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## English Language at Secondary Level in Bangladesh: (Dis)connections Between Policy and Practice of Oral Skills

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### Abstract

The development of curriculum, textbooks and assessment is a continuous process for better teaching and learning outcomes. The National Curriculum & Textbook Board (NCTB) revised its secondary curriculum in 2012 for English education considering the 2010 National Education policy. The only textbook for the whole country for secondary level, *English for Today* has been developed accordingly in 2013 for grades 6 to 10, to help students attain competency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This qualitative study is based on semi-structured interviews and content analysis of pertinent policy documents. The semi-structured interview data includes a set of English curriculum policy implementation stakeholders including teacher trainers, school principals and English teachers. This paper aims to explore the reasons for the existing disconnections coherently through the analytical lens of the Constructive Alignment (CA) Model for curriculum design to achieve the intended learning outcomes for secondary English education in Bangladesh. The findings support the argument that if the coherence of secondary curriculum, classroom teaching and learning activities and assessment system is not aligned, the aspirations of the National Education Policy 2010 may not be achieved.

### Keywords

English Language Teaching (ELT), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), curriculum policy, curriculum implementation, semi-structured interviews, constructive alignment model

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# English Language at Secondary Level in Bangladesh: (Dis)connections Between Policy and Practice of Oral Skills

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The development of curriculum, textbooks and assessment is a continuous process for better teaching and learning outcomes. The National Curriculum & Textbook Board (NCTB) revised its secondary curriculum in 2012 for English education considering the 2010 National Education policy. The only textbook for the whole country for secondary level, *English for Today* has been developed accordingly in 2013 for grades 6 to 10, to help students attain competency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This qualitative study is based on semi-structured interviews and content analysis of pertinent policy documents. The semi-structured interview data includes a set of English curriculum policy implementation stakeholders including teacher trainers, school principals and English teachers. This paper aims to explore the reasons for the existing disconnections coherently through the analytical lens of the Constructive Alignment (CA) Model for curriculum design to achieve the intended learning outcomes for secondary English education in Bangladesh. The findings support the argument that if the coherence of secondary curriculum, classroom teaching and learning activities and assessment system is not aligned, the aspirations of the National Education Policy 2010 may not be achieved.

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## Introduction

The National Education Policy 2010 of Bangladesh emphasises English language proficiency for access to global knowledge and economy (Ministry of Education, 2010). The only textbook for the whole country for secondary level, *English for Today* has been developed accordingly in 2013 for grades 6 to 10, to help students attain competency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Over the last four decades, different governments introduced different policies for English language education in Bangladesh. The need for the English language was not addressed directly from the time of the first Education Commission of Bangladesh – *Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission*<sup>1</sup> – until the recent National Education Policy 2010. The policy designed by the first Education Commission emphasized the importance and necessity of the English language in the curriculum and proposed to include English as a subject from either Grade 3 or Grade 6.

However, the issue of the inclusion of English, either from Grade 3 or not, is supposed to be decided on the basis of the availability of trained teachers. Therefore, English language education in Bangladesh has not been given a consistent level of attention. However, the

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission was formed in 1972 and submitted its report in 1974.

English language was introduced as a compulsory subject from Grade 1 to the tertiary level in 1992 as a part of ongoing educational reform (Rasheed, 2013). Hence, to successfully execute the current education policy of the English language, it is essential to implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method successfully. Consequently, to achieve proficiency in English language learning through CLT, both listening and speaking must be amalgamated along with reading and writing skills into the English Language Teaching (ELT) policy and curriculum. Moreover, the emphasis on four integrative skills is important to gain communicative competence of English as a tool for the educational and economic development of the country (Rasheed, 2013).

### **English Language in the Education Policy of Bangladesh**

The common perception of the people in policymaking in Bangladesh is that oral skills can be developed automatically and without systematic learning. However, oracy and orthography are two different systems of language although connected, and oral skills normally precede orthographic skills (Rost, 2016). For this reason, oral skills are considered primary skills. Without the development of oral skills, it is difficult to develop orthographic skills which are considered secondary skills of any language (Rasheed, 2013). Moreover, oral skills also need to be taught and learned just as do orthographic skills. Lack of understanding by people at the policy level of the need to actively develop oral skills is maybe one of the reasons for not having oral skills in secondary English textbooks (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a) and classroom teaching until the year 2015, whereas all four skills including oral skills for English education had been adopted in policy in 1996.

For the adaptation of the new policy, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (1996) surveyed in 1990 to evaluate the English proficiency of learners from Grade 1 to Grade 12, but unfortunately, they found a depressing scenario of English language education because of the damage caused in the previous policies. Therefore, the government was triggered by the situation to re-introduce English to every level of its education. According to Rahman (2007), the government also adopted a methodological shift from a traditional Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)<sup>2</sup> to a more communicative mode of teaching and learning English in Bangladesh. Subsequently, a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) English curriculum was also introduced at the secondary level in 1996 with a new hope to bring positive change in the teaching and learning of English (Sultana, 2018).

In Bangladesh, the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) prevailed in teaching and learning the English language since the country's inception in 1971 until CLT was introduced in the late 90s. The CLT method entered English language education as the prevalent method of foreign language learning at that time (Hamid, 2010). The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach took place in English language policy in Bangladesh through the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) under the Ministry of Education in July 1996. However, the CLT approach was introduced into classrooms through two new textbooks of English for Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) levels in 2001 and 2002 respectively (Alam et al., 2014). The names of the two books are: *English for Today* (Classes 11-12) and *English for Today* (Classes 9-10).

Although the CLT approach had been prescribed to teach English for more than two decades, the learning outcomes for students were not up to the expected level (Rasheed, 2013). The main reason is that shifting from the GT method to the CLT method did not ensure the relevant infrastructural facilities (such as classroom settings, CLT- relevant teaching aids) and

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<sup>2</sup> The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is a method of second language teaching that stands mostly on the grammar and translation of passages from the native language into the target language.

the approach to English language learning and teaching remained as it had been in the past (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; Podder, 2013). A reason for the continuation of the GT method is that most of the practicing teachers of the English language are the product of the GT method and are not pedagogically trained in the CLT method (Hasan & Akhand, 2009).

One of the major reasons for this hindrance is the absence of pre-service teachers' training. Researchers corroborate that (Hamid, 2010; Rahman, 2019) there is a paucity of research on Bangladeshi ELT-related teachers' training although it is recognized that it is essential to increase their professional capacity which is essential to develop learners' English competence. Although the government provides in-service teacher education programmes such as Certificate in Education (C-in-Ed) and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) to the secondary teachers to improve their professional capacity, Government Teachers' Training Colleges (TTCs) do not have the capacity to enrol all the secondary teachers who seek admission to a B.Ed. program or C-in Ed. (Rahman et al., 2018). Several studies revealed several challenges pertinent to teacher education programmes such as the rarity of training sessions, less opportunity for the rural teachers, shortage of teachers' trainers, ineffective training materials, and insufficient resources to make these training programs effective (Rahman et al., 2018).

At present, the goals of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (2012a) are made to align with the Nation Education Policy 2010. The policies consider English as one of the means of transforming the country into *Digital Bangladesh* by 2021. The policies aim to achieve the goal of the government as the English language can help contribute to the areas of national development, such as "to achieve developments in science, technology, higher education, business, industry and particularly in communications and IT skills" (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a, p. 73). Therefore, the importance of the English language reaches beyond the consideration of being a subject taught at schools and colleges.

### **The Philosophical Foundation of the National Curriculum 2012 for English Language Education**

The philosophical foundation of a curriculum helps determine the driving purpose of education, as well as the roles of the various stakeholders (Lipman, 1993). The Philosophical Foundation of English Education in Bangladesh, followed by both National Education Policy 2010 and National Curriculum 2012, is underpinned by constructivist theory for its approach to learning. In this regard, Jonassen (1999) espoused

Constructivist conceptions of learning, on the other hand, assume that knowledge is individually constructed and socially co-constructed by learners based on their interpretations of experiences in the world. Since knowledge cannot be transmitted, instruction should consist of experiences that facilitate knowledge construction. (p. 217)

Therefore, the notion of constructivist approach helps language development too. It facilitates to explore themes on language education such as acquisition of communicative ideas and the development of their language expressions, the interactive context of language use in childhood, and the role of parents input and behaviour of scaffolding in the acquisition of linguistic forms (Aljohani, 2017).

Following this notion, the government adopted a policy for secondary and higher secondary levels to promote learning through practice and interaction in such a way that not only a student can connect the classroom learning to his/her schema but also can apply that new learning in real-life situations. Moreover, the curriculum policy also discourages rote learning by accentuating more focus on learning by understanding to cement the learning of

the learners for perpetuity (Kabir, 2018). To make this happen, the national English curriculum emphasised the usage of multimedia and ICT in the classroom to visualise teaching materials for both crystallising the topic idea and making the classroom vibrant. In line with this concept, the National Curriculum 2012 for English (Classes VI-X) also promotes “peer learning” and “collaborative learning” in the classroom. It further suggests that: “Group work not only increases a learner’s knowledge and skills, but also his human qualities such as “discipline, tolerance, leadership, and mutual understanding” (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a, p. 22).

In implementing the above-mentioned activities, the National Curriculum 2012 for English (Classes VI-X) has adopted the “investigation process” of learning based on Dewey’s Action Hypothesis which also aligns with constructive activities. Dewey (1897) said:

I believe, therefore, in the so-called expressive or constructive activities as the centre of correlation, in all his [learner] training or growth. The social life gives the unconscious unity and the background of all his [learner] efforts and all his attainment. (p. 44)

In this investigation process, education is considered a conjoining process of living experience with new learning where the child is the centre of concern. A child-centred approach to education puts the emphasis on learning about the needs and interests of the child. In this way, Dewey (1907) discarded the form of authoritarian teaching methods. This means that students must interact with their environment to adapt and learn. Dewey (1907) averred that children should be allowed to explore their environments. He also emphasised an interdisciplinary curriculum that focused on plugging into multiple subjects where students would pursue their interests and construct their own ways of learning and applying knowledge.

The current National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI-X) also has emphasized the “eclectic” approach to teaching so that a teacher can apply multiple methods of teaching if needed according to the need for learning. The eclectic approach combines the principles of various methods and approaches of teaching a language depending on the lesson objectives and individual differences of students (Iskan, 2017). So, teachers should be trained in such a way that they become competent to use different teaching methods in the classroom. The curriculum has identified two categories of workloads for the learning process: a. “classwork” and b. “homework.” Practice and activities related to all four skills – listening to speaking, reading, and writing – are “classwork” for English language education. The other type of learning (i.e., “homework”) should facilitate students’ thinking ability and creativity to align with ideas gained from the classrooms. In this regard, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (2012a) suggested that “the specimen homework shown in the curriculum matrix can be followed. Homework should be designed in a way so that those can be done in 20-25 minutes” (p. 27). As far as the assessment procedure is concerned, the curriculum proposed two types of assessment: a. continuous assessment, and b. terminal and public examinations. The continuous assessment covers 20% of marks and is added to the remaining 80% of marks of the terminal and public examinations (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a). As a part of this type of assessment, English teachers are supposed to assess a student continuously following the combined performance of a student in both classwork and homework. The teacher should keep three records of a student’s assessment done every two months. Terminal and public examinations follow the pattern of the questions in a creative way that can assess students’ cognition, comprehension, application, and higher skills (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a).

International literature of similar contexts in Asia (Butler, 2011) accentuates that there is a chance of biases and malpractice regarding the marking of the assessment of oral skills in

schools. Moreover, it has not yet been decided whether oral skills will be assessed in a *formative* or *summative* way. The criteria and means for the assessment of oral skills are not yet prescribed by NCTB although the national curriculum for English 2012 distributed 10 marks each for listening and speaking skills. It has also been shown that the SSC sample English question paper proposed by NCTB in the English textbook for Paper one allocates 20 marks for oral skills, as it has proposed 80 marks for the test of reading and writing skills. So, the tension arises whether 20% of marks (10+10) for oral skills (listening + speaking) is enough to improve interactive competence in everyday life. Several international research on similar EFL contexts shows that the allocation of more marks is needed for oral skills. For example, in Nepal, English is a foreign language, but the country allowed 25% of marks out of 100 marks in their public examination called School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination. The exam is controlled by SLC examination Board under the Ministry of Education, Nepal (Dawadi, 2018). However, the SSC examination designed by the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education that assessed the English subject was based on only reading and writing skills for 100 marks in total without allocating 20 marks for the assessment of oral skills. The main reason is that NCTB has not yet proposed a sample question paper, either in the secondary textbook or in its English curriculum policy document, that indicates how the oral skills will be assessed in both school and public examinations.

### **Rationale for the Study**

It is possible to observe the curriculum of an educational organization from two distinctive perspectives. In the first instance, we can observe the curriculum policy, that is regarding the curriculum at a decision-making level, concerning students' needs and purposes, establishing desires and goals, choosing, and grading content, establishing appropriate learning arrangements and learner groupings, choosing, adapting, or developing appropriate substances by studying responsibilities and assessment and evaluation process. Alternatively, we can study the curriculum in practice. The second viewpoint takes us into the classroom. Here, we can investigate the actual practices of the teaching, learning, and assessment action that have been described in intention in curriculum policy. Therefore, it is important to investigate connections between policy and practice proposed for listening in English textbooks of the secondary level to find out what students are taught and what fails to be taught, and examined, although planned in the policy.

Since 1997, the English language policy of Bangladesh stipulated the CLT approach and developed CLT-based English textbooks at primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels. The approach to CLT and its materials were assumed to equally and practically focus on the integration of four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. CLT has been advocated as an approach to language education that emphasises pragmatic competence more than linguistic competence in a language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Savignon, 2001). Consequently, an English language class needs to be interactive and participatory to develop all four skills through peer discussion, pair work, and group work with the support of a teacher. Relevant research reported that many of the secondary English teachers, being products of a GTM, lacked proficiency in the listening and speaking skills of the English language (Rahman et al., 2018). Moreover, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (2012b) mandated that: In a communicative language curriculum, “how to teach” is more important than “what to teach.” This emphasises that:

- All four basic language skills should be practised in classrooms.
- Skills should be practised in an integrated manner - not in isolation.

- Skills practice should be done in meaningful contexts, that is, practice in language use should go beyond the textbook and include real-life situations.
  - Interactive activities should be carried out between teachers and students, and, more importantly– between students and students.
  - Graded grammar should be taught through the communicative approach.
- (p. 26)

However, in practice, teaching and learning English in Bangladesh does not live up to these expectations. In fact, Bangladeshi students leave higher secondary with limited oral and aural proficiency. The basic concept of inclusion of listening and speaking for communicative language learning of English in Bangladesh is ignored. At the higher secondary level, students are not required to pass any exams based on listening and speaking skills, so listening and speaking classes are not held for practice. Exams are based on only reading and writing skills leading both the teachers and learners to be exam-focused and at the same time disinclined, to practice listening and speaking skills for the practical learning of English (Shurovi, 2014).

Consequently, although the CLT-based textbook contains materials and activities for both listening and speaking classroom teaching and testing only cover the reading and writing portions of the text. Despite the goal and objectives of the textbooks of English emphasising all four skills, in reality, listening and speaking are not taught or assessed in an examination at any level of its education. Therefore, although the focus shifted from the Grammar-Translation approach to the CLT approach to learning the English language on paper and in policy, the status quo of classroom English teaching and learning in the country has remained the same over the last two decades. The other reason for the ineffectiveness of CLT in Bangladesh lies in the scarcity of support for and supply of trained ELT teachers to adapt to the newly designed communicative curriculum (Ali & Walker, 2014).

The existing teachers are not provided with sufficient and proper training for the CLT approach or any other ELT pedagogy to implement in English language teaching in the classroom (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; Shurovi, 2014). Most of the teachers (Rahman et al., 2018) only received 13-day CLT training as part of the project of ELTIP (English Language Teaching Improvement Project) in Bangladesh. This was insufficient to transform their attitudes and beliefs from the outdated GT method to CLT in their classroom teaching practice and there was no synergy among the stakeholders, such as teachers, learners, curriculum developers, and policymakers (Ali & Walker, 2014).

Although English is not yet widely used in all walks of the society parallel to its first language *Bangla* except for educational needs and foreign communication, the latest National Education Policy 2010 evaluated the English language as the tool to create a knowledge-based society (Ministry of Education, 2010). For this reason, the current National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI-X) has recognised the English language as a foreign language on paper but denotes that the English language has shifted its status from a foreign language to a second language in practice. In reality, English is the second language of the country; and in many sectors and jobs, English is more important than *Bangla* – the first language – in Bangladesh (Hasan, 2016; Rasheed, 2013). Thus, to face the global challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with changes in various sections of life, knowledge, and civilization, a new English curriculum in Bangladesh was necessary (Ministry of Education, 2010).

In response to this idea, the National Education Policy 2010 states that English teaching and learning should prepare learners to achieve necessary language skills, learn about culture and values, attain a positive attitude, and deal with the challenges of higher education for better employability locally and globally. Therefore, the current education policy has compromised with its CLT approach to teaching English. The main notion behind this is that CLT has been functioning, at least on paper, for almost two decades but the current teaching practices are not



enough to accomplish the aspiration of preparing Bangladeshi learners to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in terms of language scholarship (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Another reason is the inconsistency between the learners' gained scores of English as a subjects in SSC and HSC and their linguistic performance in competitive exams such as the university entrance test. After the recent HSC result ("Most GPA 5 scorers fail DU admission tests," 2015), a surprising statistic has been observed. Studying English as an EFL for as long as 12 years (focus on reading and writing only) and achieving an average of 80 percent of marks in English as a subject in both the SSC and HSC exams, most of the students failed to score the minimum qualifying marks in the entrance tests of different public universities of Bangladesh based on their reading and writing components. This scenario has been evidenced over the last few years. In this regard, it is palpable that there are mainly three factors to take into account: firstly, a gap between the test contents of public university entrance exams and the current syllabus of English language education for SSC and HSC, secondly, a gap between the actual learning outcomes of the SSC and HSC students and the English test scores for the SSC and HSC levels, and thirdly, a gap between the English language education policy and the existing practice of teaching and learning of English.

The current National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI-X) is also aimed toward the building of the human resources, people who have the necessary skills in the English language to work globally in different spheres and study for higher education abroad. So, the national curriculum wants to use "English language" as a vital basis for the fulfilment of the national project–Vision 2021– in Bangladesh to make the country a digital one and a country of middle income (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012). Nevertheless, the willingness of the government of Bangladesh failed to achieve the above-mentioned goals as it failed to bring the integrated practice of the four basic skills of a language in the classroom teaching and learning process as well as in the testing system (Shurovi, 2014). This objective gives rise to the following research questions:

- RQ 1: How does the current policy and practice influence English language education at the secondary level in Bangladesh?
- RQ 2: How do the multiple disconnections between curriculum policy and practice for oral skills affect English language education in Bangladesh?

### **Theoretical Approach**

A theoretical approach is needed to explain a phenomenon, draw connections, and make an analysis of a research study. It enables the researcher to choose a method of research. Fulton and Krainovich-Miller (2010) compare the role of the theoretical framework to a map or travel plan; so, the researcher should select an appropriate theoretical approach by considering the need for the study problem. The theoretical approach to this study guided me like a travel plan by which I have defined, discussed, and evaluated the theory relevant to my research problem. Grant and Osanloo (2014) suggested that the research questions of a study, as well as the aim of the study, should entail noticeable aspects of the theoretical framework, and the aspects must be explicitly stated in the early stage of thesis writing.

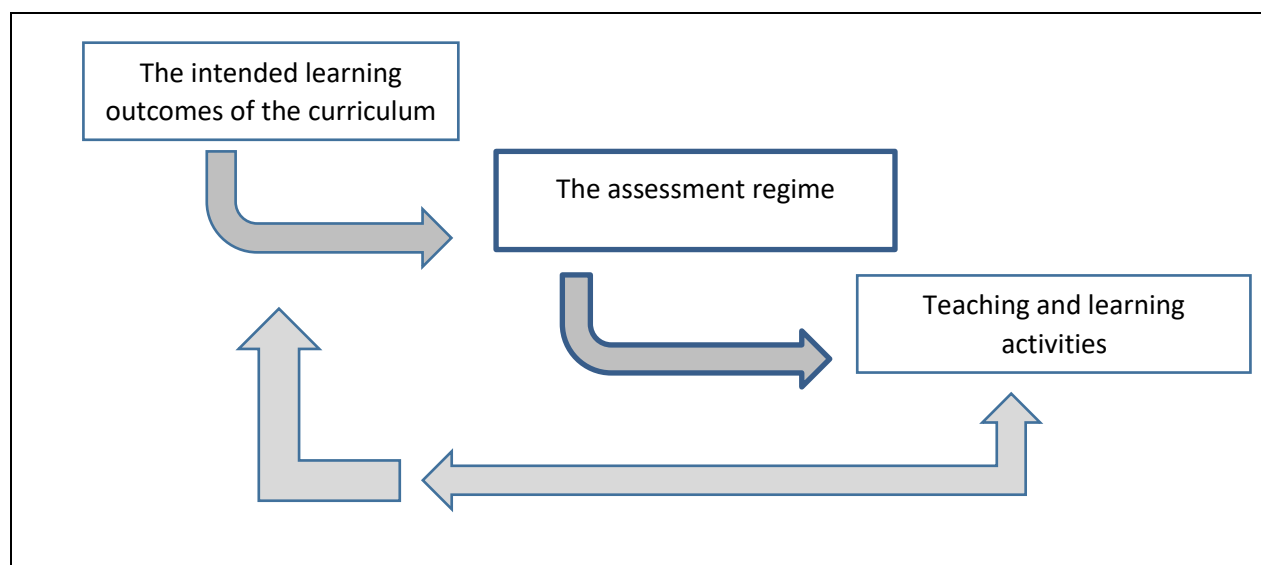
Therefore, to interpret and shed light on the study for curriculum design and practice in secondary English education, the study employs the Constructive Alignment (CA) Model (Biggs, 2003) as a discursive theoretical lens. As Figure 1 illustrates, the model requires alignment between the three key areas of the curriculum, namely, curriculum (the intended learning outcomes), teaching and learning activities (what the student does to learn and what teachers do to teach), and how the student is assessed (assessment).

The CA model (Figure 1) is used to address and investigate what the policy documents provide about the secondary English education, the curriculum policy and its implementation through the stakeholders focusing on policy directions and how the curriculum policies are reflected on the ground by the teachers experiencing due to the current secondary English education policy and practice.

Before entering the field, I discussed my approach with my supervisors and received suggestions to present myself not as an English teacher but a researcher who intends to explore the complexities related to the policy, practice, and testing of listening skill in the English language at the secondary level. Initially, I was guided by my habitual way of behaviour and way of talking with the interviewees. This situation quickly made me realise that my conventional behaviour might be an obstacle to becoming more flexible with them, and I felt there was an invisible wall of formality as my approach signalled them a sense of a formal interview.

So, after a while, I pushed myself internally to act like a researcher who left his previous position and identity to become informal and more flexible. I shared the story of my research journey that I took over the last few years in Australia and New Zealand and expressed how the research on this issue could provide a better understanding. I explained to the interviewees why I came from New Zealand and where I was pursuing my Ph.D. I explained to them why I chose the area of research. Before asking questions to the teachers, it made me confident to create an informal rapport with them as a researcher.

**Figure 1**  
*Constructive Alignment Model in Curriculum Design*



*Note.* This model is Bigg's CA model in 2003 describing the connectivity among learning outcomes, assessment, and teaching-learning activities. Adapted from "Aligning Teaching and Assessing to Course Objectives by J. Biggs, 2003, p. 3. *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: New Trends and Innovations*, University of Aveiro.

## Methods

### Design of the Study

In this study, the methodological approach is mainly based on a qualitative framework. To collect the data, semi-structured interviews are conducted as a qualitative research tool. The

purpose of this study determined the methodology and its tool to collect the relevant data as I wanted to go in-depth study the phenomenon that is the disconnect in curriculum, classroom practice and assessment of secondary English education in Bangladesh. Dornyei (2007) postulated that qualitative research opened the scope to obtain rich data to have human experiences to go for an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon. Therefore, qualitative researchers "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). The data obtained through semi-structured interviews and transcribed in Roman Bangla. The transcribed data of the interviews will be considered as a corpus of exploratory language data. Then the data will be analysed as a discourse, based on the existing corpus. I have chosen this method of analysis because interview data are the natural feedback via human interaction for knowledge production (Cohen et al., 2018).

### Data Collection

I used two different methods named "document analysis" and "semi-structured interviews" to collect data. Two different methods: document analysis and semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data. It was envisaged that the analysis of relevant educational policy documents would develop and provide a background of what the secondary English education policy is supposed to perform in the classroom. To facilitate a more focused and relational analysis of secondary English education from its policy and practice levels, in-depth interviews were needed as interviewing is an appropriate method for getting the necessary information from your participants (Creswell, 2012). It is also identified as a potential means of pure information transfer (Cohen et al., 2018). A research interview is not like an everyday conversation but an interaction having a specific purpose and having specific questions to be answered (Cohen et al., 2018). Interview data are natural feedback via human interaction for knowledge production (Cohen et al., 2018). The types of Interviews are divided into mainly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured patterns (Alvesson, 2011). Once the author decided to collect interview data based on a semi-structured pattern, they had to consider the form of interviewing that could best help them understand the prime phenomenon and answer the research questions of the study.

### Participants

The author interviewed five policymakers from National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) who are responsible for curriculum design and development and also interviewed six teachers in total from both urban and rural schools. The participants were selected purposively, based on their relevant roles and responsibilities to this research. All of them are the existing secondary school teachers from both rural and urban schools. We used pseudonyms for each teacher. The following table gives the detail of the participants.

**Table 1**

*Participants*

| Pseudonym                        | Instrument                |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| The Head of the Curriculum, NCTB | Semi-structured Interview |
| Goutam                           | Semi-structured Interview |
| Rahim                            | Semi-structured Interview |

|         |                           |
|---------|---------------------------|
| Hamid   | Semi-structured Interview |
| Rashid  | Semi-structured Interview |
| Anam    | Semi-structured Interview |
| Shahnaz | Semi-structured Interview |
| Nurul   | Semi-structured Interview |
| Ismail  | Semi-structured Interview |
| Kamal   | Semi-structured Interview |
| Yunus   | Semi-structured Interview |

## Results

Although in the history of language education in Bangladesh different types of teaching methods have been tried so far including CLT, the development of oral skills is still underused in achieving English language proficiency by the policymakers, teachers, and students. The findings highlight the existing disconnections regarding oral skills both at policy and practice levels.

### Views about Oral Skills in Bangladesh

Misconceptions about oral skills for language learning prevail at both policy and practice levels. The excerpts from policy level delineate these misconceptions. The Head of NCTB stated: The policy-level people in our country do not think that all four skills of a language should be developed equally. But they think that the oral skills of the Bangla language can be developed naturally by the students, and we need not teach the oral skills.

The Head of NCTB strictly points to the absence of the language learning process that integrates all four skills together to improve second language learning. His words “oral skills of *Bangla* language” denotes that oral skills are not only absent in English language education but also in the first language of the country that is called *Bangla* language. This perception of learning a language without excluding oral skills is a significant obstacle to achieve communicative competence among the learners in Bangladesh.

Goutum, the curriculum material developer of NCTB, further highlights some more factors which are liable for the incompetence of oral skills of English language. He said:

Actually, many factors have been working behind this issue for not implementing listening and speaking skills. One factor is the teachers’ mental perception. Teachers are products of the Grammar-Translation Method. They don’t have any mental preparation to accept or undergo this new perception of teaching listening and speaking skills in a classroom. I often talk to the English teachers, and they have told me that, “as we teachers have learned English only by reading and writing skills then why bother about teaching listening and speaking skill!”

Goutum’s excerpt indicate the factors related to teachers’ preconceived mindset and their misconceptions of oral skills. His comment suggests the unwillingness of teachers to accept changes in English teaching using oral skills as the teachers themselves learned English without developing oral skills. So, many teachers perceive that in the same way, students could also learn English without the oral skills of the English language.

Another policymaker, Hamid, an English-subject advisor of NCTB, further added traditional perception of learning a language by reading and writing skills without considering oral skills. He stated:

The general perception of our experts and English teachers is that both listening and speaking skills automatically develop once they start interacting in English with one another or in an English context. So, students only need to learn reading and writing for their learning of English.

His words denote that oral skills are less important as it can be learned naturally and needs no teaching to the skills. This notion suggested that misconceptions about the importance of developing oral skills in the English language result from understandings how the Bangla language is learned. This type of perception among the teachers demotivates the students to learn English through integrative approach. This also again emphasizes the age-old Grammar-Translation method of second language teaching and learning. Similarly, Aman, an urban teacher also reflects the same issue. He stated:

Many teachers think that they know writing and reading English well, which is enough to teach and learn English, they do not need listening or speaking skills...They do not feel the urge to use English communicatively in the classroom. So, they also do not encourage students to improve their oral skills in the English language.

Anam's observation highlights teachers' unwillingness to practise oral skills in the classroom and to motivate students to develop oral skills as a part of their English learning.

However, Nurul's statement, coming from a classroom practitioner, contradicts the opinions of the policy people. He stated:

On the part of the students, they have a problem with their mindset, which creates an obstacle to practise listening and speaking in a classroom. They think that they will not learn English through the practice of listening. They only think that if they learn writing, they will learn English. Actually, they still do not realise the global necessity of oral proficiency in the English language.

Nurul's statement argues that it is students' mindset that is not conducive to the practice of oracy in the classroom. The students' mindset may have developed because of the exclusion of oral skills in the examination process, which will be discussed further. Students' lack of interest may demotivate teachers to practice oral skills in the classroom, rather than vice-versa. Nurul's comment signals another reason for students' reluctance to practise oral skills. The reasons for the reluctance are that oral skills in English do not appear as a need in a monolingual society and students do not realise the global necessity of developing oral skills in the English language. It is noteworthy to mention here that oral skills are not practised or prioritised in all schools parallel to reading and writing activities. Yunus, a rural teacher, identified another type of misconception regarding the knowledge of knowing English without the consideration of oral proficiency. He stated:

In our country, the concept is that if a person knows grammar well, he knows English well. However, knowing English actually indicates how to communicate in English in practical life. In our school, many students know English grammar well but when they are asked to speak at least five sentences

in English to describe something, they could neither utter the sentences correctly nor fluently. So, you can learn language rules from learning grammar, but without listening and speaking practice, you cannot improve your language proficiency.

Yunus's statement informs that knowing good English grammar is an age-old concept regarding the knowledge of the English language a person in the Bangladeshi context. His indication reflects that although the communicative approach to English teaching has been adopted, the perception based on the traditional grammar-dependent teaching approach is still prevalent. Students still focus more on grammatical form than on the communicative aspect of the language, resulting in them being neither correct nor fluent speakers of the language. His further comment about using "language rules" suggests that by learning language rules in isolation without practising in interaction, one cannot improve language proficiency, which is the core requirement of a language. His statement also indicated that the grammatical rules of a language could be improved through communicative practice.

### **Disconnections between Policy, Classroom Practice, and Assessment**

The National Curriculum for English (2012a) emphasises the importance of teaching and testing all four skills of English. National Education Policy 2010 also evaluates English as a tool to create a knowledge-based society. The policy proposes the English language to be a compulsory subject in all schools, colleges, and universities to develop the communicative skills of all students. However, only reading and writing are being taught and tested. As speaking and listening are being ignored in tests, these are also parked aside in classroom teaching often. A range of opinions of the participants regarding the disconnects are as follows:

Rahim: There is a Bangla proverb that “একবারে না পারিলে দেখো শতবার” (if you fail to do in your first attempt, try it again for hundred times). So, until now, we have failed to implement oral skills in the classroom, but we are trying.

Kamal: As a result of the inclusion of oral skills since 2013 to our secondary English textbook, our classroom environment may become communicative in the true sense. Although the CLT approach was followed by the textbooks since 1997, according to the English curriculum, it was not there for practice until 2013.

The above-mentioned Bangla proverb used by one of the policymakers and the statement of a teacher reported that oral skills have faced an inconsistent progression in Bangladesh since their advent and inclusion in the curriculum. Following the issues discussed in earlier sections, this section examines the disconnections of policy about oral skills, classroom practice, and assessment.

Goutum, a curriculum designer and developer, reported in 2020:

There are three pillars of Education. Number one is curriculum, number two is the assessment and number three is teacher education. The quality of any education stands on these three pillars. When we make our curriculum, we incorporate all the good thoughts as all the religious books write about good things. But you know, to write something on paper is one thing and to

implement those is another thing. As far as Bangladesh is concerned, NCTB (National Curriculum & Textbook Board) develops, revises, and recommends curriculum but NCTB is not liable to implement the curriculum and to conduct the examinations. Ministry of Education implements the curriculum and the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education conduct public examinations. Somehow, a huge incoherence impedes curriculum implementation.

Goutum's statement indicated that curriculum adaptation, curriculum implementation, and curriculum assessment process are incoherent. His analogy of religious books to our curriculum indicates that there is no problem with the curriculum and as a curriculum, it is ideal to follow. Nonetheless, the incoherence was acknowledged by Goutum as three different bodies were responsible for three different tasks of the curriculum—NCTB for the curriculum design and adaptation, the Ministry of Education for the implementation process, and the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education for the assessment process of the curriculum – and all the three bodies lack cohesion within their function. Therefore, it is problematic to put the policy of oral skills into classroom practice and assessment process so far. Hamid further added:

Yes, it is not in the testing process. However, we have a plan to put it in the testing. It is a huge task. Teachers first have to know how to teach and administer a listening or speaking test. The test has to be some specific criteria for grading that teachers should be known. Even for speaking skill, how to test, how to evaluate them, and how to grade them. So, these things should be overcome first, by training and familiarizing myself with the testing- equipment over a long period before listening and speaking are to be tested for English exams.

Hamid's comment has aligned with that of Goutum, as he explained that it is always easy to write and incorporate ideal targets in the educational curriculum, but it is always hard at the edge of implementation. Hamid's words indicate that the ground was not ready in 1997 when oral skills were proposed to be incorporated in classrooms as a part of all four skills of English language teaching and learning. He also indicates that oral skills could be adopted later in the curriculum once the ground is supportive in terms of teachers' capacity to teach and practise oral skills properly. At the same time, teachers need to have long-term training to know how to administer, evaluate and grade a test on listening and speaking skills. Hamid's comment suggests that there was a lack of contextual understanding while incorporating oral skills into the secondary English language curriculum. The ground was not prepared and there was no survey research on how to implement oral skills. His comment also signals that the people at the policy level or decision-makers have not prepared well-trained teachers on how to practise and assess oral skills to make the process fully functional in a classroom. They have not even prepared teacher educators to train the English language teachers. On the other hand, the English teachers who participated in the study reported different reasons why oral skills did not function at classroom practice and assessment levels. Shahnaz, an assistant teacher from an urban school, reported:

Although in our syllabus and textbook, listening and speaking are included and should be assessed in internal exams of the school, we are not able to do that...neither students nor the school authority is interested in it. These are not mandatory for teaching in the classroom, as these are not assessed in public exams. However, 10 marks for listening and 10 marks for speaking have been

allotted to assess these skills in the internal exams but the relevant internal exam committee grades these 20 marks in proportion to the written performance of the students as we the teachers are not allowed to assess these skills internally yet (*showing a facial depression*).

Shahnaz's face expressed disappointment as she made these comments. Her words reinforce the way the education system is exam-driven. Her comments further indicate that it is not important to either the school authority or the students that oral skills are in the syllabus and textbooks if they are not in the assessment process. She also showed disappointment with the internal examination committees for producing a grading of oral skills based not on students' oral proficiency but as a pro-rata with written performance. This has two implications. Firstly, it supports the finding that the importance of oral skills is not understood. Secondly, her comment has re-ignited the ongoing debate in Bangladeshi academia (Musa, 2017) that the exam-driven education system has transformed the students from learners to mere examinees as the students are not keen to learn but only to pass the exam. Yunus, a rural teacher, also spoke about the procedures for grading oral skills: "No, we do not teach oral skills and we also do not assess these skills in our school. We assign grades based on students' written performance only."

Ismail, a rural English teacher, reported some other issues that prevent him from practising oral skills in his classroom. He stated:

No, personally I do not know whether our teachers are instructed to conduct a school-based assessment of listening and speaking skills. Listening and speaking are treated as out of the syllabus. So, with the pressure of completing the syllabus, we cannot practise listening and speaking.

Yunus clearly indicates a discrepancy between policy and practices around placing equal importance on teaching across written and oral skills of the English language. His words further indicate that the discrepancy seems to cause the absence of assessing students' oral skills in the examination as the teachers assess students' English language competence by their written performance only. Ismail, however, puts the issue differently. He seems to criticise the policymakers in this regard. His comment reflects that teachers are not well-informed about the policy of teaching, practising and assessing oral skills. His comment also highlights the disconnection between policy and practice: how can oral skills be included in the curriculum if they are out of the syllabus? His comment also raises another question regarding the validity of the current syllabus for secondary English education as he reported that he could not practice oral skills due to the pressure of completing the syllabus. However, oral skills are an integral part of the syllabus and textbook. Despite the disconnects, Goutum, one of the two key persons who writes, edits, and develops syllabus and materials for Secondary English textbooks, and Anam, another urban teacher, reported their optimistic views regarding the assessment of oral skills soon.

Goutum: Yes, the government has decided not only to practice oral skills in an English classroom but also to assess these skills. So, NCTB has allotted 10 marks for listening skill and 10 marks for speaking skill. These two skills will be conducted in public exams. Although not yet but very soon. However, the assessments will be done by the schools. Even many schools and their teachers are teaching and assessing these skills in their schools. For this reason, the Government is calculating and analysing the possibilities to introduce it in public



exams. Recently, there has been a mutual dialogue between our Ministry of Education and the University of Manchester in providing technical support and training support for Bangladeshi educators, teachers, and experts so that we can implement tests of listening and speaking in public exams successfully.

Anam: These oral skills are supposed to be assessed internally at school exams but still these are not included in public exams. However, we assume that if these skills are included in public exams, we have to send the assessed marks to the Education Boards. Besides, *English for Today* textbooks of NCTB have exercises on listening proficiency and assessment instructions, for example, lesson 22 of the Grade 6 textbook instructs: “listen to the CD/audio and fill in the gaps of the following text.”

Anam’s comment opens multiple questions about the assessment of oral skills in public examinations. Firstly, if the assessment of oral skills is included in the public examination, how it will be assessed in the schools. Anam assumes that oral skills could be assessed in schools internally and the marks could be sent to the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education, but the issue of fairness and malpractice may arise.

Goutum’s statement denotes that the development of curriculum, textbooks and assessment is a continuous process for better teaching and learning outcomes. As far as the practice of oral skills is concerned, it is reported by Goutum that there is a difference between urban and rural contexts in terms of conducting oral assessments. He also signals that although oral skills are not included in public examination, there is a probability that they are included and technical feasibility is being figured out. However, it is self-contradictory as oral skills are already included in the curriculum since 2012 but till now there is no content to teach or test oral skills in classrooms. So, to include oral skills in public exams is still outreach. However, Anam’s statement contradicts Goutum’s observation in this regard.

### **Documentary Analysis**

The disconnections between policy and practice explored by the interview data are also supported by the documentary analysis. The disconnections led the National Curriculum & Textbook Board to revise its secondary curriculum in 2012 for English language education considering the National Education Policy 2010. The only textbook for the whole country at the secondary level, *English for Today* has been developed accordingly in 2013 for Grades 6 to 10, to help students attain competency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, participants from both policy and practice levels reported that there is a disconnection between curriculum, classroom practice, and assessment. There are multiple reasons for this disconnection. Appendices I and J show both the proposed sample question paper given in the textbook and the actual question paper for the subject of English for the SSC examination. This highlights the gap between the proposed question paper and the question paper which appeared in the SSC examination.

Moreover, another problematic question arises. If oral skills are assessed by the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISEs) rather than assessed in schools, are the BISEs capable of conducting the assessment process? There are issues in terms of time, space for test-setting, training expert test conductors and designers, and developing relevant test equipment. Nine Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education are responsible for executing the public examinations, such as SSC and HSC examinations (Ministry of Education,

2010). More than 1,774,533 students sit for the SSS examination from 8,551 institutions in 3,412 centres around the country ("SSC, equivalent exams begin," 2018).

## **Discussion**

I analysed both in-depth interview data and documentary analysis of participants' that reveal that there is a great extent of mismatch between what the policy documents suggest for secondary English education and what is practised in classrooms.

It ranges from issues regarding the current Bangladeshi debates about the colonial impact of English language education, the methodology of CLT, the need to customise CLT for the local context, confusion about the practice of CLT, and blame game between policymakers and ground people to the disconnections of policy, practice, and negligence of the importance of oral skills for English language education and in particular, the importance of listening skill for English language proficiency (Figure 2).

Besides, the effort to implement a CLT approach has given rise to confusion in the classrooms of many Bangladeshi schools. Environmental issues such as large class sizes, improper seating arrangements (such as the learners keeping themselves seated at a motionless place), exam-oriented instruction, and low proficiency of students also influenced CLT practices. Many researchers have argued that effectively implementing CLT in the Asian context is almost impossible (Karim et al., 2017; Ma, 2009; Yildiz & Albay, 2015). Nevertheless, despite these limitations, English teachers in Bangladesh are encouraged to implement CLT for developing students' skills in English. So, the urge for the glocalisation of the CLT approach is needed.

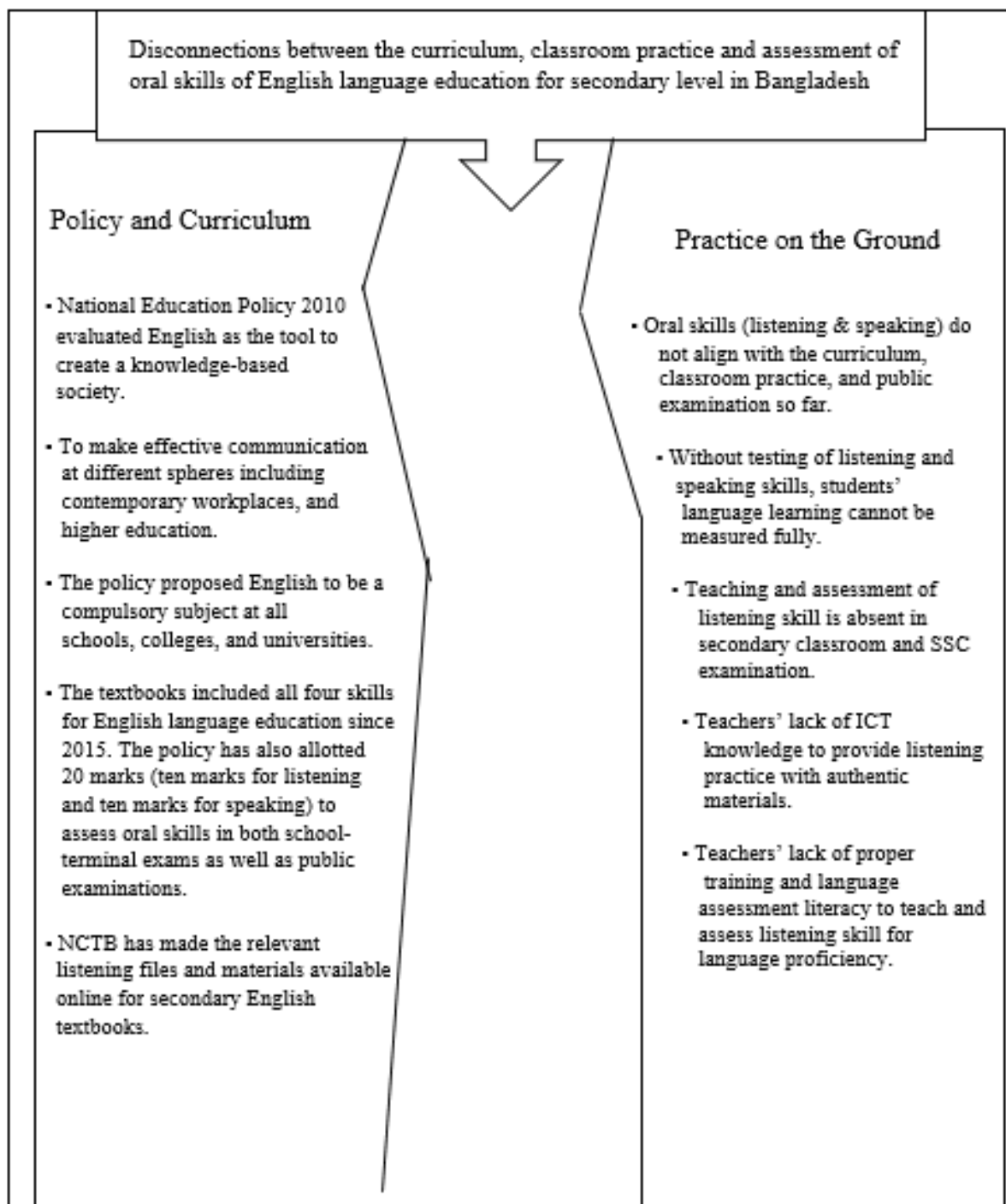
Due to the impact of a long tradition of using the Grammar-Translation Method for teaching English, many teachers hold a traditional mindset, and they are reluctant to adopt CLT-based methods. However, the reality is that students who learn English from Grade I to Grade 12 still struggle with it even after going to university. Therefore, there is a perceived tension between a grammar-based approach and the CLT approach to teaching and learning English in terms of effective learning outcomes. Besides, recent research focuses more on grammaring than grammar (Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Nan, 2015) as English grammar is not only a set of specific structures but also an important resource for meaning-making and language used appropriately in a certain communicative context. Larsen-Freeman coined the term "grammaring," which is described as, "the ability to use grammatical constructions accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately" (Larsen-Freeman, 2014, p. 264).

There is a gap that appears between what policymakers have said and what the teachers have perceived in terms of dealing with oral skills in both classroom teaching and assessment. Although the participants who are teachers reported that they received training in CLT, the training was not sufficient, and the training programs were not aligned to the reality of their classroom contexts. A range of statements is concerned with the necessity of developing specialised training courses on the oral skills of the English language.

The data from the participants have postulated the spectrum of English language education planning and policy in the Bangladeshi context in connection to multiple disconnections between the curriculum, classroom teaching-learning process, and assessment procedure. Several participants have specifically reported multiple reasons for the disconnections between policy, classroom practice and assessment of oral skills (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Existing Disconnections between Curriculum Policy and Practice for Secondary English Education*



They have identified that there is a lack of liaison between the various government departments, such as the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Ministry of Education, and the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education to make coherence in teaching, learning, and assessment of oral skills. They intend to learn only what is tested in an examination. Earlier, Podder (2013) found that students were not interested in practising oral skills as the practice would not bring them any direct benefits in terms of marks and grading. This research clarifies the nature of the disconnection between the intended English assessment policy directions and

the pattern of ongoing practice. So, this research has underlined the need for a positive rapport between the policy and practice of the curriculum.

Another major obstacle identified by the participants is the dominance of the examination. The exam-driven teaching and learning have restricted the curriculum alignment with the assessments of oral skills in public examinations, such as SSC and HSC examinations. Although 10 marks each for assessing both listening and speaking are allotted in the Curriculum Policy for English in 2012, these skills are not assessed in public examinations. Consequently, both the teachers and students do not feel the urge to improve their oral skills. International literature acknowledged that if listening proficiency were not tested being an important aspect of second language learning, teachers would not pay attention to teaching it (Richards, 2015). Other researchers in the Bangladeshi context (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018) also argued that if listening and speaking skills would not be part of the public examination, these would not be practised by students and teachers in classroom activities and often neglected. As a result, public examinations lack “content validity.” If a language test needs to have “content validity,” it must have the constitutions and representations of a sample of the language skill to measure that with which it is meant to be concerned (Hughes, 2014; Kabir, 2018). However, the public examinations do not assess all four skills and therefore, cannot measure the communicative competence of the students (Sultana, 2018).

Both the policymakers and teachers are unaware of the benefits of improving listening proficiency to develop speaking as well as other aspects of language proficiency. They perceive that the students will develop listening skill automatically with time without teaching them. However, both the concepts “listening to learn” and “learning to listen” for language education (Vandergrift, 2013) are missing in the process of teaching listening skill in secondary English education in Bangladesh. It is also evident from the data that although some teachers teach the listening skill, however, they only focus on the “product” of listening rather than the “process” of listening for English language education. Moreover, as far as oral skills in classroom-based language learning are concerned, listening competence precedes speaking competence (Brown & Lee, 2015). As my discussion proceeded, problems and challenges were explored regarding teaching, learning, and assessment of listening skill at the secondary level in Bangladesh. Therefore, the emergent trend of disconnections of English education in Bangladesh can be connected to a certain extent to Biggs’s (2003) CA model (Figure 1).

In the constructive model we start with the outcomes we intend students to learn and align teaching and assessment to those outcomes. This is because for students, assessment defines what is important in the curriculum and they will learn what they think will be assessed. Similarly, there is a common perception among policymakers and teachers that oral skills are not considered important skills for learning and developing the English language. So, until the oral skills are not assessed in public exams, both teachers and learners will not be interested in oral skills. Therefore, it is needed to align the curriculum planning with the classroom practice and learning outcomes through relevant assessment. In this regard, the constructive Alignment Model can be a framework to cohere between curriculum, along with classroom practice in connection to the assessment of oral skills of the English language in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's problem is complex. It has a great number of overly populated classrooms at secondary level. The duration of teacher-student contact hours is insufficient to provide necessary input to increase English proficiency. The teachers are found less trained to teach and assess oral skills efficiently. There is a gulf of differences between the policies and the practice of listening skill, secondary teachers’ skills, notions of listening skill by the teachers and the students for language education, availability of materials, supportive environments, and technological assistance. It seems that the country has “put the cart before the horse” for its English language teaching and learning process as classroom teaching and testing only cover the reading and writing portions of the text. Therefore, the practice and assessment of oral skills

both at the macro and micro levels of the curriculum reveal a huge gap. The lens of the curriculum is always a top-down approach in Bangladesh as the policymakers idealistically propose different policies without considering the reality on the ground. The classroom culture is not conducive to practise oral skills which can be challenging for assessing oral skills. There is a separation between the world of the policymaker and the teachers' perception and their teaching practice.

Therefore, the context of English language education in Bangladesh is not significantly compatible with Bigg's CA model. Nonetheless, the CA model can open up a scope to examine the inclusion of the opinions and paradigms of the policymakers and related to the curriculum as well as the rural and urban secondary English teachers. This framework can help align the disconnections between curriculum, classroom practice and assessment of secondary English education in Bangladesh for attaining the intended learning outcomes.

The implication of the study can be helpful for the policymakers and curriculum developers by setting up a monitoring commission. The monitoring commission will take note of research and carefully consider local problems so that it can shape policy strategically and effectively. Only then, they can fit the policies into the local context and resolve grounded needs. To do this process, policymakers and the curriculum developers need to be informed by the best international research about language learning and at the same time, they need to ensure that they adapt general ideas to the local conditions of both rural and urban schools. They must ensure the provision of relevant resources for practising oral activities in secondary classrooms.

So, further study needs to conduct action research to investigate the classroom practice of listening and its benefits for overall English language development for secondary students. There needs to be more research on teachers' training focusing specifically on increasing their capacity in teaching listening and speaking skills in a secondary classroom. The training programmes need to be practically applicable to prepare teachers on how to do listening and speaking practices better in a classroom considering the contextual need and reality.

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