

# Policy and Practice of Listening in Secondary English Education: A Critical Reflection from Bangladesh<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The current National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI- X) in Bangladesh incorporates both listening and speaking skills for its English education. Textbooks have also been designed in accordance with the policy which is set by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). The English textbook, titled *English for Today* (EFT), was designed in alignment with the current National Curriculum for English (VI-X) for students in grades 6 through 10. The target of the EFT is to achieve students' competency in integrated four skills of English language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, although the listening module is now in policy and classroom practice, it is not assessed in school or in public exams at the secondary level (Kabir, 2020). This study explores the perceptions of policy and practice of listening in secondary English education in Bangladesh. This study may be significant as little research has been done in Bangladesh on listening skill and its significance for language competence, let alone on the teaching of listening in connection to language learning. This qualitative study is based on in-depth interview data collected in 2019. The interviews included pertinent participants of policymakers and secondary English teachers. The findings indicated that there was a disconnect in curriculum, classroom practice and assessment in secondary English education.

## Resumen

El actual Plan de Estudios Nacional de Inglés 2012 (VI-X) en Bangladesh incorpora habilidades de comprensión auditiva y expresión oral para su educación en inglés. Los libros de texto también se han diseñado de acuerdo con la política establecida por el Plan de estudios nacional y libros de texto amplios (Nacional Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012). El libro de texto de inglés, titulado *Inglés para hoy* (EFT), fue diseñado en consonancia con el actual Currículo Nacional de Inglés (VI-X) para estudiantes de los grados 6 al 10. El objetivo del EFT es lograr la competencia de los estudiantes en cuatro sistemas integrados. Habilidades del idioma inglés: escuchar, hablar, leer y escribir. Sin embargo, aunque el módulo de comprensión auditiva ya forma parte de las políticas y de la práctica en el aula, no se evalúa en la escuela ni en los exámenes públicos de nivel secundario (Kabir, 2020). Este estudio explora las percepciones sobre las políticas y prácticas de escucha en la educación secundaria de inglés en Bangladesh. Este estudio puede ser significativo ya que en Bangladesh se han realizado pocas investigaciones sobre la habilidad auditiva y su importancia para la competencia lingüística, y mucho menos sobre la enseñanza de la escucha en relación con el aprendizaje de idiomas. Este estudio cualitativo se basa en datos de entrevistas en profundidad recopilados en 2019. Las entrevistas incluyeron participantes pertinentes de formuladores de políticas y profesores de inglés de secundaria. Los hallazgos indicaron que había una desconexión en el plan de estudios, la práctica en el aula y la evaluación en la educación secundaria en inglés.

## Introduction

Listening is an important language skill that requires more emphasis in the teaching and learning of English. As far as the teaching of listening is concerned, it has not received priority in the language teaching and learning process in Bangladesh until now (Kabir, 2020; Kabir & Greenwood, 2021). Listening, as a set of skills, has been absent from the beginning of the history of English language education in Bangladesh (Kaisar & Khanam, 2008). The listening skill was included in the National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI-X) but disregarded in practice. This is also evident in other contexts. For example, in Japan and Korea, throughout the history of language learning, most students have never been taught how to listen (Schmidt, 2016). "While language learners are often taught how to plan and draft a composition or deliver an oral presentation, learners are seldom taught how to approach listening" (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012, p. 22). However, the importance of listening comprehension in language learning is significantly germane to L2 learners (Brown & Lee, 2015) because many English as a foreign language (EFL) programmes have neglected it for a long time (Pourhossein et al., 2011).

Listening is supposed to be included as an integral part of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach that is mandated in Bangladesh for teaching and learning English. Bangladesh, nevertheless, has no dedicated listening instruction at any level of its mainstream education except for the post-Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) groups preparing for the IELTS exam as they have to face listening as one of the modules in the test. Listening poses an obstacle to the post higher secondary Bangladeshi learners as oral skills are not included in the academic assessment process, and they have to embrace it while taking the IELTS exam. According to Shurovi (2014), all the teachers pointed to the necessity of listening and

<sup>1</sup> Received: 30 May, 2022. Accepted: 4 January, 2023. Published: 15 July, 2024.

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speaking skills for the development of students' English language competence. Abedin et al., (2010) carried out a survey with post higher secondary learners in Bangladesh that showed that 100% of participants agreed on the necessity of practising listening to understand real-life English and to communicate properly in their academic and non-academic settings. At the same time, 96.15% of teacher participants regarded listening as a significant channel of language learning and suggested that they should take special care to develop oral skills for learners' overall English language proficiency (Abedin et al., 2010). Podder (2011) argued that listening and speaking should be properly practised as young learners were better learners of the language. If the students had proficiency in these skills, they would face fewer language-related problems when they went for higher education, jobs, or immigration.

## Review of Literature

### *L2 listening process*

The construct of second language listening ability is always complex. This section focuses on the comprehension of listening. Several research studies (Buck, 2001; Field, 2008; Rost, 2016; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012) on the listening skill have shown that L2 listening is a multidimensional process linked to the neural, social, cognitive, and metacognitive processes that require both psychological and sociological perspectives in language use. When people first meet each other and begin to share ideas, emotions, and knowledge, focus on listening becomes essential.

In listening comprehension, the meaning is not directly found in the spoken text but is constructed by the listener using linguistic knowledge, the co-text, the context of the situation, and general background or topic-specific knowledge. One of the challenges for L2 listening researchers is to identify listening strategies that seem to be the features of a fluent L2 listener. Field (2008) argues that the use of listening strategies occurs not only in "the use of contextual and co-textual 'top-down' information in order to solve local difficulties of comprehension" (p. 108) but also at various lexical levels, specifically when listeners are unsure about the reliability of what has been understood, leading them to use the most likely word match despite the context and co-text. A context works as a source of information on which a second language listener can draw. It is the situation, the background knowledge, and the topic of the text in which a word or passage appears and which helps the listener ascertain its meaning. Often, listeners rely on contextual clues to decipher the meaning when they fail to decode the whole spoken text. They may come up with a wrong interpretation of the spoken text if the context seems unfamiliar to them. For example, if a student identifies very few words in the listening script or input, their background knowledge about the context may not be sufficient to help grasp the message. They may come up with a wrong interpretation of the spoken text. Another major factor is the co-text, the surrounding of a set of words in a written expression connected linguistically that influences listening comprehension because of the meaning interpretation of a spoken text. In English, a noun at the initial position may not always inform the recipient of the verb in a sentence till you hear the voice of the verb. A careful listener will finish listening to the whole sentence/clause before answering the question. For example, if the listener listens to a sentence such as, "Peter was being chased by John and eventually he jumped into the river", they need to activate grammatical knowledge of passive voice verb form and the accompanied 'by' to understand the listening text correctly. Based on this notion, one can conclude that more reliance on context to understand the spoken text can be very costly as the listener will be busy getting the literal meaning of the spoken text than the intended meaning of the speaker. On the other hand, the understanding of co-text provides the long-term key to skilled listening, just as it does to skilled reading since it frees attention that can then be focused on the speaker's intended meaning in a specific context (Field, 2008).

Therefore, Graham (2017) explains that understanding from listening occurs at three levels: intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability. These three levels of listening are different from one another in terms of understandability. Thus, intelligibility refers to when a listener identifies the words correctly they usually hear by correct decoding of the spoken text, comprehensibility refers to the ability of the listener to recognize the meaning of words or utterances in context, and interpretability refers to the ability of the listener to perceive the speaker's intentions or inner sense. So, as the listening skill precedes speaking skill and the study focuses on listening for English language education, the importance of studies of listening comprehension for English competence is discussed in the following section.

### *The listening skill for oral communication*

Hearing is an aural ability, while listening is a skill (Rost, 2016). Listening is, thus, a creative activity that can be interpreted and described. According to many philosophers and anthropologists over the millennia

who have focused on human development, the processing of spoken language is the most intricate of all human behaviours (Rost, 2016; Sherwood et al. 2008). The reason is related to its neuropsychological and socio-linguistic aspects. While processing language through listening at a given moment, a person has to engage in different tasks simultaneously, such as speaking, interpretation of contextual cues, comprehension, and formulation of a response. To accomplish these simultaneous tasks, a range of individual component skills are required. Multiple areas of the brain, attentional readiness, and coordination of functional neural circuits are needed at once (Rost, 2016). Recent research in neurophysiology is seeking an overall understanding of these issues and the intra-connections of neural circuits for efficient language processing (Stout & Chaminade, 2012). Moreover, “meanings of verbal language are shaped by context and constructed by the listener through the act of interpreting meaning rather than receiving it intact” (Lynch & Mendelsohn, 2002, p. 194). Even “learning to speak a language begins with comprehension” (Richards, 2015, p. 370) and comprehension comes from listening to that language.

Rost and Wilson (2013) noted that active listening is more important than passive listening to improve the process of listening. When one actively listens to anything, they listen only to relevant information and can think about that in a much deeper way during the listening. This deeper way of thinking while listening ensures that one learns more efficiently and effectively. Rost (2016) and Saville-Troike (2012) argue that in the basic sequence of the learning of any language, oral skills normally precede orthographic skills. When anyone asks someone “Do you speak English?” then a person intends to mean whether the person can “carry on a conversation reasonably competently” (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 345). Listening is perhaps the most important skill for any effective communication that was first mentioned by Rankin in 1926 (as cited in Brown, 1987). Research has also suggested that adults use 40-50% of their total communication time for listening. The efficacy of listening in language learning has not yet been investigated properly (Prashene, 2016; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). It is learned first, mostly used (45%) by anyone for communication but taught least (Renukadevi, 2014). So, 45% of the total time, a language user is occupied by listening to their everyday communication, which is significantly more than speaking (30%), reading (16%), and writing (9%), respectively (Ahmed, 2015); yet both the teachers and students often failed to focus on listening to the extent required for attention. Brown (2011) also suggested that interaction among students after listening to a lecture increased language learning.

#### *The listening skill for language comprehension*

Language experts have grouped listening and reading together, naming them receptive skills; however, there is a huge difference between receiving some information through reading and listening. For example, we can get an idea or gist of a written text by skimming, but we cannot do the same for listening as it happens in real-time (Brown, 2011) and “cognates are not as available for use in listening as they are in reading, because though they look alike on paper, they sound different when pronounced” (p. 7). There are also different listening sub-skills (listening for gist, listening for details, listening for attitude, etc.). Learners understand the meanings of words in a text just like they do when looking them up in a dictionary. However, they struggle with these words when trying to use them in context or pronounce them (Brown, 2011). In this regard, Song (2008) claims that listening and reading share the comprehension process; however, the path to comprehension or decoding varies between them. Listening, by nature, is ephemeral if not repeated, and the decoder has to comprehend and infer the meaning at once. On the other hand, on decoding reading materials, one can go back and forth to decipher the meaning. So, a listener cannot rewind the oral text, but a reader can refer back to a written text to clarify understanding (Kurita, 2012).

In recent years, listening has been studied in relation to both language learning and acquisition. Furthermore, research has recognised the role of listening by affirming that better listening comprehension precedes production and leads to reflection on the learning of L2 rules (Cook, 2016). Both active and passive listening to anything in the target language improves the psychomotor skills of coping with that language quickly (Lynch, 2012). Psychomotor skills have a direct relationship with decoding and comprehension of listening although very little research has looked into this issue (Leonard, 2019). So, to make an effective interaction, it is very important to decode the speaking text properly. Hence, Ellis asserts, “learning arises not through interaction, but in interaction” (as cited in Walsh, 2011, p. 51). To have competence in any language, Krashen’s (1985) input hypothesis pointed out that learners should be ensured comprehensible input or the aural reception of the second language in a “sufficient amount” for L2 acquisition. Long (1996), in his interaction hypothesis, also promotes comprehensible input by saying that taking part in conversation can facilitate more input depending on intake capacity. However, Schmidt (2010) contends that the input does not convert into intake unless it is noticed or paid attention to as “noticing is the necessary and sufficient condition for the conversion of input into the intake for learning” (Schmidt, 1993, p. 209).

Being a lingua franca, English has gained a unique position in the world. This status helps promote the importance of the listening skill in this language. Moreover, Renandya and Hu (2018) argue that “effective L2 listening is a twenty-first-century language skill that is indispensable for effective communication and mutual understanding and has a vital role to play in enhancing the quality of life, creating new opportunities and alternatives” (p. 48). For this reason, listening requires proper pedagogical choreography. Furthermore, English as a vehicular language, in this globalised society, has connected myriads of cross-cultural relations across the world. As a result, varieties of English have emerged with a focus on the international intelligibility of the language defying the aspirations to have native-like accents (Tergujeff, 2013) as “intelligibility must come first” (Cunningham, 2009, p. 126) and learner has to understand different accents of as many varieties of speakers of English as possible rather than to understand only native speakers of English. Macaulay (1988) urged everyone, regardless of whether they were linguists, phoneticians, and teachers to rationalize the obsession with the accent of the elite minority rather than the accent of the masses so that second language users could understand the spoken language.

Furthermore, the English language curriculum in EFL or English as a second language (ESL) countries is hugely biased toward the skills of literacy rather than the skill of oracy (Renandya and Hu, 2018). EFL countries are those countries where English is adopted for some specific reasons, such as bilateral communication with another country. On the other hand, ESL countries are those where English is used parallel to the native language (Nordquist, 2020). As a result, the interface between receptive skills and productive skills for language learning is still not understood properly (Bano, 2017). This bias again leads listening to remain unfocused, rather than being the core language skill to be learned first to master a language in comparison to the other three language skills: reading, writing, and speaking (Deveci, 2018). Moreover, Brown (2011) claims “researchers and classroom teachers tend to assume that listening will develop as proficiency increases” (p. ix). This is one of the main reasons for listening as a skill has been under-researched, as it has been assumed to be a passive process in the research paradigm of second language acquisition. Due to these reasons, among all the four skills, the listening skill remains the most difficult skill to teach to EFL or ESL learners (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005).

Lindsay and Knight (2006) discuss how we always listen to a variety of things in our daily life, for example, when anyone makes a conversation, either face-to-face or via telephone, at a doctor’s office or at the bank or receiving information at an airport, railway station, or listening to a weather forecast on radio. Nevertheless, “while language learners are often taught how to plan and draft a composition or deliver an oral presentation, learners are seldom taught how to approach listening or how to manage their listening when attending to spoken texts or messages” (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012, p. 22).

Being one of the receptive language skills, listening is harder to teach, test and research than speaking and writing. Like reading, the involvement of the mind of the language user and most of the comprehension process happen internally (Badger & Yan, 2009).

Ting (2013) further adds, “The speaking ability can be cultivated and improved based on listening.” Therefore, to conduct a meaningful conversation, we have to understand the speaker first and then reply accordingly. Brown and Lee (2015) note that at present, concerted attention has been given to listening comprehension by language-teaching professionals, and the main problem is that learners can increase their overall language competence of L2 in collaboration with other students through listening comprehension tasks. Brown and Lee (2015) also added that the more the learners are aurally exposed to a target language, the more competent they will be in that language. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) put the emphasis on listening practice from product to process which means listening to a spoken speech just not to understand but to improve listening competence and make learners more responsible than teachers to become self-regulated learners. However, several studies show that the syllabus for teaching listening and the materials provided by the curriculum developers are not conducive to the learners becoming self-regulated learners by learning the process of listening (Aryana & Apsari, 2018; Kabir, 2020). For these reasons, the study aims to bridge the knowledge gap between curriculum policy and the practical implementation of listening skills in English education.

## Research Questions

The present study addresses the following questions:

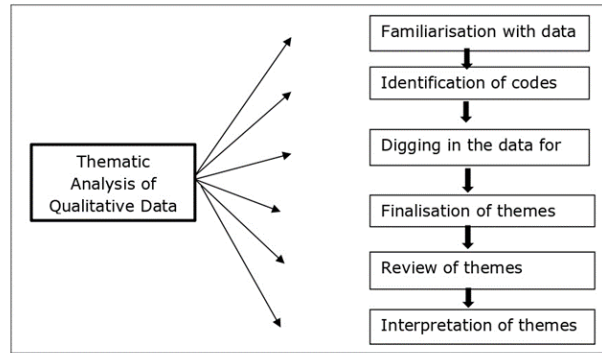
*Research Question 1: What is the current policy and practice of listening skill at the secondary level in Bangladesh?*

*Research Question 2: How does any difference between curriculum policy and practice for listening skill affect English language education at the secondary level in Bangladesh?*

Methodology

This is a qualitative study aiming to provide a detailed understanding of issues that underlie current practices (Cohen et al., 2018). The data analysis phase critically evaluates the curriculum policy and classroom practice and reports. Policymakers and secondary English teachers were interviewed to understand their perception of listening skills in policy and practice. Thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyse the interview data. This method is based on the semantic approach, and its coding and development of themes reflect the explicit substance of the data. After transcribing the data, patterns in the data were discovered using a thorough process of familiarisation with the data, coding, creation, and revision of themes (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Adapted from Gormley et al. (2019)



This paper used the TA method since it is a popular method for analysing qualitative data in many disciplines including education where procedures for using TA as a qualitative technique only began to appear in the 1990s (Cohen et al., 2018). The purpose of TA is to find meaningful patterns in a dataset to answer the research questions under consideration. This method also gives flexibility according to the practical need for analysis of what was required to answer the specific research questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This means it can be used within different frameworks to answer quite different types of research questions.

Participants

As the policymakers are major players in planning and secondary teachers are the practitioners of English language education, they were participants in the interviews. The purposive selection procedure was applied. Ten participants were interviewed in total and they were selected based on mainly three criteria: (1) relevant expertise; (2) experience; and (3) willingness to participate. In terms of experience, they were different as they worked in different contexts and had varying experiences. Pseudonyms are used for each of them to maintain privacy and anonymity. The Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury (Appendix 1) approved the study. Table 1 gives details of the participants.

Pseudonym	Description of the participants	Instrument
Head of NCTB	The head of the committee that plans and frames the curriculum for the secondary level	Policymakers
Hamid	A member of the committee that plans and frames the curriculum for the secondary level	
Rahim	A person who develops educational content for the curriculum proposed by the committee	
Goutum	A person who develops educational content for the curriculum proposed by the committee	
Mahbub	An English teacher who had been teaching English for at least 15 years	Secondary school teachers
Saif	An English teacher who had been teaching English for at least 15 years	
Rumel	An English teacher who had been teaching English for at least 12 years	
Ashek	An English teacher who had been teaching English for at least 12 years	
Taher	An English teacher who had been teaching English for at least 10 years	
Shiraji	An English teacher who had been teaching English for at least 10 years	

Table 1. Profile of the participants in pseudonyms

The participants were provided with the information necessary about the study by email and their written consent was obtained by email before the data collection.

### *Instrument*

In-depth interviews were conducted to gather detailed and comprehensive data from ten participants in total. This qualitative research method involved open-ended questions, allowing participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely. The interviews aimed to explore the nuances of participants' perspectives, providing rich insights into the subject matter. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to identify common themes and patterns (Figure 1).

### *Data collection, compilation and transcription*

To collect the qualitative data, a one-on-one interview was conducted. Each interview lasted for nearly an hour. Due to the participants' preferences, interviews were conducted in Bangla and recorded using an audio recorder. Later, the recorded interviews were transcribed into Roman Bangla and then translated into English. Regmi et al. (2010) suggested that researchers need to come up with accurate and valid translations to engage with the meanings and discourses of the collected data. The participants were asked about their understanding of English language education policy, classroom practice of oral skills, and the apparent disconnect between policy and practice in Bangladesh. The author reported findings based on the interview data and related them to other recent research findings.

### *Findings*

The findings highlight a wide range of perspectives, ranging from the policy level to the practical implementation in classrooms. The findings further present the interpretation obtained from the analysis of critical reflections related to the challenges faced in pedagogical assessment.

### *Perceptions about listening proficiency in Bangladesh*

This section reports participants' specific discussion of misconceptions about listening proficiency. Two participants from policy and practice levels respectively commented on misconceptions related to listening proficiency:

*Nurul: Students think: "What is the use of English listening? It is not graded in the exam". So, to motivate students for listening proficiency and to improve English learning, it should be included in public exams.*

*Goutum: Ideally, the listening skill should be learned first. For example, in our mother tongue, we first listen to learn the language, and gradually listening moves us to speak, and gradually, the time comes when we start learning reading, and finally, we start learning writing. However, in our country, there is a misconception, and the process does not follow the way; rather, it begins with reading. So, in our country listening is not considered an important language skill for language input which should be considered first for better competency in English. So, it is still very neglected.*

Nurul's statement suggests that the teaching of the English language is very much exam-driven. He further claims that students would only be motivated if listening is graded in the exams. On the other hand, Goutum's statement reflects that in English language classes, the acquisition of oral skills does not precede graphic skills. His comment also highlights that instead of benefitting from two channels of language input for learning, students only get language input from reading materials. In this regard, Hamid stated:

*But only reading input is not enough to learn a language. A learner needs authentic and interactive exposure to that target language. That is why language-learning lessons should start with listening input. However, it is a neglected skill in our country.*

Hamid's comment accentuates the importance of listening proficiency as an input channel for learners as they need to understand the speaker first to participate in the communication. In this regard, Vandergrift and Goh (2012) reported that adults use most of their communication in verbal form and to conduct a meaningful conversation. So, we have to understand the speaker first, and then reply accordingly. Moreover, like the other three language skills, the listening skill is also an active and independent skill for language learning that can also be taught systematically (Brown & Lee, 2015). While it is often asserted (Brown & Lee, 2015; Renukadevi, 2014; Rost, 2016) that listening is an independent skill which is used first as the basis for all four skills for the learning of any language, that concept is missing in the Bangladeshi context. It is relevant to comment here that in terms of the degree of emphasis given, listening seemed to be considered the least important skill for English language learning in Bangladesh.

### *The importance of listening skill for language proficiency*

A range of opinions by several participants acknowledged that listening skill is very important for communicative competence in the 21st century as they help develop speaking skill and different aspects of language such as vocabulary, pronunciation, accents, and expressions. The following two statements

focused on the influence of listening on making effective communication by understanding and following the speaker:

*Rahim (curriculum-material developer of NCTB): The pattern of 21st-century effective communication depends on the understanding of the speaker through listening. If a person does not understand the speaker first, he or she cannot reply properly to make effective communication.*

*Shiraji (Secondary English teacher): When I listen to native speakers of English, I always try to follow their way of speaking to improve my speaking skill.*

Rahim states that to communicate effectively in the 21st century, it is necessary to understand the speaker first by listening. Rahim's comment highlights that effective communication was not that important skill in the 20th century the way it is important in the 21st century. However, his use of the word 'understanding' can be further discussed as there are three types of 'understanding': intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability in listening to evaluate the listener's ability to understand the speaker (Jenkins, 2000). The type of 'understanding' is relevant to determine the level of effective communication among interlocutors. Rahim's further use of wording—'reply properly' probably denoted the need for understanding of all three types by the listener. Shiraji also highlighted the influence of the listening skill on improving the learner's speaking skill. His conscious attention to the native speakers helped him develop his speaking skill. It is relevant here to comment that Shiraji's focus on listening was only on the product of listening but not on the process of listening. He targeted to improve his speaking skill by following certain aspects of speaking from native speakers. He did not target the parsing and utilization stages of listening to the speaker by focusing on the process of improving his metacognitive listening strategies to facilitate the comprehension of spoken discourse. Renandya and Hu (2018) argue that auditory input through both the product and process of listening is important for a learner's overall language development. The following statements focused on the influence of listening on overall communicative competence:

*Mahbub (Secondary English teacher): The uneducated or semi-educated people who work in Arabic-speaking countries in the Middle East develop their Arabic language for communication within six months of staying there. Many of them told me that they developed the language following the speaking of Arabic people in different everyday situations. So, listening input is important to develop the communicative skill of a language.*

*Saif (Secondary English Teacher): I think language learning is an imitative process. A learner can infer so many things about a language from the receiver's end from a speaker. For example, unintentionally, a learner imitates a speaker to learn the accent, and pronunciation and a learner can learn a new word when he listens to that speaker. Even if the speaker uses the word in a context twice or thrice, the learner understands the denotation of the word and tries to use that word in his conversation.*

*Rumel (Secondary English Teacher): To understand the impact of listening over speaking, I conducted the speaking sessions before the listening sessions for a batch and graded their speaking band score. In another batch, I conducted the listening sessions first and the speaking sessions later and graded their speaking band score. When I compared the average band score of the speaking test, I found that the batch who had their listening sessions before the speaking sessions did better in their performance.*

The comments of Mahbub, Saif, and Rumel further highlight that listening could help improve communicative competence in the English language. Mahbub's anecdote related to the uneducated or semi-educated Bangladeshi workers in Arabic-speaking countries who developed their communicative skills in Arabic echoes Saif's use of the word 'imitation' for language learning. Rumel's statement of his self-conducted experimental result argues that better listening comprehension may lead to better speaking performance. All of them suggest that the listening skill is crucial for a language learner to improve communicative skills by only consistently following a speaker of a language while staying in that specific country or for the need of communication. Their statements can be linked to the concept –Noticing Hypothesis –which states that listening for L2 input could not become intake for language learning until they are noticed (Schmidt, 2010). Although it is our natural tendency to perceive speaking as the main index for communicative competence, we cannot achieve speaking proficiency without proper listening comprehension first (Brown & Lee, 2015; Richards, 2015).

Taher and Ashek, in particular, focused on improving pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge of the English language through listening:

*Taher (Secondary English teacher): Actually, through listening input, students can learn new words, and new expressions in English, which they can apply during their speaking. They can standardise their own pronunciation of English through listening practice with different audio as well as video content.*

*Ashek (Secondary English teacher): If anyone wants to develop the speaking skill, listening is helpful to improve pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge of the English language.*



Taher reported that listening is also helpful in improving a student's speaking skill by listening to a variety of listening materials. Listening could also help the students to improve their pronunciation and word stock by following the speaker. If the students need to improve their speaking skill they need to listen more carefully to a variety of audio-visual materials. Taher's comment emphasises that learners need to learn 'listening to learn' (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012) to improve their pronunciation, vocabulary, and new expressions in English. Yildiz and Albay (2015) argued that learners acquire the correct pronunciation of words and also how to use those words in sentence structures correctly through the listening process. Taher's use of the phrase "standardising their own pronunciation" reflected that the pronunciation of the students of rural areas is not standard. So, to make their pronunciation more intelligible, Taher emphasised more listening practice through audio and video content. Furthermore, Ashek highlighted the importance of listening to improve the learners' speaking. He further added that listening could play a role in improving the pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge of a learner. Ashek's reflection on "vocabulary knowledge" indicates that vocabulary knowledge is an important aspect of learning English that could be improved through listening skill. Many researchers (Coxhead, 2015; Nation & Newton, 2009) argued that vocabulary knowledge is a significant predictor of determining L2 learners' communicative competence in English. However, Ashek's statement about how to improve vocabulary through listening is a significant one. Hamid, an English-subject adviser of NCTB and the Head of NCTB, further pointed out that language input through reading is not sufficient to improve the English language; however, listening input is also needed:

*The input is needed. The language input should come from the teachers at the primary level and then at the secondary level.*

Hamid's statement emphasises simultaneous input for language learning by listening and reading as language input through reading only did not seem sufficient to him. However, his reflection that teachers could be the main source of listening input in a classroom along with other secondary sources of listening input but that teachers might not be able to play the role. The probable reasons are teachers' lack of confidence and command over speaking fluency and their non-standardized accents. Another probable reason could be that teachers may not feel the urge to focus on improving the oral skills of the students as these are not assessed for grading purposes. Rahim's speech aligns with Hamid's statement regarding secondary input that the students could receive through an audio-visual medium. He said:

*There are lots of students who receive input from the English language for their own interests through English movies and English news and so on. For example, my son developed his English proficiency by watching Australian Master Chef on TV. So, I think listening input is essential to improve language learning.*

Rahim's anecdote about his son regarding the TV show *Australian Master Chef* demonstrates the process of language improvement through audio-visual listening input. However, from Rahim's observation, it is obvious that the receiving of language input depends on the interest of its receiver, which means motivational factors can play a vital role in more listening input. Moreover, the language input of Rahim's son from the *Australian Master Chef* program also demonstrates that there are a huge number of out-of-class opportunities for a learner apart from in-class activities. Goutum's observation affirms the need for a basic sequence for language learning which is absent in the Bangladeshi context of English language learning:

*Ideally, the listening skill should be learned first. For example, in our mother tongue, first, we listen to learn the language and gradually listening helps us speak, and gradually the time comes when we start learning reading, and finally, we start learning writing. The thing is not done in that way.*

## Discussion

This article has discussed and highlighted aspects of the importance of listening for overall English competence from both policymakers and practicing secondary teachers. The majority of the policymakers and the secondary English teachers also emphasised starting with the listening skill so that it could help the students improve their vocabulary knowledge for overall English language competence. Most of the participants suggested that the gap between policy and the reality of teaching listening in the curriculum at the secondary level makes it difficult for the students to become competent in the English language in Bangladesh. The participants also emphasised the aspects of the English language input that could be improved by developing students' listening comprehension skills. Language input does not only improve listening but also vocabulary, which is a core component of language learning. By improving vocabulary via listening as a process of incremental progress, a learner achieves overall language competence. Vocabulary knowledge is a precondition for listening comprehension. Similarly, listening can also serve as a useful source for vocabulary acquisition (van Zeeland, 2013). Nonetheless, fewer empirical studies have



documented the relationship between vocabulary improvement through listening and reading skills (Nation & Newton, 2009).

Based on the findings of this study, the participants reported that listening comprehension tasks in the *EFT* textbook can improve the listening proficiency of the learners. However, listening practice is needed in the classroom on a regular basis to improve English language proficiency. Despite the need for listening practice in secondary classrooms, it is seldom taught and not assessed. This is because listening is included in the curriculum, but it is not yet included in the public exams at the secondary level. Second, although listening is included in the curriculum, it is not monitored by the relevant policymakers to discover whether the newly introduced language skill is taught and practised in classrooms according to their directives. Therefore, it is possible that the monitoring phase that was supposed to look after the implementation process was ineffective. Due to the lack of a monitoring phase, the issues that prevent listening from being part of both classroom practices and assessment procedures have not been investigated since the curriculum for English 2012 included listening. As a result, instead of improving language proficiency, the teaching and assessment of listening have been determined by the negative influence of the examinations, known as washback impact. However, the main aim of the listening practice and assessment mandated by the curriculum is to improve English language proficiency.

As mentioned earlier, public exams such as secondary school examinations (SSC) do not include listening skill in the assessment and grading for the probable reasons of practicality and fear of unfairness. The participants who were policymakers were concerned about the unfairness issue of listening assessment if it would be part of the public examination. The curriculum includes oral skills for the assessment in the public examination in 2012. However, the policymakers surprisingly excluded oral skills from being part of the public examination. The policymakers were sceptical about introducing listening assessment in the public examination. They had previous experience of unfairness regarding the assessment of lab-based practical examination of science education. This indicates that policymakers also predict the probability of unfairness in the assessment of listening comprehension. Some of the participants even reported that they were unsure about how to include the testing of listening skills in the SSC examination. Figure 2 represents the problems and gaps that have emerged from this article.

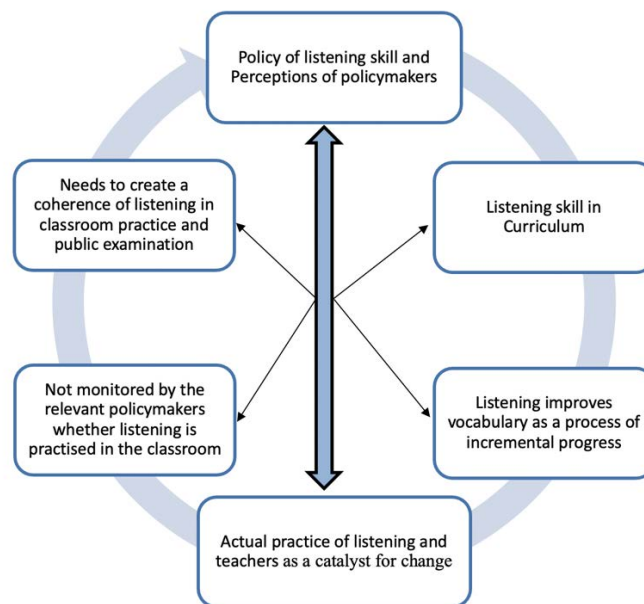


Figure 2. The required connectivity for implementing the curriculum and classroom practice of listening effectively

## Conclusion

The study reveals significant gaps between the participating teachers' understanding of the expectations of the curriculum and their actual practice of listening in a classroom. It suggests that English language learning without oral skills has weakened the communicative competence of secondary students in Bangladesh. There seems to be no longer any doubt about the value of listening, hence efforts must be taken to hone listening abilities. We must now teach listening skills; we cannot just let it happen naturally. Therefore, it is needless

to say how intensively listening needs to be synced both at policy and practice levels in order to attain its effectiveness in English language competence for the secondary students in Bangladesh.

#### Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges that the article is a part of his PhD thesis at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. The research reported in the thesis has been approved by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury. The author is truly indebted to his supervisors Professor Janinka Greenwood, Professor Una Cunningham and Professor Kevin Watson for their invaluable supervision and cooperation.

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