
Research

English Language Assessment Policies and Pedagogical Realities in Bangladeshi Secondary Education

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Abstract: Assessment plays a critical role in educational systems, serving as a source of information on the achievement of learning goals and as a basis for important decisions on student evaluation, curriculum, and teaching methods. This study investigates the alignment between declared policies and actual practices of English language assessment in secondary schools of Dhaka, Bangladesh. The findings reveal a great discrepancy between the recommended assessment policies, which call for a comprehensive assessment of the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and the common classroom practices where the assessment primarily centers around reading and writing, largely ignoring listening and speaking skills. This difference is further aggravated by such factors as large class size, insufficient training of teachers in communicative assessment techniques, and limited availability of multimedia resources. The paper concludes with strategic recommendations to bridge this policy-practice gap, including increased teacher professional development, integration of all four skills into formal assessment frameworks, and provision of essential technological infrastructure to foster a more holistic and effective English language learning environment in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Assessment, Secondary Education, Assessment Practices, Formative Assessment, Summative Assessment, Curriculum Alignment

1. Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental catalyst for societal progress and socio-economic transformation. It is a lifelong journey during which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. Development of strong curricula, innovative teaching-learning methodologies and carefully designed learning experiences are critical to the promotion of student learning which is one of the main objectives of any educational system. In this regard, continuous monitoring of the development of students and the

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effectiveness of educational interventions is crucial. Assessing learner achievement is a key function of formal education systems. It is a systematic process for collecting, reviewing, and using data about educational programs to improve student learning and development. Moreover, the assessment processes of an educational system need to be a primary focus in order to understand the real nature of that system. Assessment, in general, can be divided into two main types: summative and formative. *Summative Assessment* is generally given at the end of an instructional period, often with high stakes and a lot of points. These assessments are aimed at assessing students' learning against predetermined standards or benchmarks. On the other hand, *Formative Assessment* is a continuous process that is cyclic in nature and aims to monitor students' learning and find the best ways to modify instruction and facilitate the development of learning during the teaching process.

The global dominance of English language over the last two decades has compelled many Asian countries, including Bangladesh, to undertake major reforms in their English language policies and curricula. Such reforms were started in Bangladesh in the 1990s, due to communicative approach of English language teaching. With over 30 million students learning English as a compulsory subject in different educational streams, from primary to pre-tertiary levels, Bangladesh is among the world's biggest English language learning populations. English is considered an influential language and in 1976, the Ministry of Education, Bangladesh, introduced it as an academic subject for the improvement of foreign language competence. This was later made a compulsory subject from Grade 1 to Grade 12, and as a Medium of Instruction (MOI) at the tertiary level. The status of English was further strengthened by the National Education Policy, 2010 which included it as an academic subject across all levels of education in recognition of its widespread importance in everyday life.

The national curriculum specifically points out the development of all four skills of English language: reading, writing, listening and speaking. One of the crucial observations, however, is the lack of clear assessment policies historically incorporated within the Primary English Curriculum, often resulting in instructors using varied assessment methods, possibly at the expense of effective student learning. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) later introduced a teacher's guide highlighting continuous or formative assessment, but traditional evaluation methods, often centered on discrete test items, have continued. These methods often neglect communicative tasks needed for the

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evaluation of students' discourse production skills. Consequently, English language assessment in Bangladesh has largely been summative, mostly evaluating memorization and comprehension, not higher-order skills like presentation, analysis, synthesis and critical thinking. In particular, formal assessment has consistently ignored listening and speaking skills.

In this scenario, it is high time to explore the real condition of the English language examination system at the secondary level in Bangladesh. Such an inquiry is crucial to identify areas of development and to match the current needs. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the situation of English language assessment in secondary education and to identify the challenges teachers face in implementing assessment policies in the classroom. Addressing these issues, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective language assessment and inform policy adjustments that can foster more equitable and comprehensive evaluation practices.

1.1 Objectives of the Research

The following objectives are guiding this study:

1. To examine the current situation of assessment practices of English Language at secondary education level in Dhaka.
2. Determine and discuss the particular issues and challenges encountered by teachers in implementing English language assessment policies.
3. To provide evidence-based solutions and recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness and alignment of English language assessment practices with curriculum goals.

1.2 Research Questions

To meet the above objectives, this research sets to answer the following questions;

1. What is the present situation of English Language assessment in the secondary level schools in Dhaka?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the assessment system in English language and what are the challenges they face in its implementation?
3. What are the students' perceptions towards the English language assessment system and what difficulties do they experience in the assessment procedures?
4. What potential solutions can be proposed to deal with the problems and improve the

effectiveness of English language assessment practices?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The implications of this research into the policies and practices of English language assessment in secondary schools are significant for pedagogical theory and educational policy. This study attempts to contribute to the continuous improvement of English language assessment frameworks in Bangladesh by comprehensively examining the existing assessment mechanisms. The findings will provide valuable insights into the perceptions and challenges faced by both teachers and students, thus informing targeted interventions and professional development initiatives. To sum up, this study seeks to foster a more effective and equitable assessment system that accurately reflects students' English language proficiency and supports their overall language development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Assessment

The word assessment comes from the Latin "assidere", which means "to sit beside or with" (Wiggins 1993 cited in Earl, 2003). Assessment refers to a number of techniques for gathering data about a learner's language proficiency or accomplishment (Nunan, 2003). Assessing students' progress through certain teaching and learning activities is called assessment. In other words, the assessment measures how much of the learning outcomes previously set in the curriculum are attained by the students (National Curriculum, 2012). In the context of education, Assessment can be regarded as taking place whenever one person, in direct or indirect interaction with another one, is aware of collecting and interpreting information about that person's knowledge, understanding, abilities and attitudes (Rowntree, 1977). In other words, assessment is known as the process of acquiring and analyzing data to draw conclusions about student learning. It is the fundamental relationship between teaching and learning activities, content, and learning outcomes. Both students and their teachers use assessment to determine where students are in their learning, where they need to go, and what the best way to get there is (ACT Government: Education and Learning, 2011).

In addition, Assessment is a procedure through which a teacher determines the current levels of knowledge and skills of the students, as well as their intellectual achievement and potential development areas (Ali, 2016). Teaching and learning cannot occur without assessment. Both teachers and students need to assess their language abilities

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in order to improve their English language proficiency. Teachers should be aware of the needs and goals of their students. Teachers can determine what can be the next steps of learning that he is going to take through assessment. Since assessment enables one to gather and evaluate learning evidence and make judgments about a learner's achievement, it has a "Direct relationship with the students learning" (Begum, 2007 cited in banbeis, 2013). Teachers are the main examiners of the students' performance in the classroom. They must therefore understand the goal of the assessment. The nature, method, and excellence of teaching and learning are significantly influenced by the type of assessment. Since the process of assessment is primarily concerned with determining whether students have achieved required learning outcomes, it must be clearly aligned with the aims and objectives of the curriculum and teaching practices (Earl, 2003). As a regulatory process, it is used to determine whether students are successful in achieving the educational objectives or goals (National Education Policy of Bangladesh 2010).

2.2 The Benefits of Assessment

An essential aspect of the teaching-learning process is student assessment. Good teaching requires research and an understanding of the students. The assessment system is used as a gauge to assess ability of the students for further studies or a degree. It not only evaluates students' levels of learning competency but also helps in decision-making regarding student learning (Nitko, 2004 cited in Salahuddin, 2018).

To gather reliable information for teachers, the role of assessment in teaching and learning is vital. It makes well-informed judgments of the learner's progress in relation to the task requirements and offers feedback to teachers and students on their respective pedagogical approaches. The purpose of this tool is to collect data regarding students' learning by gathering evidence of their performance, which is subsequently used in educational quality (Arrafi & Sumarni, 2018). The type and standard of assessment determines how well students learn. This implies that a student can become a good learner through effective assessment (Begum, 2007 cited in banbeis, 2013).

2.3 The Purpose of Assessment

The purpose of assessment is twofold. It gives the students a chance to show what they've learned, provide feedback on their mistakes, and improve their performance. It serves as a great tool for teachers to assess whether their selected technique of instruction is effective or not. According to Earl (2003), there are three purposes of assessment.

1. Assessment of learning
2. Assessment for learning
3. Assessment as learning

Assessment of learning is the most common type of assessment used in schools. It has Summative purposes. It is used to verify what students already know and are capable of, as well as to show if they have met the objectives of the curriculum. Also, it certifies learning and informs parents and students about their academic progress by usually indicating where they stand with other pupils.

On the other hand, Assessment for learning takes place during the lesson, often multiple times, rather than at the end. The focus of assessment for learning switches from summative to formative evaluation, from making judgments to producing descriptions that can be applied to the subsequent learning stage. It recognizes that each student learns in a unique way, but it also acknowledges that many students follow predictable patterns and pathways. It needs careful planning on the part of teachers so that they can use the data to understand not just what students know but also how, when, and whether they apply what they have learned (Earl & Katz, 2006).

Another one is Assessment as learning which also gives emphasis on formative assessment. It occurs when students keep a close eye on what they are learning and use the feedback they get to make modifications, adaptations, and even significant changes to their understanding. It focuses on the student's role as the critical connector between assessment and learning. When students are critical, engaged and active learners, they interpret material, connect it to their previous knowledge, and apply it to new learning.

Among them, "assessment of learning" is related to summative assessment and the other two such as "assessment for learning" and "assessment as learning" are related to formative assessment. All three assessment serves important and distinct purposes. Assessment as learning and assessment for learning take on a far greater significance than the assessment of learning if one wants to improve learning for all students.

According to Stiggins (1991, cited in Salahuddin, 2018), teachers use assessments in their classes to accomplish at least three purposes.

1. As a tool for decision-making (e.g., they identify students' needs, choose students for special services, divide students into groups for teaching, and issue grades).
2. As instructional tools (e.g., to inform students of the expectations for their performance, to give them practice, to encourage self- and peer-evaluation to improve their performance)
3. As a behavior control mechanism or classroom management to keep students under control.

2.4 Types of Assessment

There are various categories or sorts of assessment. In addition, all kinds of assessments are used during or after lessons to ensure students are learning. There are two major kinds of assessment based on the time and type (National Curriculum, 2012).

1. Formative assessment
2. Summative assessment.

Formative assessment is termed as informal assessment. Formative assessment is ongoing, and the information obtained from it is typically used as the basis for further classroom work and the improvement of learners (Rahman & Khan, 2021). Sometimes, students are evaluated before or after a lesson, depending on the situation which is known as Formative or ongoing assessment (National Curriculum, 2012). During the learning process, formative assessment is carried out by teachers to use the results to enhance teaching (Nunan, 2003). Assessment is counted as formative when teachers use it to monitor their students' progress, gauge how well they have mastered what they should have learned, and then use this information to change their lesson plan (Hughes, 2003). Formative assessment is used to know the present status of a student's learning and to determine the probable way out for ensuring the development of learning (Salahuddin, 2018). Formative assessment is termed as assessment for learning. It is used by teachers to assess students' understanding at the beginning of each instructional period and throughout teaching. Also, it is often called assessment as learning, in which students evaluate and monitor their development (ACT Government: Education and Learning, 2011).

According to NCTB (2012), There are some of the positive aspects of formative assessment.

1. Continuous assessment helps to identify the weaknesses of learner's learning and to devise immediate preventative measures.
2. It gives opportunities to review the practical work of students and offer suggestions for development.
3. Assessment can be completed with less effort and expense, and prevention actions can be implemented gradually. These shortcomings cannot be measured through summative evaluation.
4. It is easy and inexpensive to evaluate some of the specialized skills of a learner such as listening, speaking, reading, etc. in this way and then provide guidance as necessary.
5. In order to make further corrections, formative assessments can be used to examine learners' affective aspects, including their individual and social behavior, values, and so forth.
6. Through learner assessment, teaching-learning methods and approaches are also evaluated to identify strengths and weaknesses and make the required changes.

On the other hand, Summative assessment is the word for evaluation that occurs at the end of a course, a term, or a school year, frequently intending to give educational authorities aggregated data on program outcomes. Hughes (2003) demonstrates that summative assessment is used at the end of a term, semester, or year to gauge both individual and group accomplishments. The assessment that is completed at the end of a course or programme, such as the terminal exam, final exam, SSC test, etc., is summative (National Curriculum, 2012). Summative assessment refers to that type of assessment which generally occurs at the end of the course or year (Salahuddin, 2018). Summative assessment is termed as assessment of learning which is used towards and at the end of an instruction period. Teachers use activities that ask students to demonstrate their mastery and knowledge of the course material to record the pinnacle of their learning accomplishments. Summative assessment data gives teachers knowledge about the efficiency of their teaching methods, the amount of time required for instruction and how to improve their methods for future students (ACT Government: Education and Learning, 2011).

There are some of the benefits of summative assessment (Earl, 2003).

1. Through summative assessment, the quantity and accuracy of the students' work are evaluated.

2. This assessment system shows which students are performing well and which ones are not.
3. This assessment system is used to make a rank order of the students and provide each one of them with a symbol that represents their place in the group.

2.5 Assessment Practices in Bangladesh

Secondary education is one of the most significant and expansive sub-sectors of education in Bangladesh, with a large number of institutions and teachers. There are a variety of methods to evaluate students' learning in secondary schools, including examinations (written, practical, and viva voce), practical activities, class tests, monthly exams, and others. Examinations are the most important method for determining students' academic success in the formal education system of Bangladesh. The curriculum has traditionally served as the basis for the assessment system in Bangladesh, which exclusively evaluated students' memorization and comprehension abilities. Other knowledge skill areas including application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation are hardly assessed (BANBEIS, 2013).

The testing and assessment culture in English language education and learning is dominated by ineffective assessment techniques that primarily emphasize rote learning. An accurate evaluation may be done when the student's internalized knowledge is tested rather than rote learning (National Education Policy, 2010). According to the MoE's (Ministry of Education, 2010) Advisory Committee for the Development of English, the current assessment practices are not in line with the aims and objectives of the curricula (Islam et al., 2021). The present system of assessment does not match the specified objectives of teaching English at the secondary level of education in Bangladesh. The summative assessment system is totally dominating. However, the formative assessment is developing slowly. Despite the emphasis on the assessment of English skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking in the curriculum guidelines, only reading and writing skills are assessed in the examination. As speaking and listening skills are not evaluated, students are unaware of the importance of these two skills. So, educational authorities should allocate marks for these two skills in the curriculum (Ali, 2016).

To ensure high marks in the region terminal examination, teachers just keep focus on completing the syllabus. The current evaluation system naturally encourages students to develop the habit of memorization to pass the written exam. In addition, the role of

suggestions in preparing for examination is crucial. When students are given and follow suggestions, they are less likely to study the entire syllabus, leading to inadequate preparation for moving on to the next level. Besides, for exam preparation, they typically rely on notebooks and guidebooks as well as previous exam questions (Das et al., 2014).

There is a lack of language assessment literacy and professional testing background among the teachers which hinders their performance in conducting assessment-related tasks. Also, it contributes to their limitations in the use of assessments to improve teaching (Sultana, 2019). Though teachers know about general or summative assessment, their knowledge of formative assessment is inadequate (Salahuddin, 2020). Also, in Bangladesh, secondary English instructors receive little or no training for assessing language proficiency. Also, while assessing the students, teachers face some of the challenges like lack of motivation of the students, large classrooms, teachers' workloads, lack of teaching aids etc. (Ali, 2016).

3. Methodology

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of English language assessment policies and practices in secondary schools in Dhaka. The study employed a non-probability sampling procedure for participant selection.

3.1 Participants and Sampling

Data were collected from four secondary schools located in urban areas of Dhaka. The participant groups included:

- Students: A total of 40 students from classes 9-10 were selected for the quantitative phase, utilizing a survey questionnaire. From each of the four schools, 10 students (5 male and 5 female) were randomly chosen to ensure gender representation. The primary purpose of collecting quantitative data from students was to ascertain their perceptions regarding the English language assessment system.
- Teachers: 12 English teachers, with three from each of the four secondary schools, were interviewed to gather qualitative data. This aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of the assessment procedures and the challenges they encountered during implementation.

- Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Participants: A focus group discussion was conducted with 10 students (5 male and 5 female) to gain in-depth qualitative insights into the current conditions of English language assessment at secondary schools.

3.2 Data Collection Instruments

Three primary instruments were utilized for data collection:

1. Survey Questionnaire

Administered to 40 students to collect quantitative data on their perceptions of English language assessment. The questionnaire comprised statements rated on a Likert scale, covering various aspects of assessment practices.

2. Semi-structured Interviews

Conducted with 12 teachers to elicit detailed qualitative data on their experiences, challenges, and perspectives regarding English language assessment. The interview protocol included questions about their assessment practices, challenges faced, and alignment with curriculum objectives.

3. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Facilitated with 10 students to explore their perceptions, challenges, and suggestions concerning the English language assessment procedure in a group setting.

3.3 Data Analysis

▪ *Quantitative Data Analysis*

Data obtained from the student survey questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to present the distribution of student perceptions. The findings were visually represented through charts and diagrams.

▪ *Qualitative Data Analysis*

Transcripts from teacher interviews and focus group discussions were subjected to thematic analysis. This involved identifying themes, patterns, and key insights related to assessment practices, challenges, and perceptions. Direct quotes from participants were used to substantiate the identified themes.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Participants were informed of their right to

withdraw from the study at any point. Ethical guidelines for conducting research involving human subjects were strictly observed.

4. Findings

This section presents the synthesized findings derived from the mixed-methods data collection, encompassing student questionnaire responses, teacher interviews, and student focus group discussions. The findings are structured to address the research questions and to highlight the key insights into English language assessment policies and practices of secondary schools in Dhaka.

4.1 Student Perceptions: Questionnaire Analysis

A survey questionnaire was administered to 40 secondary school students to identify their perceptions of English language assessment practices. The analysis revealed several notable trends:

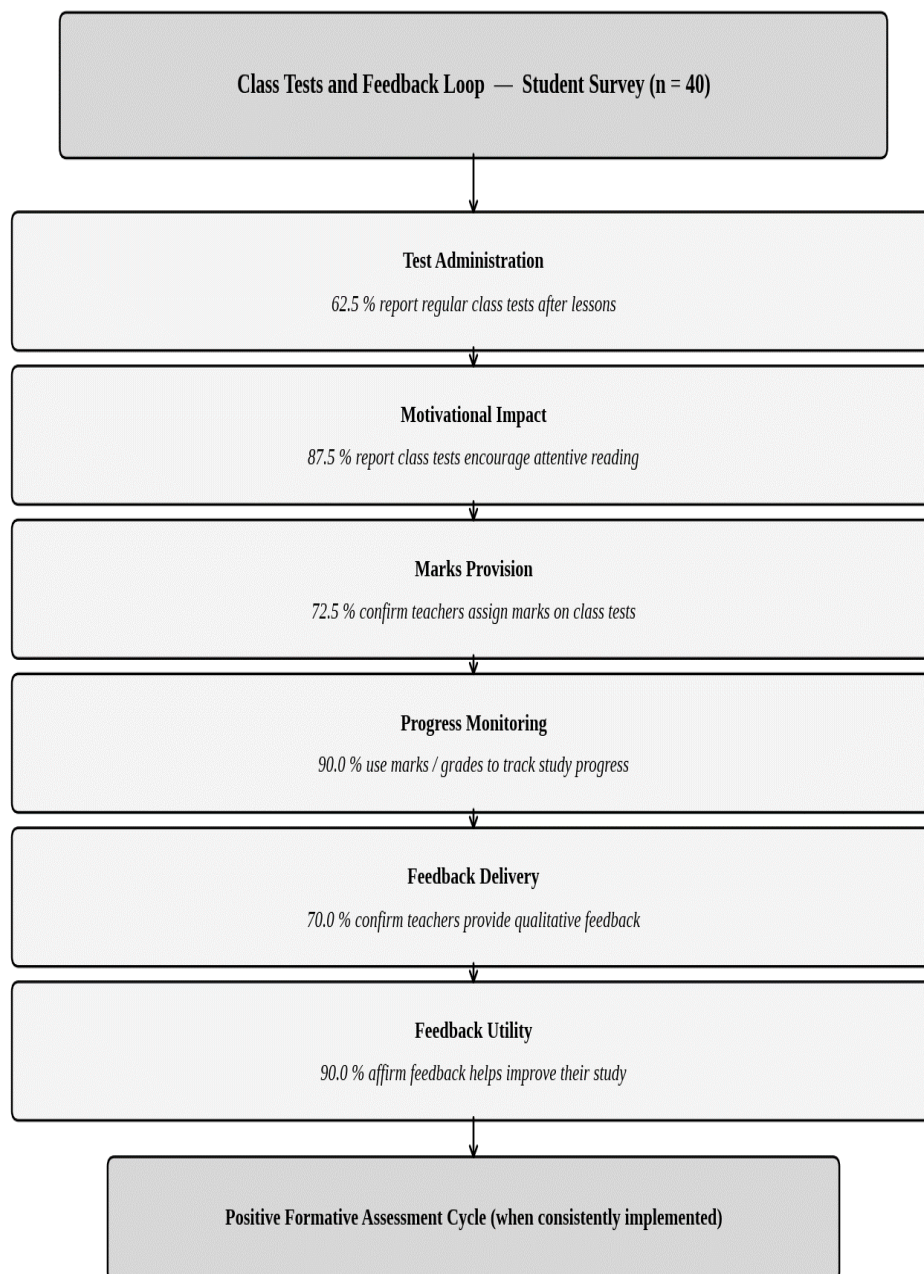


Figure 1: Findings from Students' Survey

■ **Formative Assessment Practices**

A majority of students (52.5% agreed, 17.5% strongly agreed) reported that teachers frequently initiate topics by asking questions to ascertain their understanding (Statement 01). Similarly, a substantial proportion (57.5% agreed, 37.5% strongly agreed) indicated that teachers pose questions during lessons (Statement 03) and at the conclusion of lessons (57.5% strongly agreed, 37.5% agreed) (Statement 05). However, there was less consensus regarding other formative practices: 52.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed that teachers conduct short tests at the beginning of class (Statement 02), and 39.5% disagreed or

strongly disagreed with teachers assigning pair/group work for assessment (Statement 04). Regarding writing summaries, 37.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 42.5% agreed or strongly agreed (Statement 06).

- **Class Tests and Feedback**

Class tests were perceived as a common practice, with 62.5% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that teachers administer short tests after lessons (Statement 07). These tests were largely seen as motivational, with 87.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they encourage attentive reading (Statement 08). Furthermore, 72.5% of students agreed or strongly agreed that teachers provide marks for these tests (Statement 09), and a significant 90% believed these marks help them track their study progress (Statement 10). Feedback was also recognized as beneficial, with 70% agreeing or strongly agreeing that teachers provide feedback (Statement 12), and 90% affirming that feedback helps to improve their study (Statement 14).

- **Skill Assessment in Practice**

While reading and writing tasks were consistently assigned and received corrective feedback (77.5% agreed/strongly agreed for reading tasks - Statement 15; 82.5% agreed/strongly agreed for writing tasks - Statement 16), the assessment of listening and speaking skills showed a different pattern. Only 47.5% agreed or strongly agreed that listening tasks were assigned with feedback (Statement 17), and a mere 30% agreed or strongly agreed for speaking tasks (Statement 18), with 45% remaining neutral.

- **Final Examination Assessment**

In the final examinations, 55% of students agreed or strongly agreed that reading skills were assessed (Statement 19), and 72.5% agreed or strongly agreed for writing skills (Statement 20). However, only 30% agreed or strongly agreed that listening skills were assessed (Statement 21), and a striking 57.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed that speaking skills were assessed (Statement 22).

- **Overall Satisfaction**

A significant majority of students (72.5%) expressed dissatisfaction with the current English language assessment system in their schools (Statement 23). Open-ended responses indicated that the primary source of dissatisfaction stemmed from the neglect of listening and speaking skills, which students felt hampered their overall English language

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development. For instance, one student remarked, "We learn listening and speaking in class, but they are never tested in exams, so we don't feel they are important." Another added, "How can we improve our speaking if it's not a part of our grades?"

These findings suggest a disconnection between the curriculum goals of comprehensive skill assessment and the actual implementation in classrooms, particularly concerning productive and receptive oral skills.

4.2 Teacher Perspectives: Interview Analysis

Interviews with 12 English teachers provided qualitative insights into their perceptions and challenges regarding English language assessment:

- *Perceptions of English Language Assessment*

Most teachers held a positive view of the current English language assessment system, particularly appreciating the inclusion of continuous assessment, which they believed made summative assessment more effective. They perceived the system as student-oriented, offering various opportunities for student participation and skill development. One teacher commented, "The continuous assessment helps students to improve gradually, and they get many chances to practice English." However, a minority expressed negative opinions, suggesting that students struggled to adapt to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach embedded in the assessment, lacking the necessary capabilities. One teacher noted, "Our students are not ready for CLT; they are used to traditional methods."

- *Class Test Practices*

The majority of teachers reported conducting class tests as a form of formative assessment, though not always on a regular schedule. They acknowledged that these tests contribute to students' development of reading and writing skills. A teacher stated, "I give class tests to check understanding, especially for reading and writing." The consensus was that more regular class tests would better prepare students for final examinations.

- *Assessment of Specific Skills*

Teachers largely confirmed assessing reading and writing skills through various activities. For instance, a teacher mentioned, "We assess reading through comprehension passages and writing through paragraphs and essays." In stark contrast, most teachers admitted to not formally assessing listening skills. Some occasionally incorporated listening activities by reading texts aloud, but these were not typically graded. Suggestions for

improving listening assessment included dedicated listening tasks with clear marking schemes. Similarly, while a few teachers claimed to assess speaking skills through activities like role-play, the majority did not. They emphasized the need for structured approaches to speaking assessment, including allocating specific marks.

- **Challenges in Assessment Implementation**

Teachers identified several significant challenges: large class sizes, which impede individualized assessment; time limitations within fixed class durations, making comprehensive assessment difficult; and a lack of multimedia facilities, hindering the integration of authentic listening and speaking activities. Additionally, many students, being from Bangla-medium backgrounds, struggled with English-only instructions, leading to demotivation. A teacher articulated, "With 60 students in a class, it's impossible to assess everyone's speaking." Another added, "We don't have projectors or audio systems to play listening materials."

- **Alignment with Curriculum and Need for Change**

Most teachers perceived a gap between the curriculum's emphasis on all four skills and the actual assessment practices, where only reading and writing were consistently evaluated. They strongly advocated for changes and improvements in the assessment procedure, suggesting steps to ensure a more balanced evaluation of all language skills.

4.3 Student Perspectives: Focus Group Discussion Analysis

Focus group discussions with 10 students (5 male, and 5 female) provided further qualitative depth:

- **Perception of Current Assessment**

Students generally expressed satisfaction with the current English language assessment procedure, appreciating both formative and summative components. However, they highlighted challenges primarily related to formative assessment. One student noted, "I like that we have class tests, but sometimes they are too sudden."

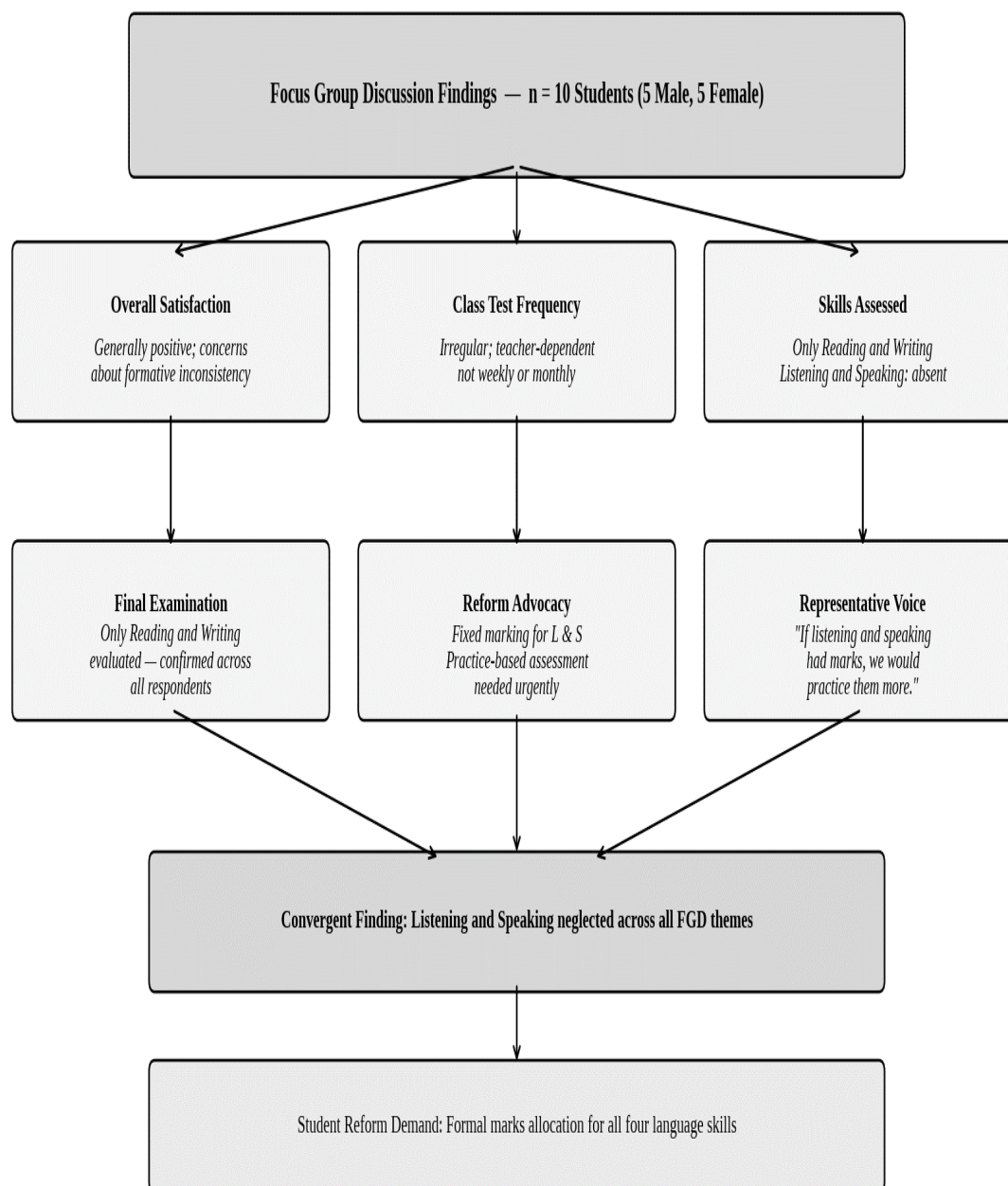


Figure 2: Findings from FGD

- **Class Test Frequency**

Most students reported that teachers did not conduct class tests based on every lesson, with only a few indicating occasional tests. This suggests an inconsistency in formative assessment implementation. A student commented, "Teachers sometimes give class tests, but not every week or month."

- **Assessment of Four Skills**

Consistently, students reported that only reading and writing skills were assessed, with listening and speaking skills being entirely neglected. A student emphatically stated, "Only reading and writing are in the exams. Listening and speaking are never checked." This reinforced the findings from the questionnaire and teacher interviews.

- Skills Not Sufficiently Evaluated

Students unanimously agreed that while reading and writing were adequately evaluated, listening and speaking were not. They expressed a strong desire for these skills to be formally assessed.

- Skills Assessed in Final Examination

Students confirmed that only reading and writing skills were evaluated in the final examinations, echoing previous findings.

- Need for Change

Students believed that the current English language testing administration needed significant changes and improvements, particularly advocating for a fixed marking system for listening and speaking skills. One student suggested, "If listening and speaking had marks, we would practice them more."

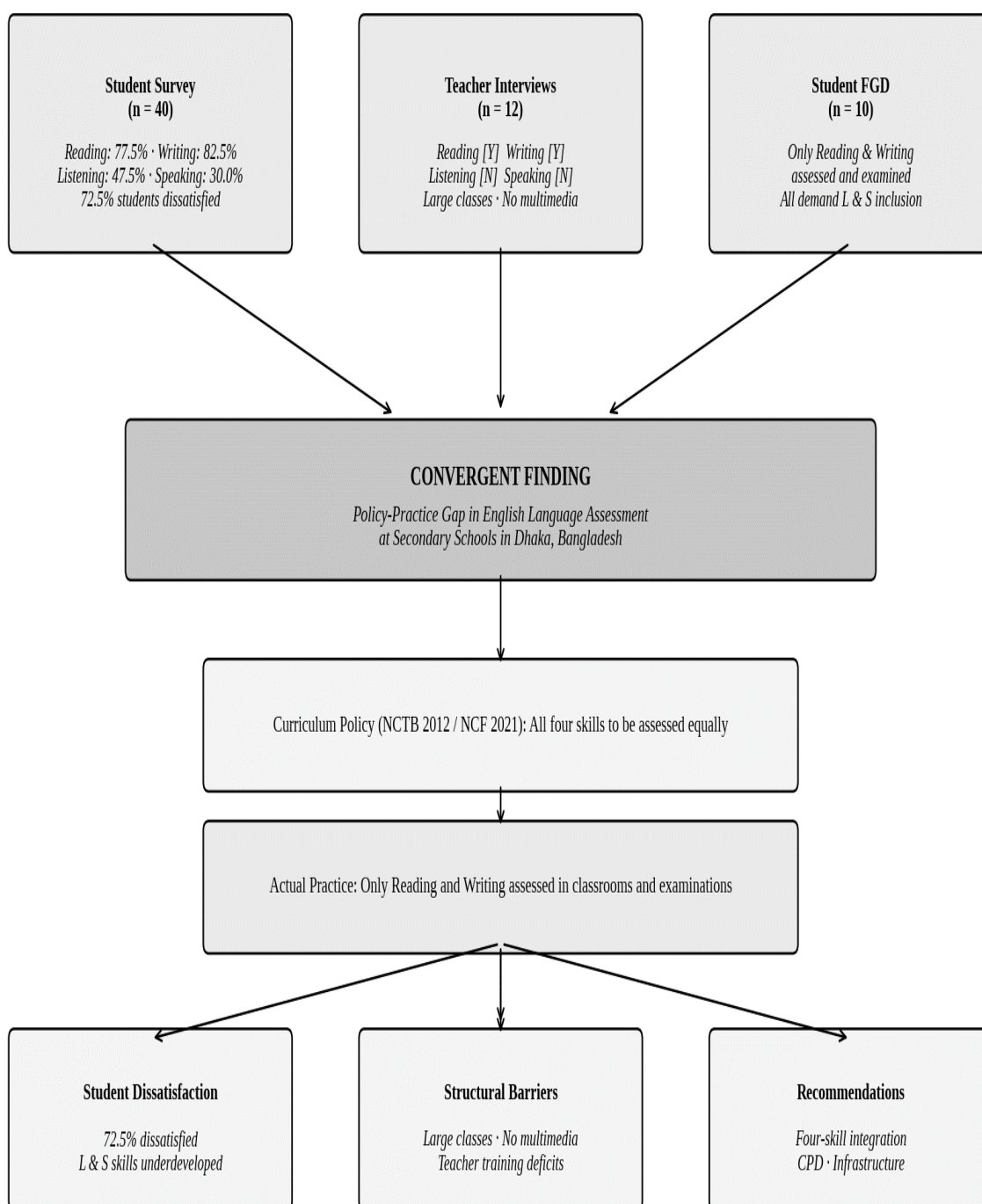


Figure 3: Policy-Practice Gap Model Across All Three Data Sources

In summary, both quantitative and qualitative data converge on a critical finding: despite policy emphasis on all four English language skills, actual assessment practices in secondary schools in Dhaka predominantly focus on reading and writing skills, leading to the neglect of listening and speaking skills. This discrepancy is a source of dissatisfaction among students and a challenge for teachers, who also face systemic limitations in implementing comprehensive assessment.

5. Discussion

This mixed-methods research was meticulously designed to elucidate the policies and actual practices governing English language assessment within secondary schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The comprehensive analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data reveals a clear picture of the current assessment landscape. While the present English language assessment system at secondary schools has demonstrably evolved and improved, particularly in its emphasis on both summative and formative assessments, a significant policy-practice gap persists. The formative assessment component, when implemented, provides students with invaluable opportunities for error correction and self-monitoring of their academic progress. However, a critical finding underscores that despite the curriculum explicitly mandating the assessment of all four English language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—the practical reality in classrooms largely confines assessment to reading and writing, with listening and speaking skills being consistently neglected.

Qualitative data from teacher interviews illuminated a positive perception regarding the theoretical framework of English language assessment at the secondary level. Teachers acknowledged that the system offers students avenues to practice and develop all four English skills by incorporating formative elements. They also recognized the benefits of formative assessment in preparing students for final examinations, thereby fostering greater confidence. Nevertheless, teachers articulated substantial challenges in implementing these comprehensive assessment policies. Foremost among these challenges are the pervasive issue of large class sizes, which renders individualized assessment of each student impractical. Time constraints within fixed class durations further exacerbate this problem, making it difficult to conduct group or pair work that requires extended interaction. Another critical infrastructural deficit is the lack of multimedia facilities in schools, which severely restricts teachers' ability to integrate authentic audio and video materials for listening and speaking activities. Moreover, the linguistic background of many students, predominantly from Bangla-medium schools, often leads to difficulties in comprehending English-only lectures and instructions, consequently demotivating them. Teachers collectively believe that addressing these systemic issues is paramount to realizing a more fruitful English language assessment procedure.

Furthermore, student perspectives, gathered through questionnaires and focus group discussions, largely corroborated the teachers' observations. Students expressed satisfaction

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with the dual emphasis on formative and summative assessment, appreciating the opportunities for continuous feedback and progress monitoring. However, their satisfaction was tempered by practical difficulties. The irregular and often infrequent administration of class tests by teachers was a point of concern, hindering consistent preparation. Crucially, students echoed the sentiment that teachers predominantly focus on reading and writing skills, with listening and speaking skills being largely ignored. This imbalance, they argued, detrimentally affects their holistic English language development. The consensus among students was a strong desire for a more equitable assessment of all four skills, particularly advocating for a fixed marking system for listening and speaking to incentivize their practice and development.

In essence, the research highlights a fundamental tension between the aspirational goals of the national curriculum, to foster comprehensive English language proficiency through balanced assessment, and the operational realities within secondary school classrooms in Dhaka. The policy-practice gap is not merely a theoretical construct, but a lived experience for both educators and learners, manifesting in the under-assessment of crucial communicative skills. This discrepancy has profound implications for students' overall linguistic competence and their preparedness for real-world communication. The challenges identified, from pedagogical limitations to infrastructural deficiencies, underscore the complexity of educational reform and the need for multi-faceted interventions to align assessment practices with educational objectives.

7. Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the English language assessment policies and practices at secondary schools in Dhaka, the following recommendations are proposed to bridge the identified policy-practice gap and enhance the scope to implement the existing assessment system.

- **Integrate All Four Skills into Formal Assessment:** It is imperative that the assessment of listening and speaking skills should be formally incorporated into both formative and summative evaluation frameworks. This requires developing standardized rubrics and assessment tools for these skills, ensuring that they carry appropriate weight in students' overall English language grades. This integration will incentivize both teachers and students to prioritize the development of these crucial communicative competencies.

- **Enhance Teacher Professional Development in Communicative Assessment:** Teachers require joining targeted continuous professional development programs focused on effective strategies for assessing listening and speaking skills, particularly within large classroom settings. Training should cover practical techniques for formative assessment, designing communicative tasks, and providing constructive feedback for oral skills. This will facilitate teachers with the necessary pedagogical expertise to implement a more balanced assessment approach.
- **Strategic Use of Mother Tongue as a Scaffolding Tool:** While English immersion is desirable, teachers should be trained to strategically utilize the mother tongue (Bangla) as a scaffolding tool when students struggle to comprehend complex English instructions or concepts. This approach can facilitate understanding, reduce student anxiety, and ultimately support English language acquisition without compromising the learning objectives.
- **Invest in Multimedia Facilities and Resources:** To effectively assess listening and speaking skills, schools must be equipped with adequate multimedia facilities, including audio systems, projectors, and internet access. These resources are essential for exposing students to authentic English language input and for conducting interactive communicative activities. Investment in such infrastructure will enable teachers to implement a more dynamic and engaging assessment environment.
- **Promote Regular and Consistent Formative Assessment:** To address student concerns about irregular class tests, school administrations should encourage and monitor the consistent implementation of formative assessment practices. This includes regular short quizzes, oral presentations, and group activities, providing continuous feedback that supports learning progression and prepares students for summative evaluations.
- **Curriculum Review and Alignment:** A periodic review of the English language curriculum is recommended to ensure that assessment guidelines are explicitly aligned with learning objectives for all four skills. This review should involve stakeholders from policy-making bodies, curriculum developers, teachers, to assessment experts in order to ensure the feasibility and practicality of implementation.

Considering these recommendations, educational authorities in Bangladesh can move towards a more holistic, equitable, and effective English language assessment system that genuinely reflects students' communicative competence and supports their overall linguistic development.

7. Conclusion

In summary, this research meticulously investigated the interplay between policy and practice in English language assessment at secondary schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The study unequivocally revealed a substantial discrepancy between the curriculum policies, which emphasize the comprehensive assessment of all four English language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and the actual pedagogical practices observed in classrooms. In practice, assessment predominantly focused on reading and writing, with listening and speaking skills largely neglected. This policy-practice gap was further compounded by a confluence of challenges faced by the teachers and learners. Teachers grappled with issues such as overcrowded classrooms, a dearth of multimedia resources, and insufficient training in contemporary assessment methodologies. Concurrently, students expressed dissatisfaction with the current assessment paradigm, particularly its failure to adequately evaluate their listening and speaking proficiencies, which they perceived as hindering their holistic English language development. The findings of this study provide a robust foundation for advocating targeted reforms. Addressing these identified discrepancies through enhanced teacher training, infrastructural improvements, and a recalibration of assessment priorities is crucial for fostering a more effective, equitable, and genuinely communicative English language learning environment in Bangladesh.

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