) to commence trade activities. The EIC initially focused on trade, avoiding proselytising to preserve harmony with local people and even restricting missionaries from using its ships to prevent conflicts (Chaudhary 2009). Regardless, such restrictions did not prevent missionaries such as William Carey from founding institutions of higher education, exemplified by the establishment of Baptist Mission College in Serampore in 1773 (Banerjee et al. 1957).

The British victory in the Battle of Plassey in 1757 solidified British rule over Bengal, raising demand for English among local traders and clerks (Banerjee et al. 1957). The establishment of the Supreme Court in Calcutta added further to the demand for English-speaking clerks and

interpreters and fostered a growing interest in English education by the late 18th century (Rahman 2020). Other institutions, such as Fort William College, founded in 1800, emerged as important centres for English education that completed the groundwork for its continued presence. British educators used different teaching methods for improving English proficiency among Bengali students. Michael West's Reading Method of vocabulary control, simplification of materials, and focusing on reading rather than speaking are among them. The British educators also incorporated bilingual materials to support learning (Smith 2003). Aligned with this objective, Lord Macaulay's Education Minutes of 1835 marked a historic decision in which Macaulay advocated for English to be the medium of instruction to produce a class of Indians 'English in tastes, opinions, morals, and intellect' (Rafi 2024). The shift itself gained legitimacy when Persian was replaced by English in law courts in 1837 (Banerjee et al. 1957). Following the partition of British India in 1947, Pakistan retained English as an important language for governance and education, even amid ideological shifts towards Islamic doctrine (Rafi 2024). In East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), the Grammar Translation Method dominated English education until the 1950s, during which reforms like Ronald Mackin's structural-situational syllabus brought about a new phase in English Language Teaching (ELT).

In 1971, following the independence of Bangladesh, Bangla was introduced as the national and official language in 1972. To decolonise the curriculum, Bangla replaced English as the medium of instruction at all educational levels, and universities no longer required English as a compulsory subject. However, the promotion of Bangla over English, propelled by the forces of nationalism, was neither ultimately successful nor sustainable, thanks to the strong link between English and globalisation (Hamid and Baldauf 2008). Bangladesh changed its English education policy in the 1990s to prepare itself for the globalised economy, making English compulsory from grades 1 to 12 (Chowdhury 2022). There are thus over 17 million children in Bangladesh who learn either English as a second or foreign language, making Bangladesh one of the largest English-speaking populations in the world and English its most widely spoken language after Bangla.

### English language teaching in Bangladesh

Inconsistency has historically been a consistent feature of ELT in Bangladesh, evident across various educational streams, policies, and reforms. The Bangladeshi education system comprises three major streams: mainstream secular education (Bangla medium), Madrasha (religious) education, and English-medium education, which follows the University of London's General Certificate of Education (GCE) or the Senior Cambridge curriculum (Rafi 2022). All three streams teach English as an academic subject, primarily based on English for General Purposes (EGP). However, there is a little consistency or collaboration in ELT practices among these streams (Ali and Walker 2014). For instance, English-medium schools often depend on foreign decontextualised materials, causing cultural disconnects from the other two streams (Kamol 2009). English language teaching also varies from urban to rural schools, where rural areas suffer from poor

teaching with unqualified teachers (Hamid and Baldauf 2008). Many teachers in Bangladesh hold an MA in English literature, a degree that hardly provides them with a practical training base to handle functional and CLT-based textbooks (Rafi 2024). Limited practical ELT/TESOL teacher education programs further exacerbate the issue (Ali and Walker 2014).

As far as the status of English is concerned, inconsistency has also been a characteristic feature of Bangladeshi education policies since the independence of the country. There was no coherent, consistent English language policy until the National Education Policy 2010. Over time, English increasingly acquired strong and deliberate acceptance, especially in the last decade, notwithstanding scattered changes. Adapted from Chowdhury and Kabir (2014), the policy timeline below shows this evolving trajectory:

### Education policies and commission reports on English education in Bangladesh

#### 1974 Bangladesh Education Commission

- English given priority as a foreign language.
- Taught from Class 6.

#### 1976 English Teaching Taskforce Commission

- English to be taught either in Class 3 or Class 6, depending on teacher availability.

#### 1988 Bangladesh National Education Commission

- Recommended starting point: Class 3.
- Suggested uniform starting point: Class 6.

#### 1991 National Curriculum Committee

- English introduced in Class 3.
- English made a compulsory subject in Class 1 (1992).

#### 2000 National Education Policy

- English set as the medium of instruction for kindergartens.
- Kindergarten curriculum and textbooks translated into English.
- English introduced as an *extra* subject in Classes 1 and 2, becoming compulsory from Class 3.
- English could be a medium of instruction from secondary level (Class 7) alongside Bangla.
- Emphasis on English as a medium of instruction at the tertiary level.

#### 2003 National Education Commission

- Reemphasis on English learning from primary level.
- Primary education should include English language skills as a foreign language.
- Focus on rebuilding the overall English curriculum.
- Training initiatives included foreign training for PTI and NAPE trainers and local training for secondary school teachers.

- Proposal for a six-month English language course at the tertiary level.

### 2010 National Education Policy

- English recognised as essential for a knowledge-based society.
- Focus on English writing and speaking from early primary education.
- English to be a compulsory subject in all secondary streams.
- English as a medium of instruction could be introduced at the secondary level.
- Emphasis on appointing more English teachers at the secondary level.
- English to be a compulsory subject in all colleges and universities.
- English (along with Bangla) to be a medium of instruction at the tertiary level.
- Encouragement for translating English books into Bangla.

Bangladesh, a low-resource country with one of the lowest education budgets in South Asia, relies heavily on external donors to fund its educational programs, including ELT projects. These funders present English as a tool for poverty alleviation and increased economic prospects (Erling et al. 2015). Their interventions have a considerable impact on local ELT policies and pedagogical practices.

ELT in Bangladesh was rooted in the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and has traditionally adopted a prescriptive approach, leaving little or no room for diverse varieties of English. Originating from the 15<sup>th</sup>-century classical method for guiding the teaching of Latin and Greek literature, GTM has emphasised the analysis of literary texts, prescriptive grammar rules, and translation exercises. Teachers generally introduce grammar in a deductive way, with this knowledge then reinforced through translation tasks. Vocabulary acquisition basically entails the reading of texts, the usage of dictionaries, and rote memorisation. Consequently, reading and writing skills have been overemphasised, while listening and speaking skills remain broadly neglected (Richards and Rodgers 2014). A text-heavy and examination-oriented framework has long defined English education in Bangladesh, ruling out any room for the growth of communicative skills among the learners.

To introduce a shift from the traditional Grammar Translation Method (GTM) towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP), funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) and operated in partnership with the Bangladesh government, was introduced as a curricular intervention. The shift stemmed from the belief that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) could facilitate the development of learners' communicative competence and further support the government's larger project towards its human resources development (NCTB 2003 in Hamid and Baldauf 2008). The project involved developing CLT-based textbooks at the secondary and higher secondary levels, as well as training teachers in the communicative approach. While ELTIP undertook a curricular reform, its reach has been limited because only 35,000 of the 60,000 English teachers nationally received training, with many

returning to GTM due to poor professional development support or deep-rooted pedagogical traditions (Hamid and Baldauf 2008).

To address the shortcomings of ELTIP, a follow-up project, the English in Action (EIA) project, was initiated in 2008 under the funding of the UK's Department for International Development (DfID). This project aimed to upskill 27 million Bangladeshis for the promotion of economic growth through increased access to global opportunities (Seargeant and Erling 2011). EIA put its emphasis on English as a global language, English and economic value, English as a language for education, and English as a language for technology, in line with Bangladesh's national development goals (Seargeant and Erling 2011). The findings revealed that the participants perceived English as essential for accessing the global job markets, foreign employment, and local information regarding the economy (Erling et al. 2015). Baseline research showed that 84% of respondents wished to learn English and that 87% associated it with economic well-being (English in Action 2009).

However, despite its impressive ambitions, EIA encountered numerous challenges. The heavy reliance of Bangladesh on foreign donor organisations raised questions about long-term national interests and policy sustainability (Rahman and Pandian 2018). Curriculum reform, however, is insufficient without attention to teacher beliefs, professional development, and support at various levels of the education system. Chowdhury et al. (2021) raised the question of whether English really served local educational needs, as certain rural participants considered English to be synonymous with a subject rather than a fully fledged language. In addition, naive promotion of English might have counteracted the formation of a national identity by generating unrealistic material expectations around the language (Imam 2005). Studies have also drawn attention to inequities in access to English and its differential impact on various social groups (Hamid and Baldauf 2008). Returnee migrant workers have described the relationship between English proficiency and economic benefit as a non-linear one wherein structural inequalities often prevail over social benefits (Erling et al. 2015). Last but not least, the success stories of EIA are found often based on embellished narratives rather than concrete evidence of any on-the-ground change (Hamid and Jahan 2020). Although the latest statistics from the 2021 English Proficiency Index, published by Sweden-based Education First, show that Bangladesh's score rose by 14 points to 490, the country remains in the 'Low Proficiency' band, trailing behind India, Nepal and Pakistan. Bangladesh's score also falls below the Asian average of 504 and the global average of 503, highlighting continued challenges in English language proficiency (Education First 2021).

### Recommendations from translanguaging scholarships

#### Localisation of the English language

Pennycook (1994) vigorously critiques colonial narratives that have always privileged English as 'the good language' and set forth the West as an epitome of superiority. These narratives contributed to the commodification of English, under



the institutional influence of the British Council, and heavily shaped English Language Teaching (ELT) in former colonies like Bangladesh. By compartmentalising English from local languages like Bangla, these influences have maintained the discourse of traditional language separation ideologies. Bangladeshi scholars also continue to spar in their attempts to conceptualise English as either a second or foreign language or somehow not Bangladeshi, clearly reflecting the tensions latent in ELT policies, practices, and reforms (Khan et al. 2020).

However, through the lens of translanguaging, I argue that the traditional language separation ideologies no longer fully capture the realities of English in Bangladesh. English is no longer merely a foreign or second language; it is a part of the nation's linguistic and cultural fabric. In Bangladesh, English manifests itself in various localised forms, shaped by socio-economic conditions and local practices. While elite English-medium schools produce globally competitive students, Bangla-medium schools and religious institutions struggle to address socio-economic disparities (Hamid and Jahan 2020). The diverse outcomes of ELT in educational streams imply the localisation of English. Furthermore, the naturally occurring practice of English–Bangla translanguaging in classrooms, workplaces, social media and beyond highlights how English has been indigenised and adapted to local needs, developing its distinct local identity in Bangladesh within a space shared by the twin forces of globalisation and local agency (Biswas 2022).

Therefore, I contend that English should be reconceptualised as a Bangladeshi language, given its historical importance, enduring presence, and ongoing transformation within the cultural and educational contexts of Bangladesh. Seeing English through the prism of translanguaging helps us to acknowledge its complex, hybrid nature, which reflects both global flows of language and the local realities of Bangladesh. This perspective challenges traditional compartmentalised views of language, providing a more nuanced understanding of how English both influences and is shaped by Bangladesh's evolving educational and social landscape. Such insights can help shape ELT policy, practices, and reforms more effectively. A translanguaging-informed ELT policy will empower Bangladeshi learners by fostering a sense of ownership over the language, moving away from native speakerism. As English continues to evolve globally, with new linguistic forms, functions, and meanings emerging (Rafi, 2024), strict adherence to native-speaker norms is unnecessary for effective communication (Sato et al. 2019). Building on this perspective, I have previously argued that English should be seen as a flexible resource that can be appropriated and adapted, with localised varieties forming an integral part of Bangladeshi identity (Rafi 2024).

### **Enacting translanguaging pedagogies**

The preceding discussion necessitates a review of the methodological feasibility of CLT's application in Bangladesh to suit the needs of local learners and teachers (Ali and Walker 2014). As a Western-oriented teaching method, CLT prescribes a considerable leap not only in terms of new teaching methodologies but also towards a cultural shift in teaching

and learning altogether. This presents a complete contrast with the existing teacher-centred approach in Bangladesh, where the dominant teacher–student relationship is hierarchical; student participation is minimal, with little to no formal interaction taking place in the classroom (Rafi and Morgan 2024). Consequently, teachers often revert to traditional 'chalk-and-talk' methods that are based on rote memorisation and learning under the teacher's explicit guidance (Littlewood 2007). Abedin (2012) highlights that the teaching methods labelled as CLT in many classrooms are, in reality, only disguised versions of GTM, demonstrating a resistance to fully adopting the communicative approach. These challenges reinforce the need for context-sensitive pedagogical strategies that acknowledge and integrate local teaching realities, while fostering students' communicative competence.

In this regard, translanguaging pedagogies are contextually responsive because they value the linguistic and educational practices existing in Bangladeshi classrooms. Whereas CLT imposes a strict monolingual approach that resists the daily multilingual practices existing in Bangladeshi classrooms, translanguaging pedagogies build on established linguistic resources used by students and teachers and promote a more organic and inclusive atmosphere for learning. While CLT has faced criticism for failing to transform classroom practices, often functioning as a disguised version of GTM in Bangladeshi classrooms, translanguaging pedagogies embrace the realities of bilingual learning while leading to successful outcomes. The integration of GTM with other translanguaging strategies – such as creating translanguaging spaces, bilingual scaffolding, guided reading with authentic non-English language texts, cognate expressions that span languages, context clues and using cultural artifact as learner-centred objects, general linguistic performances and language-specific performances – enhances linguistic proficiency and fosters learner agency. For more extensive discussions, see the Rafi and Morgan series on translanguaging pedagogies (e.g., 2021, 2022b, 2024). In my several invited talks on translanguaging pedagogies at Bangladeshi universities, colleagues and students identified cultural resonances with these strategies, noting that these methods correspond more seamlessly with the language and cognitive realities of their students. Although CLT necessitates a fundamental transformation in teacher–student dynamics, the following classroom narrative from Rafi and Morgan (2022b) demonstrate how a translanguaging pedagogical approach respects the hierarchical nature of these dynamics in Bangladeshi classrooms while supporting students in developing English proficiency. In one instance, when a Bangla-medium student named Zia struggled to explain a concept in English, I did not enforce English but instead facilitated a multilingual activity using Google Translate. By comparing the English definition of 'nuclear family' with its flawed automated Bangla translation and collaboratively refining it, students critically engaged with both languages. This process affirmed the legitimacy of their full linguistic repertoire and positioned them as active knowledge producers. Eventually, Zia, having drawn on these translanguaging strategies, confidently explained the concept in English (Rafi and Morgan 2022b).

In contrast, in many CLT classrooms in Bangladesh, teachers may insist that Zia immediately speak English, increasing

his anxiety. Translanguaging pedagogy, by design, equips students like Zia with vocabularies and linguistic resources required for speaking English independently, reducing anxiety and fostering greater confidence. A similar finding is reported by Yasar and Dikilitas (2022), whereby students felt more at ease, engaged, and motivated to use English because they were drawing on their full linguistic repertoire. In contrast to grammar-translation and communicative approaches, the statistical comparison in the Yasar and Dikilitas (2022) study clearly shows that translanguaging noticeably favoured the improvement of all four of the students' language skills by offering cognitive, interactive, and affective advantages.

### Moving beyond top-down reforms in English Language Education

Qualified primary and secondary English teachers, with sound tertiary education and practical competency in CLT pedagogy, are essential for ensuring the success of English education at the primary and secondary levels (Kirkwood and Rae 2011). However, as mentioned before, many English language teachers in Bangladesh have a degree in English literature, which has little to no application in language education (Hamid and Baldauf 2008; Rafi 2024). In addition to the lack of knowledge about effective language teaching methodologies, Siddique (2004) highlights teachers' limited English proficiency, particularly in peripheral regions. These classroom realities are often overlooked, and policymakers neglect teachers' needs – a problem that undermines the success of curriculum reforms in Bangladesh. Last but not least, the absence of collaboration during curriculum development, resulting in teachers' voices going unheard (Ali and Walker 2014). Involving teachers in research could be a potential solution, as it would not only give teachers a voice but also help identify classroom challenges and develop practical solutions (Rahman and Pandian 2018). Empowering teachers through collaboration and research engagement could bridge the gap between policy and practice and foster more effective curriculum reforms.

Translanguaging scholarship offers a collaborative and context-sensitive approach in addressing systemic challenges of English language education in Bangladesh, in particular the dissonance between policy and practice, teachers' limited training, and their exclusion from curriculum reform. The CUNY-New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals (CUNY-NYSIEB) model emphasises trust-based collaboration between teachers and researchers, positioning teachers as co-learners and co-constructors of pedagogical change rather than passive recipients of externally imposed methodologies (Garcia and Kleyn 2016). This model is particularly relevant for Bangladesh, where CLT has struggled due to its misalignment with local educational cultures and teachers' lack of preparedness. By engaging teachers in co-planning, co-teaching, and co-researching translanguaging strategies, educators can develop pedagogies that are both theoretically informed and practically viable. Unlike traditional top-down approaches, the translanguaging scholarship shares and redistributes the burden of pedagogical innovation and, therefore, engages the teachers in a way that

their positionality as active agents of change empower them to adapt strategies based on the linguistic contexts of their learners. This ensures the grounding of language policies with classroom realities so that the gap between policy and practice is bridged and the learning environment is inclusive and sustainable.

### Conclusion

The Bangladeshi ELT landscape has long been bogged down by entrenched monolingual ideas, policy-practice mismatches, systemic infrastructural deficiencies, and the uncritical implementation of Western educational frameworks like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). In response to these longstanding challenges, I propose translanguaging as a pragmatic and context-sensitive alternative. Unlike CLT, which imposes rigid language hierarchies, translanguaging legitimises bilingual practices, positioning English not as an external or colonial imposition but as a dynamic, locally embedded linguistic resource.

The pedagogical construct of translanguaging scholarship values Bangladeshi teacher-student dynamics and integrates existing classroom practices. By allowing them to strategically mobilise their full linguistic repertoires, translanguaging pedagogies foster deeper engagement, enhance learning outcomes, and challenge the entrenched monolingual biases of previous ELT reforms. Furthermore, translanguaging also places teacher agency at the centre of ELT reform, addressing the persistent gap between policy and practice. Rather than relying on top-down, donor-driven training programs, translanguaging scholarship promotes co-planning, co-teaching and co-researching, empowering teachers as active participants in shaping language education.

Moving forward, the success of translanguaging scholarship in the Bangladeshi ELT context depends on a shift in both teacher mindsets and institutional policies. Teachers need professional development opportunities that equip them with translanguaging pedagogical strategies, and policymakers must acknowledge linguistic diversity as an asset rather than a hindrance to English learning. Instead of treating English as a 'subject' to be mastered in isolation, embracing translanguaging ensures that learners develop genuine communicative competence while maintaining their linguistic and cultural identities. In doing so, translanguaging steps in – not as a temporary fix, but as a sustainable, locally relevant way forward for ELT in Bangladesh.

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