

## THE PERSISTENT PEDAGOGY: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CONTINUED USE OF THE GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD (GTM) BY PAKISTANI EFL TEACHERS

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*This study investigates the persistent use of the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) by Pakistani EFL teachers, despite a global pedagogical shift towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). It argues that GTM's prevalence is not a failure of professional development but a rational adaptation to a complex ecosystem. Using a mixed-methods design, the research confirms the overwhelming dominance of GTM practices and explores the underlying reasons. Findings reveal a powerful convergence of three reinforcing factors: teachers' deep-seated beliefs shaped by their own schooling; the powerful washback effect from a national examination system that prioritizes grammatical accuracy; and severe contextual constraints, such as large class sizes, that make GTM a pragmatic classroom management strategy. The study concludes that teachers' adherence to GTM is a logical response to an environment that validates, mandates, and rewards its use. Meaningful reform, therefore, requires a systemic overhaul of assessments and curricula rather than focusing solely on changing individual teacher practices.*

**Keywords:** *Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), Teacher Cognition, Washback Effect, ELT in Pakistan, Mixed-Methods Research*

### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

The post-World War II era made English language International the Lingua-Franca, increasing its importance in the non-English speaking world. In recent times, English continues to be a passport for academic success, professional growth and an enhanced social status. Recolonizing the vitality of the English language, the ESL and EFL contexts have undergone significant changes in terms of teaching methodology: from direct methods to communicative language teaching, to enhance learning and increase the effectiveness of the teaching methods. The pioneering teaching method - Grammar Translation Method (GTM) – cantered on grammar and translation was replaced by more effective teaching methods such as CLT which is more focused on the actual use of language (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Savignon, 2002).

In post-colonial nations such as Pakistan, English is considered the only path to social status, white colour jobs and higher education (Rahman, 2002; Shamim, 2011). In every national policy, since independence, the government has vowed to focus on English language teaching from Primary to University level so that student can use English confidently within and outside the country. However, despite the government's so-called interest and measures, no solid steps have been taken so far to enhance the teaching of English especially in state-run institutions, resulting in the reliance on teaching methods from the colonial era: the Grammar Translation method which is known for its failure to develop proficiency in speaking, continue to be deemed a failed and outdated teaching method.

The present study attempts to understand why such an outdated teaching is still extensively used in Pakistani institutions where, as per the requirements of the modern world, communicative skills must be taught to prepare students for the future challenges. The present study will try to explore English language teachers' personal beliefs, administrative pressure, and social constraints.

English language teachers, despite the availability of other alternatives, find GTM the most suitable, logical and practical method of teaching given the educational and social context of Pakistan

To build an argument, this paper attempts to address the main research question: despite being highly qualified in the relevant subject from the university, why English language teachers in Pakistan still prefer to use GTM despite its outdated status and limitations?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In ancient times, GTM had been used to teach classical languages such as Latin and Greek with a purpose to enable students to learn grammar and analyse and to be able to read the classical literature (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The main components of the method were memorisation of relevant vocabulary, grammatical structures and translation of sentences without the understanding of the context and use. This method has long been criticised for its limitations: it teaches rules but fails to prepare students to use language communicatively. Howatt (1984) argued that GTM created a vacuum where students learn rules of grammar without connecting them to the real world making it an object of analysis rather than a tool of communication.

In direct opposition, the communicative competence movement, spearheaded by theorists like Hymes (1972), argued that knowing a language involves more than just grammatical knowledge; it requires knowing how to use language appropriately in different social contexts. This led to the development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), an approach that prioritizes interaction and authentic language use, values fluency over pure accuracy, and learner-centered activities such as role-playing and problem-solving (Savignon, 2002; Littlewood, 2011). The global consensus within ELT scholarship for the past four decades has firmly favored CLT, framing GTM as an outdated pedagogy for developing well-rounded language users.

### 2.2 Teacher Cognition: Beliefs, Training, and the 'Apprenticeship of Observation'

The consistent use of any teaching method cannot be understood without observing the teachers in the English language classroom. The research in teacher cognition attempts to find those dimensions of teaching which shape classroom practice (Borg, 2003, p. 81). English language teachers teaching methods are often filtered through a belief system that they have formed over many years of teaching. Pajares (1992) argues that these teaching beliefs are formed early their career and are hard to change. Moreover, these beliefs help filter the knowledge that is obtained during teacher training.

Similarly, Lortie's (1975) concept of the apprenticeship of observation argues that teachers spend decades as students. They observe their own teachers and form their own models of teaching. These models is said to be more influential than pre-service or in-service training. This becomes important if the training conflicts with these models. In many EFL contexts, GTM is seen as the definition of what language teaching *is*. That is why when these teachers are trained on CLT, they may revert to GTM, viewing it as more relevant and effective (Karavas-Doukas, 1996). Kumaravadivelu (2006) notes that without knowing the deep-rooted teaching beliefs of the English language teachers, policymakers and practitioners will not be able to change the teaching model and mode inside the classroom.

### 2.3 Systemic Pressures in the Pakistani Context

Teachers' beliefs are shaped by the teaching context in which they work. In Pakistan, three factors are particularly important. The first is the washback effect of high-stakes examinations (Alderson & Wall, 1993). The Matriculation and Intermediate examinations primarily test grammar questions, vocabular, and translation (Warwick & Reimers, 1995; Mahboob, 2018). It is pertinent to mention that student's futures and an institutions' reputations depend on these exam scores. It is therefore, becomes practical for teachers to teach to the test. To achieve the objectives of the exams, GTM is the best available option, effective and practical. This then creates a cycle where the test validates GTM, and GTM prepares students for the test.

The second reason is the curriculum and textbooks. Both of them reinforce GTM as the most effective and workable method. Textbooks mostly contain grammatical units, with end-of-chapter exercises which are particularly focused on fill-in-the-blanks, changing the voices, and translation. Hence, little room is left for guidance or material for communicative activities (Rahman, 2002).

The third reason is the contextual constraints. In Pakistani state-run schools, class sizes can exceed 100 students, and resources like photocopiers or audio-visual aids are scarce making GTM the best available option (Shamim, 2008). In such conditions, GTM is a far more reliable and efficient method for managing the lesson and large classes than resource-intensive CLT activities (Littlewood, 2007). GTM thus becomes a practical method for operating in a challenging teaching environment.

### 2.4 Research Gap

While the individual elements of teacher beliefs, washback, and contextual constraints are well-documented, few studies within the Pakistani context have employed a mixed-methods approach to demonstrate how these factors interact and reinforce one another to ensure the enduring dominance of GTM. This study aims to fill that gap by systematically linking the quantitative prevalence of GTM practices to the qualitative reasons, both internal and external, that sustain them.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed method approach to collect the relevant data. In the first phase, 120 English language teachers were selected using purposive sampling at the Higer Secondary level in the District Swabi. A survey questionnaire containing 20 Likert-scale items based on the study's objectives was distributed among the selected teachers. Similarly, five experienced English teachers with at least 15 years of teaching experience and a B.Ed./MPhil in English were interviewed to explore the reason why they continued to use GTM despite the availability of more effective and modern teaching methods.

The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS, while the semi-structured interviews were first transcribed using ELAN and then subjected to thematic Analysis using the computer program NVivo Ver. 24.0 to identify similarities in recurring patterns of teacher beliefs and practices concerning a particular method

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS

**Table 01: Frequency of Classroom Activities Based on Teacher Self-Report (N=120)**

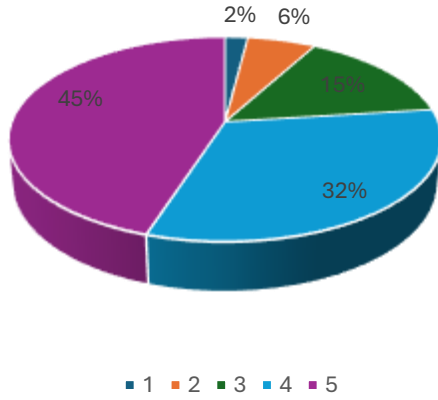
Survey Item	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
<b>GTM-Oriented Practices</b>					
I begin my lesson by explaining a grammar rule.	2%	6%	15%	32%	45%

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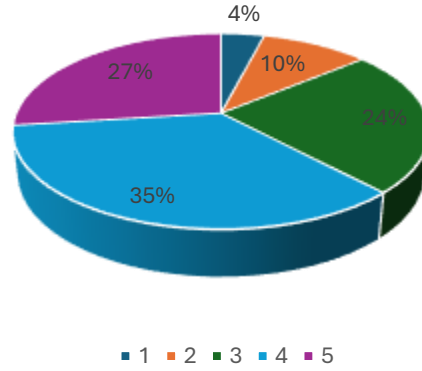
I ask students to translate sentences from English to Urdu.	3%	8%	20%	41%	28%
I explain the meaning of new English words using their Urdu equivalents.	1%	3%	13%	39%	44%
I use the students' native language (Pashto) to explain complex ideas.	1%	5%	11%	40%	43%
Students' tests consist mainly of grammar fill-in-the-blanks and translation.	4%	10%	24%	35%	27%
<b>CLT-Oriented Practices</b>					
I ask students to work in pairs or small groups to complete a task.	48%	23%	22%	5%	2%
I use role-plays, interviews, or simulations in my class.	60%	25%	10%	3%	2%
I encourage students to communicate their own ideas, even if they make mistakes.	41%	23%	25%	8%	3%
I use authentic materials like newspaper articles, songs, or videos.	55%	24%	15%	4%	2%
I assess students' speaking and listening skills as part of their grade.	58%	23%	12%	5%	2%

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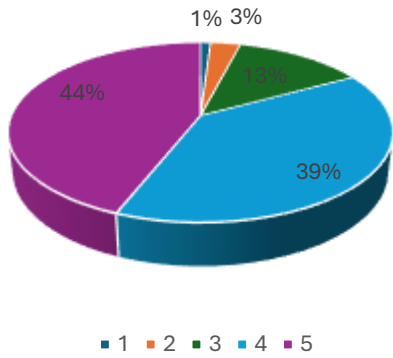
I begin my lesson by explaining a grammar rule.



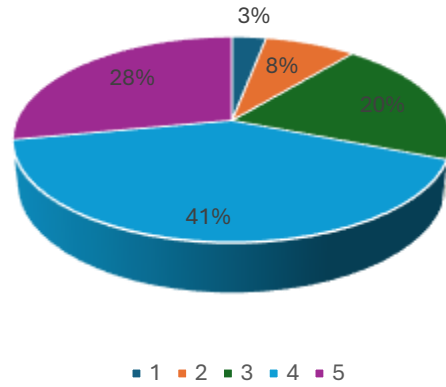
Students' tests consist mainly of grammar fill-in-the-blanks and translation.



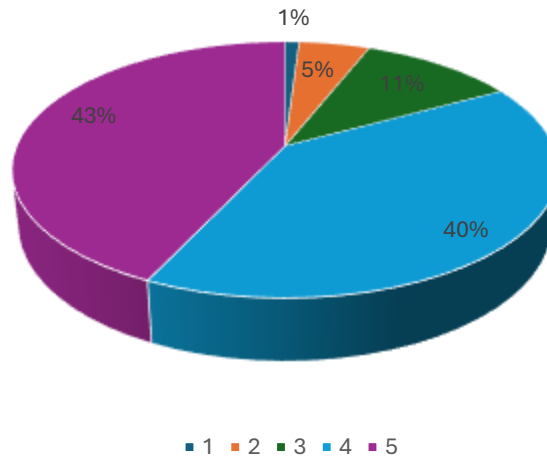
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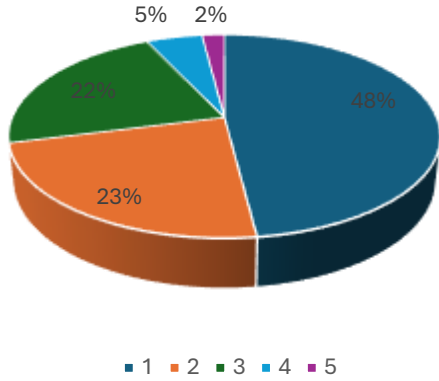
I ask students to translate sentences from English to Urdu.



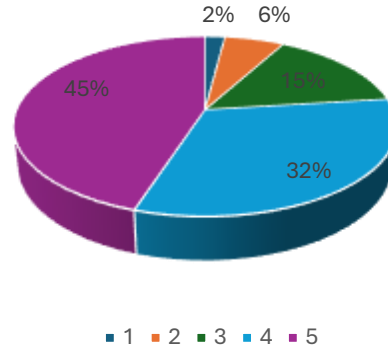
I use the students' native language (Pashto) to explain complex ideas.



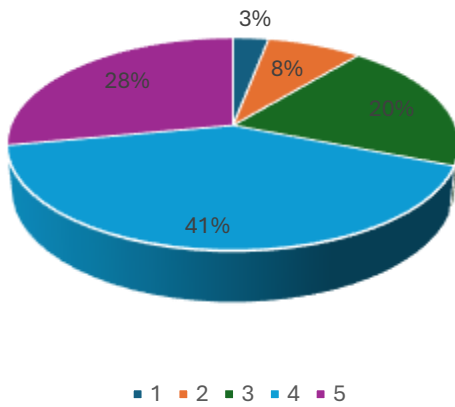
I ask students to work in pairs or small groups to complete a task.



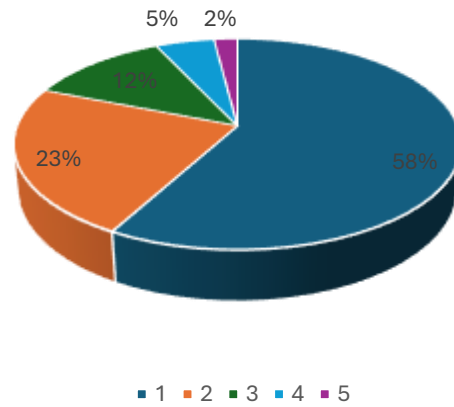
I encourage students to communicate their own ideas, even if they make mistakes.



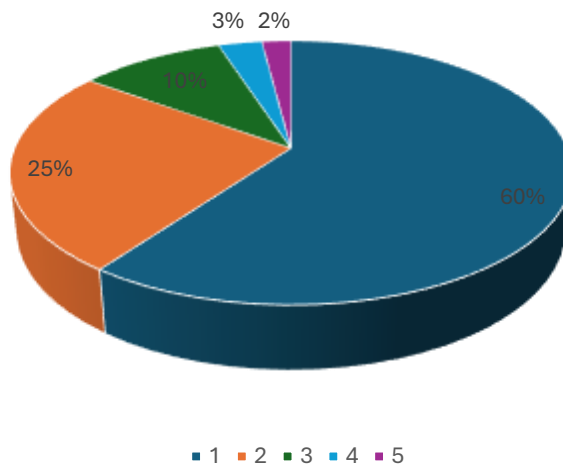
I use authentic materials like newspaper articles, songs, or videos.



I assess students' speaking and listening skills as part of their grade.



I use role-plays, interviews, or simulations in my class.



The above tables/Figures provide a clear quantitative confirmation of the study's central premise: the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is not merely present but is the overwhelmingly dominant pedagogical approach in the surveyed classrooms, while Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) practices are exceptionally rare. The data reveals a clear and consistent pattern that can be broken down into two opposing narratives.

#### **The Dominance of GTM-Oriented Practices**

Table No. 01/figure shows that activities based on GTM are part of daily classroom teaching. A majority of English language teachers i.e., 77% (45% + 32%) reported that they "Often" or "Always" begin their lessons by explaining a grammar rule. It indicates that the classroom is the place for transferring the linguistic knowledge, rather than the practice of communication. Moreover, the reliance on the students' first language (L1), Pashto, further supports the argument. Similarly, a large majority of teacher (83%) use Pashto to explain both new vocabulary and concepts, a central tenet of GTM which treats English as a subject to be taught through their L1. Furthermore, a significant number of teachers (69%) ask their students to translate sentences. Interestingly, this is also reflected in assessment practices: 62% of teachers reported that their tests contain grammar and translation tasks. This relationship between teaching and testing creates a cycle in which GTM is presented as the most efficient, practical, and context-relevant way to ensure students pass their exams.

#### **The Marginalization of CLT-Oriented Practices**

The bottom half of the table No. 01 shows that communicative practices are entirely absent from the classroom: practices such as pair work, group work, role-plays, and simulations which form the foundation of CLT. For example, 71% of teachers "Never" or "Rarely" use pair or group work. Similarly, 85% do not include role-plays or simulations in their teaching. This suggests that English classrooms in Swabi are mostly teacher centered where students-to-teacher and student-to-student interaction is hardly witnessed. The fluency and communication which is the focus of CLT, is also rejected as we can see that a majority of 64% of teachers discourage their students from communicating as they think students will make grammatical mistakes – the main belief of GTM that accuracy must precede communication. Finally, the lack of authentic materials (avoided by 79%) and the failure to assess speaking or listening skills (neglected by 81%) shows that the English teachers have not prepared their students to use English language in the real-world contexts.

The table, in totality, provides strong evidence that English teachers are not ready to shift their method of teaching due to some administrative and contextual constraints. It paints a picture detailing current practices of English teachers where the focus is on grammar rules, L1 explanations, and translation, followed by the relevant assessment system. The data demonstrates that communicative activities are almost absent from the classroom. This provides a strong empirical foundation for the study followed by the subsequent qualitative exploration *why* this reality persists.

#### **4.2 The Practitioner: Internal Beliefs and Training**

Thematic analysis of the teacher interviews revealed three core themes explaining teachers' preference for using GTM.

- **Theme 1: Apprenticeship of Observation.** A Large majority of English teachers ascribed their methods of teaching to their own schooling. Saira remarked, *"This is how I learned English, I guess. I remember, my teacher taught me through GTM. I think it helps to make the rules o English grammar easy for my students."* This show that the belief about the effectiveness of GTM is deep-rooted in Pakistan's education system.
- **Theme 2: Belief in Grammar as the Foundation.** English teachers in Swabi strongly believe that grammatical accuracy takes precedence over communication. One English

teacher, Mujahid, said, *"How can a student speak correctly if he does not first know the rules of grammar? I believe that speaking without grammar is just making is always a risk, a risk of being inaccurate. I reiterate that students must build the strong foundation in grammar first."* It shows that GTM is considered a necessary first step in language learning from school to college.

- **Theme 3: Lack of Confidence and Training in CLT.** During the interviews, quite a few teachers expressed their concerns about implementing communicative approaches. Sajjad confessed, *"I do confess, CLT is a modern and very effective approach but it requires the teacher to be very fluent and quick to handle difficult questions. To be honest, if you allow me, I am not confident in my own speaking. As for GTM, I am in more than fine with it."* This demonstrates the strength and influence of GTM. It is considered a safe method for teachers who feel their English proficiency is not strong enough to address questions requiring complex vocabulary and detailed responses.

#### 4.3 The Pressures: Systemic and Contextual Realities

- **Theme 1: The Overwhelming Washback of Examinations.** This was the most important theme emerged. Every teacher mentioned the HSSC exams as the main reason for their choice of using GTM. Sidra explained, *"Well, if you happen to read the board paper, you see that it is based on grammar questions and translation. Now tell me ... how can I spend my time on speaking activities? My students will either fail or score low, and I will be held responsible, isn't it so? My task is to prepare them for the HSSC exams to secure good grades in English, that's it."* This shows an interesting fact that teaching to the test is not a choice but a professional necessity for the English teachers in Swabi.
- **Theme 2: Systemic and Resource Constraints.** Teachers also complained about the teaching context and problems that exist there. Mahnoor lamented, *"You see sir, I have 87 students in my class. Do you think I will be able to do pair work? Not impossible, you know. I believe, GTM helps me to manage the class and cover the syllabus."* Some teachers believed that English textbooks were structured around GTM, leaving no room for communicative teaching.

#### 5. Discussion

This study seeks to find out why English teachers in Pakistan rely on the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) despite the fact that it is an outdated method of teaching. The relevant literature and practices show that teaching has shifted towards communication long ago. Yet, in Pakistani institutions, the old method is still strong and in practice. The findings show that this is not by chance; Instead, it is a rational response to a system that supports GTM in many ways.

The data demonstrates that teachers are not just using GTM occasionally, they are using it constantly. Lessons mostly begin with grammar rules and rely on translation into Urdu or Pashto. The summative and formative assessments test grammar and translation. At the same time, communicative activities are almost absent from the classroom. Similarly, pair work, role-plays, and the use of real-life materials are very rare. In the classroom, students mostly learn about English, rather than practicing it to prepare themselves for real-world use.

This raises the question why do teachers in Pakistan prefer to use GTM and avoid using CLT? The interviews unveil the reasons. They reveal a cycle where teachers' personal beliefs and the education system support each other.

Teachers' beliefs are shaped by their own experiences. As students, they were taught with GTM. This "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) set the model. They believe that GTM is the only way to teach English efficiently in the classroom. The interviews explored a common pattern of belief where grammar is considered foundation of everything. As one



teacher remarked, speaking English without grammar is speaking something meaningless gibberish. This brings them into a direct conflict with modern language teaching. The modern English language teaching considers communication as the goal, not just grammar. Moreover, some teachers openly confessed they lack the confidence required for speaking English. They believe that GTM is safe which lets them control the class through rules and translations. On the other hand, communicative methods would require them to be fluent in English for which they feel they are not yet ready for (Karavas-Doukas, 1996).

However, it is not justified to blame teachers alone as this is one side of the picture. The other, and powerful, side is the system they work in which encourages them to use GTM. In Pakistan at HSSC level, exams are the most powerful force. The HSSC English language paper tests grammar, vocabulary, and translation. Hence, teachers feel pressure to "teach to the test" (Alderson & Wall, 1993). If they do not do so, their students might fail. In a context like Pakistan where exam results are deemed as the criterion to decide students' futures and school reputations, focusing on communication skills is considered a professional risk. One teacher confirmed that her job is to prepare students for that exam, not for real-life communication and challenges in English.

Furthermore, the practical realities also support GTM. Classrooms are often overcrowded with hundreds of students. In a class of 75 students, communicative activities is almost impossible. GTM, with its teacher-centred lectures, and grammar and translation exercises, is more manageable and easier (Shamim, 2008). The textbooks do not help either as they are often structured around grammatical rules and exercises suitable for GTM. Given this scenario, it is clear that teachers have little material to support communicative activities (Rahman, 2002).

The exams require the teachers to teach the rule of grammar and vocabulary forcing teachers to use GTM. In addition, textbooks and large classes make GTM the first and only choice. Interestingly, English teachers, trained in the same method, believe it is the right way of teaching. Hence, the cycle continues. In such a strong system, any attempt to introduce communicative methods will be equivalent to colliding with a solid wall of beliefs and decades old firm practices (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

There might be some people who argue that teachers should be better trained in CLT. They would use once they understand it. But this seems misleading as our findings show that even knowledgeable and experienced teachers feel forced to abandon CLT because the system would not allow it, instead encouraging them to use GTM. Others might say the problem is lack of resources. Although this is true, again it is one part of the story. Even if resources were provided, the exam would still compel them to use GTM.

The real issue is that promises made on governmental level only stay on paper. National policies always promise to produce confident English speakers for the global world. But the education system is never improved, no reforms are brought in exams system, textbooks, and conditions. No measures have been taken to implement method that produces students who know about English as well use it confidently. Until this mismatch is addressed, change will be very slow. Teachers are not resisting modern methods without reason. They are making the most practical choice in a system that has not truly decided to leave the colonial-era classroom behind.

## 6. Conclusion

This study concludes that the persistence of the Grammar-Translation Method among Pakistani ESL teachers is not an act of resistance to modern pedagogy but a deeply rational phenomenon.

It is the logical outcome of a powerful convergence of forces: teachers' own ingrained educational beliefs, the overwhelming systemic pressure from a national examination system that prioritizes grammatical accuracy, and severe contextual constraints that make GTM a pragmatic and manageable methodology. Educators are not stubbornly clinging to an outdated method; they are making calculated, intelligent choices within a professional ecosystem that actively promotes, rewards, and is structured to support it.

Consequently, any meaningful shift towards communicative language teaching hinges on a holistic, systemic overhaul rather than on isolated interventions like teacher training workshops. The most critical step is the fundamental reform of high-stakes examinations to include direct assessments of communicative skills, thereby creating the institutional incentive for pedagogical change. This must be coupled with the revision of curricula and textbooks to be activity-based and the re-imagining of teacher training to be a site for reflective practice that equips educators with techniques adapted for their challenging contexts. Ultimately, to change the practice within the classroom, we must first change the system that defines it, ensuring students can be truly equipped with the English skills they need to thrive.

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