

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES POST-REFORM: THE DISCONTINUATION OF  
PRIMARY PUBLIC ENGLISH EXAMS IN BANGLADESH

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## AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Md Ariful Hasan* for the degree of *Master of Education in English Language Teaching*, presented on 28 November 2024, entitled *Educational Outcomes Post-Reform: The Discontinuation of Primary Public English Exams in Bangladesh*.

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The assessment of English language skills in Bangladesh has been a major challenge because the teaching of the language has traditionally been based on isolated language elements. Reading and writing skills were emphasised in high-stakes exams such as the Primary Education Certificate (PEC) or the Ebtadayee English exam, yet the skills of listening and speaking were overlooked. As a consequence, students' communicative competence was hindered, and their future educational success was hampered.

This narrative inquiry explored the effect that discontinuing the PEC English exam has on primary-level English pedagogy. This study is based on an analysis of literature and policies, as well as six English language teachers from different regions who were interviewed about interview discrepancies and their experiences with past and current PEC practices. What comes out of teachers' perspectives is a concern for the methods of assessment, the content of the textbooks, and the training of the teachers that needs to be aligned with the National Curriculum Framework 2021.

The discontinuance of PEC's English exam forced an alteration to the exam-centric method of education, which resulted in student demotivation and the absence of high-stakes examinations. While it encouraged a shift towards communicative and student-centred methodologies, it also encouraged a shift towards co-planning with students. Although limited resources and inadequate professional development may

pose challenges to teachers' adoption of these approaches, they express readiness for this adoption.

With Bangladesh's plan to introduce the new curriculum for grade five by 2025, all go together. This reform will have to bring out the intrinsic motivation, incorporate all four skills, and satisfy the future needs of the learners. The findings about communicative competence and the contribution of English policy reform are crucial for the further development of English education.



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28 November 2024

## शोध सार

अंग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षामा स्नातकोत्तर डिग्रीको लागि मो. अरिफुल हसनको शोध प्रबन्धको शिर्षक " शैक्षिक परिणामहरू सुधारपछिको अवस्थामा: बङ्गलादेशमा प्राथमिक सार्वजनिक अङ्ग्रेजी परीक्षाहरूको अन्त्य" १३ मंसिर २०८१ मा प्रस्तुत गरिएको थियो ।

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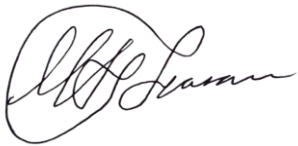
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बङ्गलादेशमा अंग्रेजी भाषा सीपको मूल्याङ्कन एक प्रमुख चुनौती रहिआएको छ, किनभने परम्परागत रूपमा अंग्रेजी शिक्षण छुट्टाछुट्टै भाषिक तत्त्वहरूमा आधारित हुँदै आएको छ। प्राइमरी एजुकेशन सर्टिफिकेट (PEC) वा इन्तेदायी अंग्रेजी परीक्षा जस्ता उच्च महत्वका परीक्षाहरूमा पढ्ने र लेख्ने सीपहरूमा जोड दिइन्थ्यो, तर सुन्ने र बोल्ने सीपहरूलाई बेवास्ता गरिन्थ्यो। यसका परिणामस्वरूप, विद्यार्थीहरूको संप्रेषण क्षमता कमजोर भयो र उनीहरूको भावी शैक्षिक सफलतामा अवरोध उत्पन्न भयो।

यस कथात्मक अनुसन्धानले PEC अंग्रेजी परीक्षा बन्द गर्दा प्राइमरी तहको अंग्रेजी शिक्षणमा पर्ने प्रभावको अध्ययन गरेको हो। यो अध्ययन साहित्य र नीतिहरूको विश्लेषणमा आधारित छ, साथै विभिन्न क्षेत्रका छ जना अंग्रेजी शिक्षकहरूसँग गरिएको अन्तर्वार्ता समावेश गरिएको छ, जसमा अन्तर्वार्ताका फरक दृष्टिकोण र अघिल्लो र हालको PEC अभ्याससम्बन्धी अनुभवहरू समेटिएको छ। शिक्षकहरूको दृष्टिकोणले मूल्याङ्कनका तरिकाहरू, पाठ्यपुस्तकको सामग्री, र शिक्षकहरूको तालिम जस्ता पक्षहरूलाई उठान गर्छ, जुन राष्ट्रिय पाठ्यक्रम रूपरेखा २०२१ सँग मेल खाने गरी समायोजन गर्नु आवश्यक देखिन्छ। PEC को अंग्रेजी परीक्षा बन्द भएपछि परीक्षा-केन्द्रित शिक्षण पद्धतिमा परिवर्तन गर्नुपरेको थियो, जसले गर्दा विद्यार्थीहरूको उत्साह घट्यो र उच्च महत्वका परीक्षा नहुँदा उनीहरूमा उद्देश्यको कमी देखियो। यद्यपि यसले संप्रेषणात्मक र विद्यार्थी-केन्द्रित शिक्षण विधितर्फ प्रेरित गर्‍यो, साथै विद्यार्थीहरूसँग सह-योजना (co-planning) को अभ्यास पनि बढायो। सीमित स्रोतसाधन र पर्याप्त व्यावसायिक विकास नहुनुले शिक्षकहरूलाई यी विधिहरू अपनाउन केही कठिनाइ पुऱ्याउन सक्छ, तर तिनीहरूले यसलाई अपनाउन तयार रहेको देखिएको छ।

बङ्गलादेशले सन् २०२५ सम्ममा कक्षा पाँचका लागि नयाँ पाठ्यक्रम लागू गर्ने योजना बनाएको सन्दर्भमा, सबै पक्ष मिलेर अघि बढ्नु आवश्यक छ। यस सुधारले विद्यार्थीहरूको आन्तरिक प्रेरणा उजागर गर्न, चारै भाषिक सीपहरू (सुन्ने, बोल्ने, पढ्ने, लेख्ने) समावेश गर्न, र भविष्यका आवश्यकताहरू पूरा गर्न

सक्षम हुनुपर्नेछ। संप्रेषण क्षमतासम्बन्धी प्राप्त निष्कर्षहरू र अंग्रेजी नीतिमा भएका सुधारहरू अंग्रेजी शिक्षाको भविष्य विकासका लागि अत्यन्त महत्वपूर्ण छन्।



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१३ मंसिर २०८१

मो. अरिफुल हसन

उपाधि उम्मेदवार

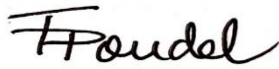
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I understand and agree that my dissertation will become part of a permanent collection in the library of Kathmandu University. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

  
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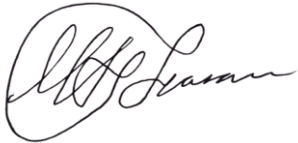
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and it has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree at any other university.



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## DEDICATION

To my Father, Mother, Wife, and Arisha

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AL	Assessment for Learning
AoL	Assessment of Learning
ATEO	Assistant Thana Education Officer
BELTA	Bangladesh English Language Teachers' Association
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CLT	Communication Language Teaching
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	KUSOED: Kathmandu University School of Education
HOT	High-order Thinking
HOTS	High-order Thinking Skills
HSC	Higher Secondary School Certificate
JSC	Junior School Certificate
KU	Kathmandu University
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MEd	Masters of Education
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
NCTB	National Curriculum and Textbook Board
NELTA	Nepal English Language Teachers' Association
PEC	Primary Education Completion
PSC	Primary School Certificate
SSC	Secondary School Certificate

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The English Language Education has been an extremely significant factor in Bangladesh's academic and professional life since our English language ability opens pathways to the world. Even though it is a pertinent and essential aspect of the training system, the system of measuring English proficiency has actually largely been based on high-stakes exams in Bangladesh, for example, the discontinued Primary Education Completion (PEC) or Ebtadayee English exam, previously known as the Primary School Certificate (PSC). Nevertheless, such exams have been criticised for placing undue emphasis on rote learning of isolated bits of language, as opposed to real, meaningful language learning, especially as regards communicative competence. However, the discontinuation of the PEC is a policy shift as important as any I can currently think of, and that leaves us with lots of fruitful empirical questions on the effects on teaching practices and student outcomes that need to be explored.

The chapter is structured into several sections to provide a comprehensive foundation for the study. It begins with (a) Background, offering an overview of the historical and contextual development of English language assessment in Bangladesh. This is followed by (b) My Journey Through Scholarship Exams and PEC Coaching, which provides a personal narrative reflecting the researcher's experiences with the PEC exam system. The section (c) The PEC Exam: A System of Pressure Over Progress delves into the limitations of the PEC exam, emphasising its focus on exam preparation over meaningful language acquisition. (d) Gaps in PEC and Comprehensive Language Assessments highlight discrepancies in the assessment system, particularly its inability to address listening and speaking skills.

The subsequent section (e), Rationale of the Study, highlights the importance of analysing the impacts resulting from the discontinuation of the PEC examination. The (f) Statement of Problems presents the specific challenges and concerns addressed in the research. (g) Purpose of the Study outlines the study's objectives, while (h) Research Questions articulates the key inquiries guiding the investigation. (i) Significance of the Study emphasises the research's contributions to language pedagogy, assessment reform, and policy-making. (j) Delimitation of the Study

specifies the scope and boundaries of the research, ensuring a focused exploration of the subject matter.

The chapter continues with (k) Operational Definitions of Key Terms, clarifying crucial concepts for consistency and understanding. (l) Theories for Language Testing introduces the theoretical frameworks informing the study, and (m) Characteristics of Language Testing provides a detailed exploration of relevant assessment principles. Finally, (n) the Structure and Overview of the Dissertation outlines the organization of the dissertation, summarizing its chapters and their contributions to the overall research narrative. Chapter I closes by addressing the core concepts associated with the research topic and underscoring the study's emphasis on educators' viewpoints about the cessation of the PEC English test and its wider ramifications on English teaching and learning dynamics.

### **Background**

The PEC Examination, a nationwide mandatory assessment for all students nearing the conclusion of their fifth year in Bangladeshi primary schools by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), was implemented in 2009 to achieve the “International Standard” (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2010), directed to reach the goal of providing quality education (Madani, 2019). However, due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the PEC examination, which had last occurred in 2019, had to be cancelled in both 2020 and 2022. Subsequently, the government declared its intention (Hossain, 2017; Kalerkantho, 2016). to discontinue the PEC examination in light of an impending new curriculum set to be introduced in 2023 in an attempt to ease the burden on young learners and shift the focus towards a more comprehensive and holistic primary education experience (The Dhaka Tribune, 2022) which had created a tension among stakeholders about pedagogical effect on English along with other subjects. This decision brought to a close a 13-year period during which the PEC examination had been a key component of the educational landscape in Bangladesh.

Given that English has been consecrated as the medium for the growth of science, technology, and globalisation for a very long time, English is a compulsory subject from pre-school up to secondary school according to the National Education Policy 2010 (MoE, 2010) as part of the government's “Digital Bangladesh 2021”. The National Education Policy 2010, the National Curriculum 2012, and the National Curriculum Framework 2021 suggest that English and Bengali languages are equally

important in teaching and learning. As noted in the National Curriculum 2012, the English language helps in national development by contributing to areas such as "to achieve developments in science, technology, higher education, business, industry, and especially communications and IT skills" (MoE, 2010, p. 5).

There are supporters and critics of the decision to discontinue the English public examination, as well as five other courses to be run at the primary level. It was controversial because the issue sparked debate among the educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders of Bangladesh, as there had been a lot of issues, such as the old coursebook (New Age, 2022), without teacher training on the new curriculum framework. According to them, this would leave teachers with more time to help students build those language skills instead of preparing them for a test. When I thought about my own scholarship tests and PEC coaching, it was clear that the exam was both a source of stress and a source of inspiration. Usually, the overly intense preparation was overshadowing the actual language learning, but it gave us a structured way of going about our academic goals. On the other hand, critics raised concerns about the potential role of quality teaching in the absence of the PEC English exam, which previously motivated stakeholders to prepare learners for good grades and develop English proficiency to thrive in a globalized world. That is important because elementary education in Bangladesh is of general importance and because students' command of English, for all its dominance, is the *lingua franca*.

### **My Journey Through Scholarship Exams and PEC Coaching**

Back in 1995, as a fifth-grade student, I participated in the scholarship exam. At that time, our school created six special coaching batches of 40 students each, held after regular classes. As a non-government school, there was a strong emphasis on producing scholarship winners, as it was a matter of pride and tradition. Additionally, it helped the school attract talented students for the following academic year. Both guardians and teachers were extremely serious about preparing their children for this exam.

In 2017, I had the opportunity to teach class five students in a non-government school, and I found that the scenario had not changed much. The scholarship system was still in place, but now the PEC exam served as the primary step for students to be considered for scholarships. Interestingly, I conducted coaching classes for class five students to help them secure A+ grades and scholarships, just as my teachers had done. The school administration continued to pressure both teachers and students to

achieve these high marks. Similarly, most guardians were just as invested in this process. As a consequence, the stakeholders outweigh the purpose of learning a language due to the exam design as well as the teaching-learning system.

### **PEC Exam Pressure Over Progress**

My paper sought to analyse various aspects of promotion for students as they move from class four to class five, aspects that happened in the past and the present. The most typical procedure is that after completing classes, the class five students sit for an admission examination in order to be placed in different schools, although this tradition was interrupted over the last several years. In the past, schools have put psychological pressure on teachers to ensure they review subject papers before the students' progress from class four to class five. Some schools had gone to the extent of repeating some students in the same year if they did not perform as required during the finality of class five.

With the PEC exam being public, English and Mathematics were most important for the respective stakeholders. These students had a very big problem, especially in these subjects, which they described as being hard because of the lack of proper teaching and learning methods they had received since their childhood. Stakeholders, however, focused on a singular goal: achieving the best scores, especially an A+ in academic performance. Consequently, the focus shifted from the actual learning to passing the PEC exam and the marks that would be attained, as shown by the following changes. When I taught as a primary English language teacher, I realised how much pressure all the stakeholders placed on attaining an A+ in English. This pressure often created an eventual emphasis on the preparation for taking the PEC English exam and prepared only according to the items of the exam (Lakhana et al., 2008; Llosa, 2007; Lori et al., 2006). I would like to bring forward two stories: In order to support the exploration of the context of the PEC English exams and its system, two perspectives, including one of the PEC examinee and another of an Assistant Thana Education Officer (ATEO), are narrated here. I borrowed pseudonyms, having regard to the fact that I respected their privacy.

### **Ether Ali's Experience with the PEC Exam**

*Back in 2018, when I was in class eight, I took the PEC exam. It has been ages, but some things I still remember. My dad is a businessman, and my mom is a primary school teacher for the government. She played such a huge role in preparing her for the PEC exam. In Kushtia, I was attending a non-*

*governmental school, 10 No Barkhada Primary School. The class was in English, and there were only 14 students, and I was outside of the town a few kilometres away. Our class was small for that time; the English version wasn't as popular then as it is now.*

*Jannatul Ferdous, or Jannat Ma'am, as we called her, taught our English class. We didn't have a space where we regularly practised listening and speaking skills, but in an English Arena we were encouraged to speak English, even if we got it wrong. This helped us to communicate in English and, in the process, improve our speaking skills. It was a really good way to approach! It was comforting that our teachers used to help us when we made grammatical errors.*

*In preparation for the PEC exam, we practised a lot on letter writing. Or it was a major part of the exam, so we did it repeatedly. But we weren't given the space to create or speak freely. In fact, we didn't really learn about creativity until much later, late in class seven or eight.*

*The PEC exam couldn't really help me increase my English proficiency. It did in that way, it did help me learn how to write letters, and we memorised answers to some things we expected to see. But I don't think it really helped me improve my overall English skills. What we wanted to do was simply pass English classes because we wanted to get good grades. I don't recall us ever being tested on listening or speaking, and that stress didn't help with developing that skill.*

*I went through everything, including my parents supporting me the day before the exam and studying with my friends for months! They took the time to make sure I was ready, but not to force me to do anything. However, I was nervous about sitting the exam in a school I didn't know and teachers I didn't know, but overall, I remained confident. In the end, I'm glad I went through the process, but I think there could have been more thrust given towards practical language skills like speaking and listening.*

*I would revise the PEC exam in such a way that it becomes harder. For example, I would decrease the unseen passage section and increase grammar-based questions. This strategy is instrumental in advancing students' English mastery, specifically skilfully and thoroughly critical thinking, and writing development. Now that we're older and having learnt a bit more about the*

*world, the more realistic, working in real-life language methodology should be more of the focus in an education system.*

### **Anbir Ahmed's Role as an ATEO in Primary Education**

*I'm an Assistant Thana Education Officer (ATEO), meaning I supervise the primary and secondary schools in the region where I work. Personally, of course, it has been quite a journey, especially in the year that I presided over the PEC examination from 2018 to 2019. There were no specific duties, just to ensure it ran smoothly from delivering the question papers to the schools, maintaining order in the exam halls and definitely during exam periods. We and local law enforcement worked hand in hand to ensure that the environment was safe for the students and teachers.*

*I definitely saw one of the key issues that I thought existed – or rather, didn't exist – was the PEC English exam. I think the exam that they were able to design was not able to support their English language skills. The exam was meant to improve their skill, not like it did. Students of various academic levels could not speak English. What ended up being a disadvantage, especially for the students who would have done well, was that it only took one question on exam day, which prevented them from getting a perfect score. So that's why I think the government's decision to cancel the PEC exam will ultimately be a good one.*

*I will always claim that English teachers should be better trained. A newer generation of teachers has mastered English skills, but many are million-plus-year-olds in their teaching and have yet to make sense of their English skills. I've noticed that they are often scared of starting a conversation in English. However, these teachers need training programmes that are lacking at present. In order to gain better confidence in speaking and teaching English, they need more in-depth and more practical training.*

*At least ten times a month, I visit my schools where I monitor structural developments, evaluate teachers' skills, and in some cases, address any problems that a school might have. In addition, we will meet with the school committees, class teachers and families throughout the year so that all is working correctly. The other major issue is that we do not have enough manpower. We have so many empty positions in our office, and frequently, a sense of being too stretched thin.*



*I hope that the new curriculum will help address some of these problems. Though we chatted with them and were told that they'd get training for the new curriculum soon, we don't know when exactly. I think that this will be for the good of primary education, in that students will get better at English. But, in realising that there is a lot more to do to help both teachers and students succeed, it is clear.*

The stories of a 2018 PEC examinee and an ATEO revealed reasons for discontinuing the PEC English exam. These narratives revealed the key flaws in the system, from the student's experience of the limited language development and memorisation-driven learning to the thoughts of the ATEOs based on an ineffective exam design. These reflections lead to a number of questions I began to investigate in chapter I, which constituted the rest of these reflections, to help extend and probe into the effects of ceasing the PEC English test, and its further consequences within primary education language learning.

### **Gaps in PEC and Comprehensive Language Assessments**

I have been a Bangladeshi English language teacher, closely observing the education system, so far, the PEC exam was not anything out of the ordinary. Time has seen changes in the curricula without significant changes in the pedagogical process (Ali & Hamid, 2020) for class five students. A proper and adequate way to teach English as a global language should place emphasis on proper or adequate language acquisition rather than being dealt with as a subject (Talukder, 2019). In fact, the question items from the high-stakes exams were not good enough to improve students' reading and writing skills (Chowdhury, 2022), and the PEC exam was not so different. Above all, the exam did not have listening and speaking skills, which are necessary to develop a language (Kabir, 2023).

Although the PEC test had ceased, the PECs were designed with current assessment questions, which leaves little room for comprehensive learning needs in language (MoE, 2022). This important gap in the assessment process was that all four language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, were not being assessed. These skills have to be included in assessments because not only will they improve the pedagogical approach, but they will also ensure that students get practical language skills (Kabir & Greenwood, 2021). Thus, the current flawed assessment system fails to adequately assess English language proficiency and hence calls for urgent reforms (Ali & Hamid, 2020; Kabir, 2023).

### **Rationale of the study**

The first national exam in which Grade V students appeared was PEC, when they were usually ten years of age. It was shown by researchers that the importance placed on good grades (Mamun et al., 2020; Prodhan, 2016), and students, teachers and parents were all under severe pressure. On the other hand, the design of the PEC exam slowed down the accountability of the students and created a culture of memorization. The same was true of English among the six subjects. The National Education Policy 2010 and the National Curriculum 2012 emphasised all areas of language skills and encourage critical thinking without following these principles, the PEC test.

Before the PEC exam, teachers were extolling; their best efforts were on meritorious students and others trying to bring scholarships for their institutions. During the PEC era, this system evolved to focus on scores in the PEC exam, which are GPA 5. On all such occasions, although good grades took priority over student accountability, it compromised educational ethics (The Financial Express, 2017). Teachers got scared of an exam-oriented and content-based teaching, but students & teachers followed it because there were systemic pressures. The PEC English test was limited to a narrow set of question types and did not provide the opportunity to develop higher-order thinking skills per Bloom's taxonomy. Four critical language skills which should be emphasised were structurally overlooked, and therefore there was further devaluation of the process of achieving pedagogical goals that is turning the teacher-to-student relationship into what Freire (1978) labels "pedagogical oppression".

However, these concerns were not dealt with by undertaking any scientific study of the PEC test design to identify its flaws or identify its scope for improvement. A gap in research left unanswered questions as to how it stacks up as an assessor of learners' actual proficiency in the language. However, while some studies (Andhara & Alfian, 2023; Wallace & Leong, 2020) pointed out that students in different contexts were willing to learn English in order to study abroad or become integrated into target language cultures, the lack of feasibility to make such aspirations possible for learners who wanted to pass the PEC exam appears to have been neglected. Yet while parental support (Andhara & Alfian, 2023) and even teachers' attitudes (Ekiz & Kulmetov, 2016) did affect PEC's results, the links between their role and PEC's objectives were missing.

Since the discontinuance of the PEC English exam with the introduction of the National Curriculum Framework 2021, due to its continued application of old textbooks and curriculum up to 2024, controversies have arisen. The discontinuation of this English test left us in a state of urgency to look at how effective the test is in measuring the language proficiency of the learners. The gaps in the quality of National Curriculum 2021 assessments in Grade V would aid decision makers in designing an alternative assessment framework until full adaptation of National Curriculum 2021 in Grade V.

### **Statement of Problems**

The PEC or Ebtadayee exam had been continued in Bangladesh nationally since 2009 (The New Nation, 2018) with six courses: Bangla, English, Mathematics, Primary Science, Bangladesh and Global Studies, and Religion; and discontinued officially from 2022 as a part of new competency-based National Curriculum Framework 2021's planning and implementation. Public exams in developing countries tend to be highly academic and often create inequities for students, including culturally inappropriate questions and language barriers (Yung, 2020). However, understanding the global economy and its historical importance, English is one of the core subjects in the national curriculum of Bangladesh from pre-primary to higher secondary level. In addition, with equal admission scores to the secondary level, the PEC or Ebtadayee test result was considered the deciding factor for students (Secondary and Higher Secondary Board, 2021). The PEC and Ebtadayee results showed that the passing percentage got lower sometimes, and this mostly happened due to failure in the English and Mathematics tests. Given the significance of teaching English, several curriculum changes in Bangladesh aimed to enhance English teaching and learning environments since Bangladesh's sovereignty. The National Education Policy 2010 (MoE, 2010), the National Curriculum 2012 (National Curriculum and Textbook Board [NCTB], 2012), and National Curriculum Framework 2021 (MoE, 2022) consider English as the essential language after Bengali, so it has been considered as a subject as Bengali rather than a language. To pass this subject in the PEC exam, the different stakeholders, for example, students, teachers, school administrations, and guardians, preferred to go through the content-based question design and policy, ignoring English language learning.

The National Curriculum 2012 (NCTB, 2012) emphasises listening and speaking as the essential building blocks for fostering students' reading and writing

skills. It further specifies that the primary purpose of English instruction is to help students acquire proficiency in all four English language skills via engaging activities. The test design had a pedagogical implication for the English learning process. In this case, it was needed to investigate the opportunities and limitations to promote actual English language learning, considering the subskills essential to learn receptive and productive skills in this.

While the national curriculum was following the continuation of the Communication Language Teaching (CLT) approach in Bangladesh, MoE and NCTB neglected the misalignments between the syllabus curriculum and the assessment process (Rahmatuzzman, 2018). There was a gap between class five's English textbook design and its public exam question design, which encouraged both students and teachers to depend on reference books rather than textbooks, which always put a question mark on the 25-year journey of CLT. To navigate the issue, the authorities had taken some initiatives to address the challenges in Bangladesh, but they were not enough to address the imbalance. Rather than exercising listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, teachers and students practiced exam-oriented content, which directly impacted other academic examinations. To prepare for the twenty-first century, the educational system needed to prepare the students to emphasise developing high-order thinking (HOT) rather than memorisation (Sasson, 2019; Zohar & Lustov, 2018). The test question design needed changes to encourage HOT in real-world applications that were in line with the four language skills development. My research focused on thoroughly understanding teachers' opinions on the discontinuation of the PEC English language exam.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of skipping the PEC English exam as a part of the educational outcome and its impacts in Bangladesh. First, what would happen if the PEC English exam is cancelled and whether there could be a shift in practice in Primary Education? The impact of the reform on students' English language acquisition, including their acquisition of all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), is to be investigated. The second seeks to analyse the changes in the assessment methods after the elimination of the PEC exam and their congruence with the goals of the National Curriculum Framework 2021. Then, through the understanding, experiences and preparedness of primary English language teachers in adapting to the new system was explored.

Finally, it seeks to help us identify gaps and challenges teachers, students, and other stakeholders face as they move to the revised curriculum and assessment practices.

### **Research Questions**

Two research questions had been developed to ensure that the study provided significant results. The questionnaire had been prepared based on these questions to elicit participants' replies.

1. How do teachers view the impact of discontinuing English public exams on students' learning outcomes and academic performance at the primary level in Bangladesh?
2. What challenges do English language teachers face in teaching after the discontinuation of English public exams, and how are they addressing these challenges?

### **Significance of the study**

In the now shortened PEC exams, I observed large glitches in the testing and assessment system and most importantly, how language skills were being tested on students. This (Alamgir, 2022) was the point of core significance that makes the present study so critical. Teacher perspectives on the PEC examination and its implications for English language learning are researched critically. The study elucidates systemic problems in language education by illuminating how the exam impacted instructional practices and student outcomes.

The research further examines the content and structure of textbooks that are used in the PEC exams and their comparison with language skill development. In my study, I explore the broader question of whether tests and learning materials are effective in inculcating core language competencies of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

While writing this investigation, I examined the PEC's methodology of testing both pros and cons. This 'holistic' approach enables us to understand the true role of the exam in language learning. By providing a clear picture of the validity, sustainability, transparency and accountability of the PEC exam in the educational framework of Bangladesh, it holds significant motivation for this study. Despite numerous reforms, however, these concerns have continued.

Studies related to other board exams of Bangladesh include the Junior School Certificate (JSC), Secondary School Certificate (SSC), and Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC), and these studies have almost always depicted board exams as a

strong instrument for testing language skills, not just reading and writing, but less so on listening and speaking skills (Begum & Farooqui, 2008; Hamid & Honan, 2012;). On the other hand, the PEC English test system is relatively unexplored. To fill that gap, my study analysed the PEC examination's testing procedures in detail, its tie to the curriculum, and its total effect on the English pedagogy. These findings sought to contribute novel insights regarding the effectiveness of language assessments in the early stage and offer evidence-based suggestions for educational reforms in Bangladesh (Ahmed et al., 2005; Rahman et al., 2020).

### **Delimitation of the Study**

While addressing the main challenge of PEC test on language learning, my research was limited as well. Although Bangladesh has 64 districts, the study was based on interviews of selected districts; mostly those of Cumilla, Sylhet, Jhenaidah and Dinajpur. The generalizability of the findings is thus restricted by this regional concentration of districts since sociocultural and economic dynamics in these districts may not fully represent those across the country as a whole. For instance, English language acquisition may be different in various regions on the basis that areas may have different linguistic practices, access to resources and educational opportunities (Afrin & Baines, 2020).

Therefore, Bangladesh, a culturally diverse country, has different cultural factors affecting English education, and they differ widely among regions, due to the regional attitudes regarding English education and the legacies of colonial language policies (Rahman, 2024). There are cultural differences that can positively and negatively affect language learning. Furthermore, the economic gap between regions complicates even more the access to a good English education. Although Sylhet districts may possess more access to foreign remittances used for educational development, other districts lack poverty and educational infrastructure (Finance Division, Ministry of Finance-Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2008; Mondal, 2019).

The limitation was due to these factors and the limited financial constraints available sources. A more comprehensive, nationwide study of a wider variety of districts would have been less representative and less comprehensive. This was, however, beyond the limits of this research, due to budgetary and logistical challenges. Moreover, the time constraints of data collection precluded the possibility of more in-depth, long-term interviews, which would have elicited a broader

understanding of the overarching (or long-term) impacts of the PEC exam on language learning goals.

While these limitations remained, the selected regions provided a useful cross-section of views that addressed the critical issues in the PEC system. Future research could build on this foundation by increasing sample size, more fully covering the regional disparities, and perhaps exploring the long-run impacts of English education reforms across Bangladesh.

### **Operational Definitions of The Key Terms**

Communicative Competence

*Hymes (1972) and later Canale and Swain (1980) consider the concept of communicative competence as proficiency in applying language in real situations such as listening, speaking, reading and writing.*

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

A language teaching model that focuses on interaction and the practical use of language for communication, focusing on developing the four language skills, is central to CLT (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Savignon, 2002).

Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)

*Higher-order thought skills are mental processes that involve the cognitive processes of critical analysis, as well as creative thinking and reasoning. In fact, these cognitive abilities are critical to high-level psychological functionality (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloom, 1956).*

Intrinsic Motivation

If participants participate in an activity simply for the sake of its inherent satisfaction, it is intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Extrinsic Motivation

External motivation brings about extrinsic motivation to do something and get a reward or leave a situation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Assessment for Learning

Assessment for learning is formative and attempts to improve instruction through feedback that could help both the student and the teacher change their approaches (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Assessment of Learning

Assessment of learning is summative, concentrating on evaluating the student's ultimate success of an instructional period (Harlen, 2007).

### High-Stake Tests

Utilised for critical decision-making, teachers, institutions, or districts are typically referred to as high-stakes assessments (Madaus, 1998).

### Washback

The influence that testing has on pedagogical practices is recognised as the washback effect (Alderson & Wall, 1993).

### Validity

Ensuring the assessment aligns with its intended purpose to measure is central to the concept of validity (Messick, 1989).

### Reliability

The uniformity of results across different testing sessions is a key aspect of reliability (Crocker & Algina, 2006).

### Objectivity

The level of objectivity in test results, unaffected by examiner bias, relates to the concept of its objectivity (Gipps, 1994).

## **Structure and Overview of the Dissertation**

My dissertation is structured into seven chapters. In Chapter I, the study agenda was introduced, describing the objectives and focus of the study. Chapter II provided a review of the literature to provide a basic understanding of the research context. The research methodology used in the study is discussed in Chapter III. Chapter IV presented a narration of the four research participants. In Chapter V, opportunities provided by using English in the professional practice of teacher trainers are explored. In Chapter VI, teachers' views, teacher trainers' experiences and other faces of teachers' experiences relative to the use of English were explored. The study finally presented its most important conclusions and reflections about the research in Chapter VII.

## **Chapter Summary**

In Chapter I, I introduced my dissertation with the research agenda and objectives, focusing on post-discontinuation educational outcomes of the PEC English exam in Bangladesh. It describes how the PEC exam became an integrated part of the national curriculum from 2009 onward and how it has shaped primary education. English is a must-course in the Bangladeshi educational system and occupies a very important place given its global relevance.



The chapter noted the dramatic pressure to which stakeholders, including teachers, students, and guardians, were subjected because of the high stakes of the PEC exam. Additionally, it discussed shortcomings of the exam, including in measuring more whole language skills like listening and speaking. The exam design did not match up with the actual changes in the curriculum, and this resulted in a focused curriculum that valued rote learning and grades over real language acquisition.

It also presented the rationale of the study, problem statement, study purpose and research questions. It also discussed the importance of the research, how removing the PEC exam will affect teaching practices and student learning. A review of selected operation definitions of the key words used in language testing was followed by an outline of the dissertation, that is, the main structure, which allowed for a complete analysis of teachers' points of view on the discontinuation of the exam and its pedagogical impact.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Bangladesh extensively uses English in documentation after the national language, Bangla. High-stakes exams have been important since the earliest decades of the country's history. Some views about the pivotal place of English have also been introduced within the context of CLT, which nevertheless has not reached its goal (Haider & Chowdhury, 2012). The conventional approach developed public English tests, which also provided few opportunities for candidates to show their creative abilities. The grammatical rules, reading, and writing skills taught in the PEC English exam were at the expense of listening and speaking skills; thus, holistic language development had received little emphasis.

The second chapter explored the English public examinations in Bangladesh, concentrating specifically on linking the development of communicative competence across productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (listening and reading) language skills to them. The second part of the chapter went on to engage with pertinent theoretical and policy frameworks, presenting a critical review of existing literature as a means of conceptualising the groundwork of this study.

#### **English as a subject in Bangladeshi Public Exams**

English has a place in the Bangladeshi educational system. Hamid and Honan (2012) explain that English has been an integral part of the national curriculum since the country's independence, and it is taught from the primary to the higher secondary levels. Although numerous educational reforms had sought to bolster English language instruction, skills for listening and speaking were almost entirely ignored by such public exams as the PEC, which tested reading and writing exclusively. This selective emphasis led to an erroneous system of assessment that prevented students from reaching functional proficiency in English, which in turn is crucial for participating in the world of the global community (Cosentino et al., 2020; Ni et al., 2022).

In this regard, the integration of CLT in the NCTB English textbooks was assumed to improve communicative competence. Exams like the PEC, however, remain tests and are not meant to foster critical thinking, but rather measure fact-

based knowledge, and, as such, expected outcomes have not been fully realised (Rahman, 2011; Zhang & Bian, 2020). All that this exam-focused system has driven the students and the teachers alike from practising real-life language skills and towards rote learning for securing high marks. In this light, students have come to depend more and more on test preps and private tutors —out of fear that they will not be able to fulfil the ‘language requirement’, and thus give more importance to memorising ‘correct’ preconceived answers than engaging in meaningful language practise (Ara, 2009; Schuth et al., 2017).

The approach is heavily impacted by teachers and central figures. They have also reported feeling pressured to teach solely reading and writing skills, those were graded in the PEC exam. Because exercises in listening and speaking, vital parts of the development of language, were simply not in the syllabus, they were skipped entirely. Consequently, students had few opportunities to practise any of these subskills, resulting in little communicative ability after many years of English education. Hoque (2011) found that many teachers taught to the test without teaching topics outside the range of the PEC exam, which limited the nature of English instruction in primary schools.

The narrow focus on limited skills in the PEC exam itself has been criticised (Islam & Richards, 2022; Alamgir, 2022; Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2015; Begum & Farooqui, 2008). In the English section, the main components were the vocabulary and the basic rules of grammar of English, and those were elements central to foreign language learning, yet were not included in this. The limited vocabulary knowledge of the teachers has been admitted by teachers to affect their performance as teachers (Schuth et al., 2017), though they had to rotate to the restricted PEC curriculum. This cycle is perpetuated by both students and teachers focusing on memorisation, not communication, thus genuinely inhibiting real language proficiency.

This focus on rote learning has done much to stunt students’ ability for meaningful communication as well. These people had studied English for years leading up to the PEC exam; they had a fundamental problem with basic English conversations. The exam was seen by teachers and students as the principal aim of English instruction rather than using it practically. The teachers often deducted points for grammatical mistakes, not taking the developmental stage of the students into account, with the result that Ara (2009) observed that students used only

memorisation. This harsh grading silenced students from attempting to use even a bit of English in actual situations, keeping a lid on learning.

There was pressure to maintain high pass rates, too, as reported by teachers from high school administrations and parents. And in some instances, administrators discouraged teachers from setting different or unfamiliar essay topics, lest students underperform and guardians complain. As a result, Maniruzzaman and Hoque (2010) explained that high marks became an end in themselves and not for the mastery of the language. The result, then, was that teachers ceased to be language facilitators and started to be responsible only for getting students to pass exams, no matter the cost to authentic linguistic abilities.

Further studies showed that reference books and private tuitions interfered with effective English instruction in government schools. Pre-written answers in reference books became a resource in certain tests that students normally resorted to. This marginalises the textbook that was assumed to be the principal learning resource in the National Curriculum. Not only did these practices hinder authentic learning, but they also necessarily contributed to differences among students who received private lessons (Saha, 2019).

Standardised measure of academic achievement that the PEC exam was, it did not address the same complexities that students face in learning a language. HOTS from Bloom's Taxonomy were not integrated into the test; it was not about basic recall and recognition. The problem with this approach was that it restricted the application of language knowledge by students. Requests are necessary to take a year full of exams, but in a world where twenty-first-century skills such as critical thinking and problem solving are being emphasised, the design of the PEC exam did not prepare students for real-world communication (Sasson, 2019; Zohar & Lustov, 2018).

The results of this system are revealed in the students' communicative competencies. Although most students passed the PEC exam, a great many people had trouble with simple English conversation. This divergence between academic performance and practical language skills is the single biggest flaw in English teaching and testing at the primary level. An ideal PEC, for example, should test all four skills of language, like listening, speaking, reading and writing. But the system had to fail.

Both educational reformers and policymakers have long recognised that we need to go beyond rote learning and embrace communicative approaches. National Education Policy 2010, National Curriculum 2012, and National Curriculum Framework 2021, about the teacher and pedagogy, underline the importance of communicative competence, but the PEC exam contradicts this aim. The exam concentrates mostly on reading and writing, and does not develop the types of proficiency that students need in a globalised world (MoE, 2010). The lack of connection between policy and practice has led to a frozen education system, with the real potential of English instruction yet to be realised.

The PEG exam comes with a mixed verdict from stakeholders such as teachers, parents and administrators. Parents saw it as the necessary benchmark, but teachers were also frustrated with its limits. Educationalist himself, observed that indeed child specialists and many educationalists had favoured a balanced language assessment which advocates for meaningful and authentic learning rather than test preparation (Saha, 2019). Similar issues were found by Zhang (2019) in a study of public English exams in China: these are not specific to Bangladesh, but rather global problems in language education.

On the other hand, Gruber (2017) reported that students in Austria liked English Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) lessons, but future parents sounded warnings about implementation. Our results demonstrate the significance of context in how stakeholders perceive decisions. The consequences of focusing too much on high-stakes testing in Bangladesh, as in many other countries imposing centralised exams, have been an overvaluation of grades, which in turn, led many educators to forget the need to teach meaningful language acquisition.

English instruction at the primary level in Bangladesh was significantly shaped by the PEC exam. Rote learning tended to suppress the development of communicative competence, failing to adequately prepare students for real-life language use. However, reforms, including the integration of CLT, were meant to improve language instruction. The PEC exam's emphasis on reading and writing undermined the success of these reforms. First and foremost, it is important to rethink the assessment system that would align English instruction with the broader objectives of the national curriculum, correlating to enhance the acquisition of language skills, which the students are promised to acquire in the future, which has not been the case in the recent past.

### Relating Communicative Competence to Productive and Receptive Skills

Teaching linguistic abilities is usually very challenging because the teacher is accountable for establishing an atmosphere where educational goals may be successfully attained. There are two distinct sorts of language abilities, known as 'Receptive skills' and 'Productive skills.' Whilst listening and reading are considered passive language skills, speaking and writing are classified as active language abilities. Teachers usually find productivity easy to teach because of the availability of observation using the senses. On the contrary, it is not valid for receptive skills. (Sun et al., 2019). There is an untold trend to present the task orally before reading and writing to make the task easier for the students. However, there was a chance of manipulating thinking with the explanation and sentence structures while the students are on a listening or writing test (Higgins et al., 2006).

**Figure 1**

*A Relationship Diagram of Communicative Competency*



(Light, 1989)

Competent language learners can present themselves to others, understanding the target language in the era of globalization with mastered linguistic abilities. Their success changes thoughts and perceptions, which differ from those of others. However, to know the loopholes during the learning procedure for different learners (Flavin, 2019), along with the L1. Policymakers need to be concerned about the learners' cognitive level. (MoE, 2010). The 2010 Education Policy aims to develop students' proficiency in the four fundamental language skills: oral communication,

written expression, comprehension of written text, and aural comprehension, which requires appropriate content while keeping the different variables.

In a study, Rahmatuzzaman (2018) shows that the context in Bangladesh does not practically favour CLT implementation. CLT refers to *Communicative Competence* in language teaching. Jacob and Farrell (2003) pointed out a few key components of CLT, for example, learner-centered lessons, meaning-focused learning, building HOTS, and lifelong learning. Though there is no best method for teaching (Prabhu, 1990), “all of them need to be continuously adjusted and enriched in a real teaching practice situation; the same is true for CLT” (Ju, 2013, p. 1583).

## Figure 2

*An illustration of PEC Test Assessment Focus*



Rao (2019) mentioned that the four language skills are all essential in learning English, and listening is the first. However, Pardede (2019) stated that an integrated approach is the best method to develop learners' language competence and help teachers teach English. From the beginning of language instruction, discrete skill instruction has been given to students to improve their proficiency in one skill at a time. On the other hand, the government has reworked textbooks to make studying languages more enjoyable by providing authentic opportunities for students to use the language correctly. In addition, the new curriculum emphasised teaching grammar in the proper context to ensure correctness and facilitate language learning (Saha, 2019; NCTB, 2012). In English language learning, all four language skills are interlinked and complementary (Karmakar et al., 2022) to increase language competence. In a study, Riemer (2002) showed that communication skills are one of the essential academic and professional tools, and they also influence other elements, such as

gender equality. He also mentioned that being isolated endangers communication skill development when they need to engage themselves in more experiential learning.

### **Teaching Tweens**

A student's language skills grow best under the guidance of a caring and dedicated teacher. However, myriad difficulties arise that disrupt the learning process by erecting a barrier that an educator cannot let a pupil go beyond, no matter how hard that educator wants that pupil to succeed. School boards, the government, and society often pressure students to improve their grades (Chamberlin et al., 2018), since scores are always deemed superior to genuine learning. On top of that, teachers are being coerced into a test-driven pedagogy that waters down the learning process. Research on Public Secondary Schools in Sukkur, Sindh (Nandwani et al., 2021) indicates that teachers need to cover the syllabus within a limited time due to the term exams following the teacher-centred method or subject-centred method (Jan, 2013), which is almost similar in the Bangladeshi education system.

Bangladesh has 129,258 schools, from pre-primary to primary level, where 72,1801 teachers teach 201,22,337 students (MoPME, 2020). Weiss and Meurers (2019) showed that elementary school students have a better accuracy level in language learning, which highly affects the following levels. In the realm of English language instruction, it is more crucial for educators to prioritise helping students achieve high marks rather than focusing solely on teaching the language itself. To come out of this situation and the conventional teaching method, students and teachers need the motivation to learn the English language after L1. Game-based tasks and consciousness-raising exercises should be employed by teachers, such as critical thinking-related studies and real-life conversation, to support students' second language acquisition (Nida, 2021).

### **Theoretical Review**

In this theoretical review in particular, key concepts and frameworks from language pedagogy and assessment were investigated and analysed in terms of their relation to English Language Education in Bangladesh. Communicative competence, CLT, HOTS, and motivational factors in learning played a significant role in this central discussion. Moreover, the review looked at the assessment principles of reliability, validity, and objectivity, as well as the effect of high-stakes testing and its impact on washback of teaching and learning. This review, therefore, aimed at bringing these theories together to shed light on the alignment of educational policies,



pedagogical strategies, and assessment practices in relation to the discontinuation of the PEC exam in 2023.

### **Language Pedagogy and Learning Frameworks**

The development of communicative competence has always been considered the main objective of the process of language instruction in the domain. This productivity consists of more than appropriate sentence construction, and it includes the ability to correctly and appropriately use language in a wide variety of examples. The skill is more than correct language, and it includes using the language in an acceptable way in different contexts. In order to achieve this goal, the instructional approach called CLT has come into vogue because it focuses on communicative activity over rote memorisation of linguistic forms. Additionally, the importing of HOTS in language instruction is being considered more and more important for the development of critical thinking and problem solving in learners, particularly relevant in light of the importance of the PEC exam in Bangladesh. This review addresses the interrelation between communicative competence, CLT and HOTS in terms of their implications for English language pedagogy and assessment in Bangladesh.

#### ***Communicative Competence***

Hymes (1972) came up with the concept of communicative competence to mean the capability to use language effectively in social interactions: grammatical accuracy, sociolinguistic appropriateness and strategic competence. Hymes' model took it further by developing upon the traditional linguistic competence, that is, an analysis of structure and only structural analysis, to push us to think about using language in context. It has thus influenced world language approaches from structuralist to communicative and more recent approaches.

Canale and Swain (1980) later refined the concept, recognising four elements of communicative proficiency: sociocultural competence, linguistic competence, textual competence and adaptive competence. The elements presented here provide a detailed structure for understanding the intricacy of language mastery, and communicative competence is put forward as the major goal of language instruction. However, within the context of the PEC exam, this ideal was quite a gap from the way in which students' language abilities were actually assessed. Reading and writing skills, but very little listening and speaking, were the focus of the exam.

To become communicatively competent, you must focus on listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, in traditional basic education systems,

including that of Bangladesh, such assessment heavily leans towards the latter two to the detriment of meaningful language use. In Kamiya (2017), it is maintained that a valid language test should include all aspects of communicative competence. And should represent the authentic use of language. Here, the design of the PEC exam, which incentivised rote memorisation, did not advance these principles and constrained the students' natural ability for real-world communication.

### ***Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)***

CLT, subversively, emerged as an alternative to those preceding pedagogical approaches, in particular grammar translation and the so-called audio-lingual technique, which place form over form. If the essence of CLT is that effective language acquisition takes place through meaningful interaction, rather than memorising of discrete linguistic units (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), then there is a strong likelihood that items will be followed earlier. This methodology supports the goal of promoting communicative competence, in that it focuses on interaction or negotiations, meaning, and the application of language in real contexts.

The National Curriculum 2012 in the Bangladeshi context has the possibility to support the practice of CLT to cultivate communicative competence among students. Yet the realisation of CLT in Bangladeshi classrooms has been lukewarm. There are, however, difficulties that teachers face when trying to use communicative activities: big class sizes, limitations of resources and an emphasis on exam preparation. Nuby et al. (2020) also observe that many Bangladeshi teachers return to the traditional teacher-centred methods, using the mother tongue instead of the target language to accomplish the syllabus and ensure students gain good marks on exams like PEC.

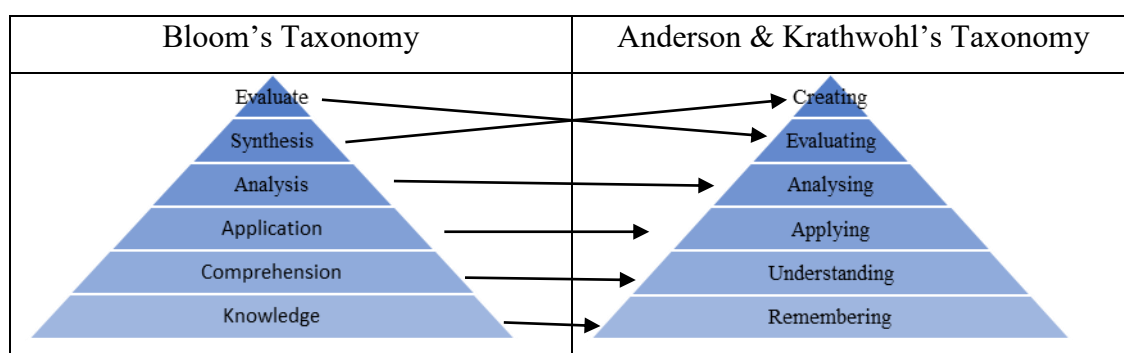
The PEC exam, while continuing to emphasise reading comprehension and writing issues, does not fully support the goals of CLT. Silva and Almeida (2017) add that assessment practices that emphasise rote memorisation and pre-set answers interfere with the communicative intention of language education. Assessments of communicative competence must take into account the interactive and dynamic nature of language use. In order to do this, there is going to be a need to incorporate tasks that focus on listening and speaking skills and tasks for writing that will promote creativity and critical thinking.

### ***Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)***

HOTS is defined in terms of growing cognitive processes in Bloom's Taxonomy, such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation and creation (*Conklin, 2005; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloom, 1956*). These are the skills that learners will need in order to get past the simple memory and use acquired knowledge in far-reaching and additional ways. In language education, HOTS, as a learning objective, promotes critical thinking about language in learning, problem solving and improved communication in varied situations.

**Figure 3**

*An illustration of Anderson & Krathwohl's Revised Taxonomy*



(Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)

HOTS can never be integrated into language instruction without having a significant impact on the development of learners who can flexibly and adaptively use the language. However, in plotting out the learning within the context of high-stakes assessments such as PEC, the process of HOTS is frequently impeded by the emphasis on lower-tier thinking processes, namely rote memorisation and recall. Rahman et al. (2019) state that the design of the high-stakes exam, by prioritising conventional questions, did not facilitate critical thinking or problem solving. Implementing a curriculum that heavily emphasizes higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), while exams largely focus on lower-order skills, creates a mismatch between the objectives of language instruction and the aims of language assessments in Bangladesh.

Language assessments that promote HOTS necessitate the use of tasks that call for students to analyse, evaluate, and produce in the target language. For instance, open-ended questions, problem-solving tasks and communicative activities that encourage students to apply cognitive skills, i.e., critical thinking and language creative use, can fill the gap between language teaching and testing. Therefore, HOTS

fosters the competencies taught to students for real-life communication and lifelong learning.

### **Implications for the PEC Exam and Language Education in Bangladesh**

The PEC exam's design, which placed emphasis on reading and writing skills and promoted rote memorisation, did not fit the need of communicative competence or HOTS. With CLT principles, future reforms should pay more attention to including many forms and sizes of language in the exam to allow more sustainable and meaningful language use. It will include evaluation of listening and speaking skills; design and task development for the improvement of critical thinking and problem solving.

Additionally, the end of the PEC exam in 2023 opened the doors for rethinking the role of linguistic testing at the primary level in the country. Given educators' efforts to shift away from a solely exam-centred approach with an emphasis on test prep, assessment could be accomplished with a balance of well-developed, communicative competence and HOTS. It can be done by linking assessments with curricular aims, training teachers on CLT methods, and testing that generates positive washback (tests that promote teaching practices that enhance rather than shallow learning).

It is important to integrate communicative competence, CLT and HOTS into developing learners' proficiency in practical language use so that learners can communicate effectively in real situations. Education has a big role in the acquisition of linguistic skills, which allows individuals to use language competently in real scenarios. While these goals were hard to attain, the PEC exam's focus on lower-order thinking skills and rote memorisation defied the achievement of these goals. Future reforms of language teaching and testing practices in Bangladesh may be better aligned if all four language skills are incorporated into assessments and an emphasis is placed on critical thinking and problem solving. Therefore, HOTS would help to develop communicative competence, and the students will be adept at the competencies needed for academic and real-life experiences.

### **Motivation in Learning**

Motivation is a major factor in the success of language learners. It tells you how much or how little of a person will be engaged in, how long they will remain on

a task, and how effective they will be at finishing a second language. Within the realm of language education, two primary categories of motivation are typically recognised: intrinsic and extrinsic. Teachers and educators need to understand these two types of motivation because the way they impact CLT can be crucial in deciding the efficacy of a particular teaching approach. This review considered definitions of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, their contribution to language proficiency development, and the interaction of the two with pedagogical strategies such as CLT.

### **Intrinsic Motivation**

Intrinsic motivation is simply a natural tendency to act upon something, whereas acting upon something because it is inherent and without external incentives or constraints. Learners who are intrinsically motivated learning a language enjoy the process ‘for the sake of it’, are interested, curious, and want to get better at it. Self-Determination Theory, proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), posits that three fundamental psychological requirements fuel intrinsic motivation: the need for autonomy, the desire for competence, and a sense of relatedness. Internal Motivation is more likely to occur when learners feel independent in their educational process, feel confident in their ability to succeed, and experience a feeling of belonging in their educational community (pp. 31-34).

Connected to intrinsic motivation is a deeper attention to material and a longer time to obtain the target language. Thus, students with intrinsic motivation are more likely to take risks, to practise the speaking skills and to be fully engaged with authentic language experiences in real-world situations — these matters for communicative competence (Ushioda, 2011). At the same time, intrinsic motivation is easily compatible with CLT principles, based as they are on meaningful communication and interaction as necessary features of language learning. CLT can tap into students’ intrinsic motivation just by setting up authentic and learner-centred experiences.

The research supports the value of intrinsic motivation in language learning. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013), learners with intrinsic motivation usually set personal language goals and seek different language practice opportunities outside of the classroom. However, this self-directed learning is vital in the CLT environments where students are encouraged to speak spontaneously and creatively. In addition, intrinsic motivation is associated with more advanced language proficiency, since intrinsically motivated students tend to engage in short active

learning activities: critical thinking, problem solving, reflective language use, and so on (Schmidt & Watanabe, 2001).

While the benefits of fostering intrinsic motivation in the classroom are well known, doing so can be a challenge, especially where external pressure, for example, the nature of high-stakes exams, is more prevalent. For example, in Bangladesh, memorisation and exam performance as part of the PEC exam have been found to stifle students' intrinsic motivation to learn English (Rahman et al., 2021). In response to this, educators need to establish a supportive learning context where learners are able to experience autonomy, relevance and relevance from their learning, and application of language skills to actual situations. This approach allows teachers to develop intrinsic motivation that lends to more significant and endurable language learning outcomes.

### **Extrinsic Motivation**

Extrinsic motivation is the force to engage in a task because of rewards, grades and social recognition. Learners who are extrinsically motivated are motivated by receiving praise from teachers and parents, certificates of achievement, or passing an exam. Although extrinsic motivation is often regarded as less desirable than intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation can contribute to language learning in educational contexts that emphasise performance and assessments.

Extrinsic motivation in language education might be beneficial as well as restrictive within the scope of language education. As a positive point, extrinsic rewards can lead learners to sufficiently involve themselves in language activities that they might otherwise fail to initiate. For example, if the participation of the students in communicative activities promises to get them a higher grade or positive feedback from their instructor (Gardner, 2010), the students can be motivated to take part in communicative activities. This sort of motivation is capable of overcoming early resistance or anxiety associated with the usage of the target language, particularly in the early stages of language acquisition.

But motivation of this kind can also be harmful, especially when it becomes the main stimulus of learning. Students fixated on external rewards, such as passing exams, may substitute these with mindless rote memorisation rather than communicative competence, as they fail to understand that external rewards themselves are not the measure of a person's success or achievement. In the case of PEC exam in Bangladesh, a high stakes exam context in which students often learned

through extrinsic motivation, engaged in surface level strategies to learn the language while simply preparing for the exam, resulting in learning what is required in the test rather than the genuine acquisition of the language (Begum & Farooqui, 2008).

In such cases, the emphasis on extrinsic motivation will undermine the goals of an approach such as CLT that seeks to enhance communicative competence through meaningful interaction and language use. Dörnyei (2009) gauges that learners who are mainly driven by extrinsic factors could undertake language learning tasks without really committing themselves to the intellectual and emotional effort involved in language acquisition. As a result, students may end up with a superficial knowledge of the language — a knowledge shaped around the exam, as opposed to a way into real-world communication.

To minimise the risks of relying on extrinsic motivation, the idea is to alternate extrinsic reward with opportunities for intrinsic rewards. One approach for achieving this is in the design of tasks which are both meaningful and challenging, ones that provide learners with an opportunity to experience achievement alongside feeling satisfied by solving the language challenge. It also enhances effective feedback like providing feedback that's value lies in personal development and language improvement rather than just grades or outcomes to divert the learning of the learners from receiving the rewards to satisfaction internally rather than externally (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

### **Motivation and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

The success of CLT depends largely on motivation. One thing to note here is that CLT is not just a practical involved application in real-life situations, learner autonomy, and meaningful communication, which is aligned to intrinsic motivation (students are doing something because they enjoy doing it and fulfilling themselves). CLT takes advantage of the natural human motivation through built and implemented communicative tasks based on role plays, discussions, and problem-solving exercises, helping learners feel themselves as an integral part of their learning, and using language in its most creative way.

Similarly, it is possible to draw on extrinsic motivation in the CLT setting to facilitate students who are not presently intrinsically motivated. The danger, however, is that intrinsic rewards are shoved aside by extrinsic rewards. Deci and Ryan (1985) explain how if we pretend language learning is merely for a practical need, e.g., so

that we can gain a job, we risk demotivating our students because it stops being an enjoyable process and becomes just a service to fulfil other people's needs.

Both internal and external motivational factors significantly influence language acquisition in that they determine how much learners will engage, persist and be successful at acquiring a new language. Intrinsic motivation encourages deeper engagement and language use; extrinsic motivation helps with initial encouragement and achieves specified goals. According to CLT, this issue takes on special importance for fostering intrinsic motivation, as it complements the approach's orientation towards authentic communication in the real world and to learner autonomy. Yet, even a balanced approach that claims the worth of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation will assist in designing a supportive and successful understanding atmosphere (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Knowledge and familiarity with the causal determinants of motivation allow teachers to improve the overall success of language learning, especially in an exam-driven context like Bangladesh.

### **Assessment Concepts**

Assessment has a central role to play in educating, uniting as a means of assessing and improving learners' learning experiences. Two fundamental types of assessment are widely recognized: AfL and AoL. The differences between the two approaches occur in the purpose for which they are used, with AfL related to formative assessment processes intended to help improve learning and AoL referring to summative assessments designed to determine the reach or breadth of learning at a given point in time. Educators must understand these concepts if they want to align their way of teaching with the most efficient evaluation methods. This review has explored both AfL and AoL with emphasis made on differences, purposes and impact on teaching and learning, particularly in relation to CLT and language education.

### **Assessment for Learning (AfL)**

Assessment for Learning is a series of evaluative endeavours, where continuous feedback and interactive assessment are used to support and promote learning. This formative method helps students throughout their whole educational process. Assessment for Learning (AfL) is the ongoing process, not just at the end of a learning phase, that happens throughout the entire education. The intention was to discover students' strengths and make them see where they may need to improve, and having the opportunity to reflect on their progress and make adjustments was imperative. Pioneers in AfL research, Black and Wiliam (1998) emphasise that



effective formative assessment leads to learning by active participation, getting students into the process, and helping them to understand their learning objectives.

The main purpose of AfL is to stimulate learning rather than to measure it purely. AfL creates a more learner-centered approach; it focuses on educating the learner. In this model, the teachers give timely constructive feedback so that the student can incorporate the knowledge and use it to make their performance grow further and better. According to Wiliam (2011), AfL stresses the role of feedback loops — learners are continually told what they are doing and can act on that feedback to get better. Through this process, learners develop the skill of self-regulation as they also start learning to evaluate their work and pinpoint what they need to work on more.

AfL is most effective in conjunction with communication-based teaching practices such as CLT in relation to English language instruction. The main focus in CLT is to have communicative competence, in which language skills continue to be practised and polished. With AfL, teachers are able to give feedback to learners during communicative practices like role play, discussion and peer interaction so as to mentor learners towards language development for use in real situations. According to Harlen (2012), formative strategies for language education, such as peer and self-assessment, enable students to take responsibility for their learning and develop a critical capacity in speaking, listening and writing.

AfL, in addition, also encourages HOTS, i.e., reflection, critical thinking and problem solving. AfL is more about looking at how and why students got to that one correct answer, rather than always having to have the right answer. This fits neatly with the objectives of CLT because CLT centres around meaningful communication instead of rote memorisation of linguistic forms (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). By embedding AfL into CLT practices, teachers create a learning environment where student learning and growth are prioritised above performance on summative tests.

### **Key Strategies in Assessment for Learning**

AfL is implemented through a range of strategies that help both teachers and students gauge learning progress. Some of these strategies include:

#### ***Questioning***

Teachers use targeted questioning to assess students' understanding of concepts and encourage deeper thinking. This technique can also highlight areas where students may be struggling and need further clarification.

### ***Peer and Self-Assessment***

Students are encouraged to provide feedback on their own work or their peers' work, which promotes reflection and critical analysis of their learning.

### ***Feedback***

Constructive, timely feedback is essential in AfL. Teachers provide specific guidance on how students can improve, focusing on process rather than simply giving grades (Sadler, 1989).

### ***Learning Intentions and Success Criteria***

By clearly defining the learning goals and criteria for success, teachers help students recognize the expectations for their performance and how they can achieve these goals.

Incorporating these strategies into the classroom helps students develop a clearer understanding of their progress and supports their ongoing development.

### **Assessment of Learning (AoL)**

Assessment of Learning is generally used as the conventional summative method of evaluation at the end of a period of education. The main purpose of AoL is to check what students have learnt, learning their proficiency, skills and competencies and prepare a recurring mark of performance. This differs from the AfL, which stresses learning growth, the AoL in this case focusing only on the accountability, with results often being used to report via grading, certification or promotion (Harlen, 2007).

While formal standardised testing is often found in an AoL, such as final exams, unit tests, and national assessments, these assessments are high stakes in general and focus on measuring students' performance against benchmarks or learning objectives. In language acquisition, AoL tends to manifest as written examinations of comprehension and composition. However, spoken evaluations or one-on-one discussions can also be used to assess aural and verbal competencies.

AoL has value with respect to gathering data on students' learning outcomes; however, AoL has its limitations. It is typically the emphasis placed on the product (a final product) rather than the learning procedure that can result in a limited view of what students are capable of doing. Secondly, for example, summative assessments tend to focus on only a small amount of the range of skills and learning children have built up (Broadfoot, 2007). This can prove to be quite a problem in language

education; however, communication competence comprises both the accurate use of the language and the practical use of the language in a variety of situations.

### **Integrating both Assessment for Learning and Assessment of Learning**

The two are important and different, and both are necessary in an overall assessment framework. AfL enables formative feedback that is needed for learners to improve and grow their skills and abilities, whereas AoL is a summative evaluation of their overall achievement. Formative and summative elements constitute an effective assessment system, as suggested by Popham (2008), which allows teachers to ascertain an improvement in their progress and fulfil the set standards (Wiliam, 2000).

Balancing AfL and AoL might be used in language education as a way to better support holistic assessment within the regime of both learning and accountability. We can use this as an example since summative exams are helpful in determining how well a student can memorise grammar and vocabulary, while formative assessments can give us an idea of how a student can use English in real-world situations. With this integration of both of these forms of assessment, educators are able to confirm that students not only possess the capacity to pass high-stakes exams but also have the knowledge and skills to participate in meaningful communication.

### **Challenges in Implementing AfL and AoL**

Many challenges exist with the integration of AfL and AoL. The time and effort to set up effective formative assessments is a paramount challenge. There will be numerous changes in the course of teaching being taught to students every day, and teachers will have to monitor students' improvement, give personalised feedback to the students and modify their teaching tactics based on their tendencies. In addition, PEC in Bangladesh was found to carry high-stakes tests, which paved the way for overemphasis of AoL at the expense of formative opportunities for learning (Begum & Farooqui, 2008).

An additional challenge is the matching of summative assessments to AfL aims. Top-down AoL, continuous assessments, and feedback may play a role in limiting the focus on key communication skills, but they risk diminishing the critical thinking and communicative skills that are products of AfL. This problem calls for the design of summative tests that reflect the goals of AfL, in which students are assessed based on their capacity to apply or realise the knowledge (Black & Wiliam, 2018).

There are two different but complementary methodologies in the sphere of education: Assessment for Learning and Assessment of Learning, and they serve different roles in the learning process. A contrast between AfL, which is concerned with formative feedback for learning, and AoL consists of a summative evaluation of students' performance. Combining AF in language education with AoL can contribute to making an assessment system more balanced and effective, as well as more supportive of communicative competence and critical thinking. However, it's important to address the challenges of implementing both types of assessment, which might include time constraints and high-stakes testing.

### **Testing and Its Impact**

Assessments are important for educational progress, guidance of instructional approaches, and definition of educational goals across the world, and they are important in educational systems. Of all the assessment types, high-stakes tests are unique because of the high consequences should their results be negative. All of these tests impact a wide range of decisions, ranging from student promotion and graduation to teacher evaluations and school funding. However, such tests have an impact beyond the individual test taker; they also influence how teachers teach, how test takers learn, and how national education policies are formulated. Impact of examinations on educational practices and outcomes, referred to as washback, concerns the extent to which education is influenced through assessment, that is, the impact of examinations on teachers' practice and on students' learning. The review takes up the issues of concepts of high-stakes testing and washback, particularly in the Bangladesh situation, to ascertain how these assessments influence educational practice and outcomes.

### **High-Stakes Tests**

High stakes are referred to as those evaluations with important implications for pupils, educators, educational institutions, and at times, complete education systems. They carry great weight and can have big ripple effects. These tests are often used to make momentous decisions such as determining whether students should advance, qualify to attend higher education or receive a teacher's salary. These tests are often considered to be a marker of success or failure for both students and the institutions producing them. Most often, summative assessments, including high-stakes testing, are linked to summative assessments, whose goal is to assess the extent to which a student has learned at the end of an instructional period (Harlen, 2012).

A lot can be said about the PEC exam, as it is one of the most prominent examples of high-stakes testing in Bangladesh. The PEC is a national second standardised test to be taken in the fifth grade, and the results will be used to determine students' eligibility for progression to secondary school. The PEC is a high-stakes exam, and it creates considerable tension on students, teachers and schools. Students who fail to pass are held back, and schools can be called on or penalised if their students fail consistently (Ahmed et al., 2005).

There are several advantages of the PEC, but the first is that it has the advantage of uniformity in the measurement of student achievement in different regions and schools. In both cases, they also function as an accountability mechanism that holds educational institutions and teachers accountable for giving high-quality instruction (Shepard, 2000). However, these tests come with unintended negative consequences caused by the pressure associated with them. Consider, for example, teachers being forced to teach 'to the test', focusing solely on what would show up on the exam, whilst they don't develop broader learning objectives or critical thinking skills. This shrinking of the curriculum alone can restrict students' opportunity to experience more appropriate and thoughtful educational experiences (Au, 2007).

Moreover, in high-stakes testing environments, rote learning is often encouraged, and pupils tend to learn by rote rather than knowing in full. The issue is especially difficult in the fields of English language teaching. For example, language teaching places emphasis on the development of communicative proficiency based on meaningful language. While listening and speaking skills are important, high stakes tests can further stress that reading and writing takes priority over listening and speaking, which can lead to neglecting important language acquisition skills especially when that standardised exam can be used for critical reasons (e.g. promotion, graduation, scholarship, etc.) (Nuby et al., 2020).

### **The Washback Impact of Testing on Teaching and Learning**

Washback refers to the actions and decisions impacted by testing by educators, students, and other players of the educational system. Beneficial or detrimental washback depends on whether the assessment leads to desirable educational practices or unwanted, unintended negative consequences. In particular, high-stakes tests directly influence students' lives due to the serious implications of their all too visible results (Alderson & Wall, 1993).

Positive washback arises when a test enhances practices that are consistent with educational goals, such as analytical reasoning, innovative solutions, and practical utilisation of knowledge in everyday contexts. A language test that measures listening, reading, writing, and speaking can stimulate teachers to include communicative activities in their classes as ways to raise students' proficiency in the language (Bailey, 1996). Test alignment with the curriculum and learning objectives serves to reinforce good teaching practices and support overall student development when tests are well aligned with the learning objectives.

Negative washback is, however, more commonplace in high-stakes testing environments, especially where tests are poorly designed or overwhelm narrow skill sets. As the reduction in the range of subjects taught, by repetitive memorisation and exam-focused instruction, is counterproductive to desirable educational approaches, negative washback occurs when the test leads to practices not furthering these approaches (Cheng, 2005). An example is the PEC exam in Bangladesh, which has maintained a significant focus on reading comprehension and written tasks that place a focus on students memorising answers instead of actual language skills. In addition to being limiting to their communicative competence, this approach also undermines the larger objectives of language education (Rahman et al., 2021).

The stress of excelling in high-stakes examinations also affects the manner in which educators teach. By focusing on exam preparation rather than more interactive and engaging activities, teachers may miss out on the opportunity for students to develop HOTS (analysis, evaluation, and synthesis). Thus, students may become passive knowledge receivers rather than active contributors in their own education, thus undermining their ability to practise what they know in knowledgeable ways (Yin, 2008). This is particularly problematic for language education, in which the development of language proficiency requires the use of the language in authentic contexts.

### **The Role of Washback in Language Teaching Practices**

Shaping language teaching and learning, the washback effect of high-stakes tests is especially strong in language education. It is in Bangladesh, with high-stakes exams such as the PEC, where there is such a significant washback effect, with reading and writing skills prioritised at the detriment of speaking and listening. The fact that the PEC test is structured in this way implies the imbalance: it prioritises written language tasks and lacks oral language use.

In order to reduce the bad washback of high-stakes tests in language education, assessments have to be designed that are compatible with communicative proficiency as the objectives for language learning. A solution to this problem involves working tasks that measure all four language skills, as opposed to concentrating on written tasks only. An example of this is to add oral presentations, interviews or listening comprehension exercises into language exams in order to help ensure that students develop more rounded language ability (Cheng, 2005).

Additionally, reducing the negative effects of washback requires teachers' professional development. In high-stakes testing environments, teachers need to be supported and trained to implement more communicative and interactive teaching that corresponds with the goals of CLT. Traditional methods of teaching English (based on rote learning and linguistic reason) can prepare learners just as rote learning will enable them to perform so well in exams, but not in the real use of language (Harlen, 2012).

Educational systems like the one in Bangladesh are based on high-stakes tests, such as the PEC, which carry very big weights for students, teachers and schools. Tests are indispensable but also important, providing a sense of accountability and a standardised measure of student achievement, but tests have far-reaching ramifications for teaching and learning practices. Although the washback effect is the effect of testing back to schooling, it can bring in either positive or negative effects depending on how well the test corresponds to the educational essence.

When high-stakes testing is used, it often produces negative washback in the form of repetitive learning, teaching to the test syndrome, and shrinking curriculum. It is particularly problematic in language pedagogy since all four language skills must be developed in communicative competence, which is the ultimate goal of any language teaching process. However, if we do want to ensure that our assessments do not contain washback, it is critical that we design assessments that support the goals of meaningful language learning and that provide our teachers with the support necessary to adopt and implement communicative teaching methods. However, if we address these challenges, educators and policymakers will have a wider set of effective tools at their disposal to ensure that we balance effectiveness in assessment and accountability for learning.

In countries like Bangladesh, National exams are very important because they have a lot of high-stakes tests, and they determine students' educational and

professional future. The findings of these examinations frequently determine if pupils qualify to take any higher educational stages, to receive certificates or for any academic programme. Consequently, they are extremely influential in the policy and processes of teaching and learning. To understand the impact of these tests, an understanding of washback is essential, which speaks to how the tests affect teaching, curriculum design and even the behaviour of learners. Using high-stakes tests and washback, this review considers how these assessments shape teaching and educational outcomes.

There are high stakes for students, teachers, schools, and, if it gets bad enough, for policymakers as well. These exam results often determine whether a student moves to the next educational level, graduates or earns scholarships. Above all, student outcomes are major factors in evaluating the effectiveness of teachers and schools on these tests (Harlen, 2012). As a barometer of the success of national education policies, these exams are also widely used to keep accountability within educational systems.

High-stakes tests, including PEC, JSC and SSC, are an important part of students' academic journey in Bangladesh. However, these exams are very important for student progression and are frequently subjected to pressure from society. It is high-stakes exams, and the results of these exams can considerably influence students' future academic opportunities, as failure of these high-stakes tests can prevent a student from continuing with formal education (Begum & Farooqui, 2008). Thus, these tests create anxiety and stress in the form of students, teachers and parents.

The gateway to any secondary education from PEC, which was written for those in the fifth grade. As a result of PEC, students must perform well to be eligible for the secondary school and also their track, as they perform very well in JSC and SSC exams. The PEC exam, which is a standardized measure of academic achievement across Bangladesh, has been unfortunately coupled with a high-stakes nature, leading to negative (unintended) consequences for educational practice and student learning experiences (Ali et al., 2018).

One of the major strengths of high-stakes tests is that they allow for a standardised test of learning for a student across regions and schools. It is in this way that all students are judged by the same criteria, no matter where they attended school or where they come from (Au, 2007). The trade-off required to perform well on these



tests often has an unwanted effect, including cutting back the curriculum, teaching only for the test outcomes, and over-stressing rote memorisation (Ahmed et al., 2005). These practices can remove the opportunity for students to experience more real and authentic ways of learning and can take the focus away from the growth of critical thinking skills.

### **How High-Stakes Testing Affects Teaching and Learning**

The term Washback refers to assessment as it influences both teaching and learning processes. Washback can be either positive or negative, depending on whether the assessment creates positive educational methods or negative effects. Washback is mostly dependent on the assessment characteristics and structure, and the extent to which it fits with curriculum objectives. (Bailey, 1996).

A test that facilitates beneficial teaching methods, such as fostering high cognitive abilities, the practical application of knowledge, and encouraging inventiveness, leads to positive washback. For instance, a well-designed language test might draw attention to such areas as listening, speaking, reading and writing, thus motivating teachers to utilise CLT approaches (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). As such, the test in this scenario forms a mechanism for improving teaching pedagogy, thus improving outcomes.

However, negative washback is associated most commonly with high-stakes tests, especially when the tests focus narrowly on a particular facet of learning, for example, factual recall or basic skills (Alderson & Wall, 1993). For example, the PEC exam evaluates reading and writing skills rather than listening and speaking in Bangladesh (Nuby et al., 2020). Consequently, teachers tend to prepare students for the particular exam components at the neglect of broader communicative competencies. This leads to a reduction of the curriculum where the only stuff that gets taught are immediately exam-relevant materials, leaving out more useful, learning experiences such as the use of interacting language as well as critical thinking (Rahman et al., 2021).

One of the most powerful links with negative washback is teaching to the test. What this means is that teachers spend time explicitly teaching the content and format of the exam and not on learning goals. Given that educators and educational institutions are often assessed based on their pupils' examination performance, As Harlen (2007) points out, the pressure to achieve high student performance on high stakes exams is often driven by attempts to achieve short term gains in test scores but

leads to undermining sustained development in students' cognitive abilities, particularly in creativity, critical thinking and problem solving.

The washback effect of high-stakes tests is especially pronounced in the area of English language pedagogy. Although critical for improving students' real-world language use, CLT methods can easily be restricted based on high-stakes language exams that focus on grammar and writing, rather than communicative skills. Teachers in Bangladesh can feel the pressure to facilitate rote memorisation of grammatical rules and set responses to exam questions, versus encourage their use in interactive and meaningful ways. Not only is the pedagogical approach altered in such a way that students' linguistic competence is constrained, but the degree to which students participate in activities for genuine language acquisition is diminished.

### **Reducing Negative Washback in High-Stakes Testing**

There are several ways that can be used to mitigate the adverse washback of high-stakes tests. An alternative approach involves proposing tests with which the curriculum goals are a better fit, as well as which lead to a broader scope of learning outcomes. One illustration of this is when language tests that assess reading, writing, listening and speaking can be used to encourage a more balanced approach to language teaching with communicative activities incorporated in lessons (Cheng, 2005). Such a test can bring positive washback, whereby the test can facilitate the development of comprehensive language skills and strengthen student proficiency in general.

Additionally, educators' professional growth is necessary to minimise the adverse washback effects. In order to be able to make use of teaching strategies in agreement with both curricular objectives and assessment aims, teachers are dependent on appropriate support and training. In language education, this translates to equipping educators with the knowledge and resources needed to adopt CLT even in the presence of high-stakes exams. If teachers can shift the focus to communicative competence by teaching meaningful ways for students to use language, they will help students develop the skills based on which students can find success both academically and in real-world language use (Shepard, 2000).

Examinations such as the PEC play a crucial role in building the practice of education and student outcomes in Bangladesh. These tests standardise measures of academic achievement and help hold educators and learners accountable, but these tests can have a major impact on teaching and learning, either positively or

negatively, based on how they are structured and intended to comprehensively accomplish the objectives. High-stakes tests, in many cases, have a negative washback effect, and teachers narrow the curriculum, devote less time to exploratory activities, and focus on rote memorisation to improve test performance. Too frequently, students' broader learning experience is limited, as is the acquisition of critical abilities in language learning.

Since washback has a negative impact of its own, it's necessary to design such tests that tally with the curriculum goals and also involve a holistic approach in teaching and learning. This also includes giving teachers professional development and promoting communicative teaching techniques so that high-stakes tests become a vehicle to ensure that educational outcomes are not restricted.

### **Characteristics of Effective Testing**

The degree to which an education assessment tool is good is based on how precisely it measures what it measures (the intended subject matter) and how reliably it is able to compile unbiased results. The evaluation of the effectiveness of any test can be made of three qualities: validity, reliability, and objectivity and these three qualities frame and support the pillars of evaluating the efficacy of any test. These are the essential characteristics that assessments should exhibit, considering they are meant for examining a national high-stakes exam like the discontinued PEC in Bangladesh or any classroom-based quiz. In this work, this analysis investigates the concepts of validity, reliability and objectivity, as well as their importance in the development of fair and economical test methodology, in the framework of educational assessment.

### **Validity**

Validity arises from achieving validity; a test must assess what it claims to, and assess the types of competencies, expertise, and capabilities that it claims to have, and therefore it is at the cornerstone of effective assessment. Messick (1989) extends the concept of validity beyond the content of the test to mean the interpretation and application of the results obtained from measurement (assessment). Validity may also be built into the design of the test or into how results of the test are used.

There are several types of validity that educators and test developers consider when designing assessments:

#### ***Content Validity***

Validity of this form of validity assesses how accurately a test's contents cover the subject matter that the test is meant to evaluate. If we discuss the case of the PEC exam in Bangladesh, content validity for the test would entail that it should cover the entire spectrum of competencies expected of fifth graders in reading, writing, listening and speaking in the context of language learning. Some critics (Rahman et al., 2021) argue that the exam is so limited, centred on reading comprehension and writing, that it has insufficient content validity because other language skills related to the content area are not assessed.

### ***Construct Validity***

If a test does not measure what it is intended to, then the test fails to be valid on construct validity grounds. Construct validity is important in language testing as it ensures that the test does not measure a student's ability to recall memorised information but rather their communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). If learning were rote and students were encouraged to memorise answers rather than engage in useful language use, the PEC exam's construct validity should be challenged.

### ***Criterion-Related Validity***

The type of validity that asks whether the test's results are related to an external criterion, such as future academic performance or some other standardised tests. Criterion-related validity is at a high level if students who perform well on the PEC exam have good chances of success in later levels of education, such as secondary school.

A valid test must be proven effective in all of these areas. The results of a test are not valid unless they are a real portrayal of students' abilities or knowledge.

### ***Reliability***

The focus of validity in testing is accuracy; reliability is consistency. A reliable test is repeatable, consistently producing reliable results over time and with different test conditions. Brennan (2001) claims that a test is reliable if the same results arise when the test is repeated with the same group of students on multiple occasions. Let us imagine that there were two students with the same level of knowledge and skills and this time they sit for PEC exam and they appeared at different times for this exam then if the test is reliable then the scores must be the same because everything in this world is reliable and if not then it's the opposite.

Several approaches exist for evaluating the reliability of a test:

### ***Test-Retest Reliability***

This type of reliability is based on giving the same examination to an identical group of pupils at two different times. The test is reliable if the scores remain the same. Yet, to evaluate this type of reliability, it can be difficult for high-stakes exams like the PEC, since those taking such exams cannot usually retake them.

### ***Inter-Rater Reliability***

Inter-rater reliability refers to the uniformity of scores in grading the same test measured by different graders. For instance, reliability is an important issue in the evaluation of subjective performance as it relates to essay composition or spoken presentation, where consistency of different evaluators on the same task is crucial. If two teachers assign the same essay two different scores, it means the test may not be trustworthy. In PEC-type English exams (like open responses), consistency in scoring is necessary to conserve the reliability of the tests (Weigle, 2002).

### **Internal Consistency**

It is a measure of how the same test produces consistent results over different parts of that test. To illustrate, if a language test has several sections, testing for example reading, writing and grammar, internal consistency requires that students scoring high in one section also tend to score high on the other, if the test is measuring the same underlying ability.

The test is reliable if the score under study accurately measures the students' actual abilities as opposed to some outside force, such as the testing conditions or subjective grading. We acknowledge that reliability is important, but it is not the only factor in a test; a test could be reliable and fail in transfer validity. Such an example is a test that never fails to quantify students' capacity to learn facts, but which can be seen as unreliable if the target of assessment was, for instance, critical thinking (Harlen, 2012).

### **Objectivity**

The objectivity concerns the degree to which the test results remain unbiased or do not show any effect of being subjective. An objective test result is unaffected by the examiner's opinions, beliefs and preferences. Objectivity in educational testing has usually been achieved through the use of standardised testing formats, for example, questions with predetermined answer options for, e.g., selection from choices, truth or falsity, or pairing related items, which can be scored automatically or with minimal human supervision (Yin, 2008).

Looking at the National Academy of Primary Education (NAPE) (2018) published PEC English question structure, much as with many normed assessments, the PEC examination consisted of objective-style questions (e.g., multiple choice and completion items) that facilitate consistent and unbiased scoring. However, assessments based on open-ended responses, such as composition and letter writing, are more challenging to achieve objectives in. The introduction of standardised rubrics can be useful in these cases to guarantee that scoring is as objective as possible (as opposed to subjective) when human judgement is employed (Weigle, 2002).

Objectivity is key to ensuring testing shows total fairness, but it can also limit the full scope of what is tested. For example, multiple choice questions may objectively test students' ability to recognise correct answers, but the assessment of a deeper comprehension or capacity to apply knowledge in actual, real-world situations may not proceed well. (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This shows that, in order to have a fully rounded assessment, we need to balance objectivity with other characteristics such as validity.

### **Balancing Validity, Reliability, and Objectivity**

Assessment effectiveness is a balance of validity, reliability, and objectivity. A totally reliable, but not very valid test, may provide an incomplete assessment of pupils' ability in all realms and understanding of what they are expected to possess. An invalid and inconsistent test may yield unreliable outcomes as well; thus, incorrectly identifying a student's score doesn't make sense.

Making this balance in the context of the PEC exam is important. Since there is a standardised format to the test, there is a certain level of objectivity and reliability. However, the validity of the test has been questioned, in light of its emphasis on rote learning and a lack of communicative skills (Nuby et al., 2020). Finally, policymakers and educators need to work to make the PEC exam more effective so that, in addition to offering reliable and objective results, the test should also accurately measure the complete set of skills and abilities that learners need to shine further in subsequent educational phases.

An assessment is effective when it is valid, reliable and objective. Validity refers to a test that measures what it purports to measure, reliability to produce similar results and objectivity to score without bias. At a time of high-stakes exams such as the PEC in Bangladesh, there is a need to balance between these two qualities for

assessments which are fair, meaningful and representative of what students can do. That examinations are valid, dependable, and impartial means that educators can give a more precise, even more thorough measure of how a student is doing academically.

### **Policy Review**

The policies governing the education of English in nations that contain English in different roles have a direct bearing on the kind of instruction and how English is acquired. Secondly, these repressive policies have a huge bearing on the teaching, how the language is taught and learnt. English has an ongoing specific role in Bangladesh, as an academic subject in the educational curriculum and as a conduit of global communication. In order to understand the policy landscape around English language education, this study must explore the notion of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), as well as how English is perceived and used in the Bangladeshi context. This review analyses English language testing at the elementary level in Bangladesh under the utilisation of ELF (English in the Bangladeshi context) versus English. Second, it analyses the literature relevant to the gaps and offers insights for future educational reforms.

### **English as a Lingua Franca vs. English in Bangladesh**

The ELF perspective contrasts with a traditional focus on native like proficiency, grammar and translation in English in Bangladesh. English is central to education and international engagement in the Bangladesh system, but takes precedence over speaking and listening over reading and writing, antithetical to ELF's focus on communicative competence in the face of the world.

### **English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)**

English as a Lingua Franca is a use of English as a shared communication tool between people whose mother tongues are diverse (Jenkins, 2015). Applied learner's English (ELF) prioritises practical applications of English in the speakers' communicative success, rather than conforming to native speaker standards. It accepts the worldwide spread of English and the function that it has in facilitating global interconnections across different professional contexts, like commerce, learning, and statecraft (Seidlhofer, 2011).

### **English in the Bangladeshi Context**

The position of English in Bangladesh is not simple. It is not an official language but, on the go, extensively in educational, business dealings and international dealings (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). English is a compulsory subject from the rudimentary phase of primary education to advance the already developed language skills and help them participate in international settings. Rather, the ELF perspective (Rahman & Pandian, 2018) has been cumbersome and often focused on the attainment of native like proficiency, incorporating traditional norms.

Historically, the Bangladeshi education system has been based on the grammar and translation method, teaching reading and writing and has strongly placed emphasis on reading and writing ahead of speaking and listening (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Contrastingly, the ELF idea proposes the acquisition of communicative competence in order to enable learners to employ English effectively in different transnational settings (Cogo & Dewey, 2012).

### **National Education Policy 2010**

The National Education Policy 2010 is a foundational document that is in place to guide all educational reforms and changes in Bangladesh. It stresses rote reduction; they indicate that students should understand and apply the knowledge.

#### ***Assessment Focus***

"The initiated method is to evaluate the students' acquisition of the course contents and not rote learning. The examination system will be made more effective" (MoE, 2010, p. 58).

#### ***Teacher and Student Preparedness***

"The proper implementation of this system will depend on the preparation of the right kind of textbooks, a set of rules to prepare question papers, and an effective understanding of the process by the paper-setters and students" (MoE, 2010, p. 58).

The policy advocates for assessments that encourage HOTS and reduce dependence on memorisation. However, in practice, assessments like the PEC exam have continued to emphasise reading as well as writing, neglecting listening and speaking skills essential for communicative competence (Sultana, 2018a).

### **National Curriculum 2012**

The National Curriculum 2012 builds on the education policy by outlining specific goals for English language learning:

#### ***Language Skills Development***



Students should "use the basic skills of English as a foreign language as a primary education marginal qualification" (NCTB, 2012, p. 2).

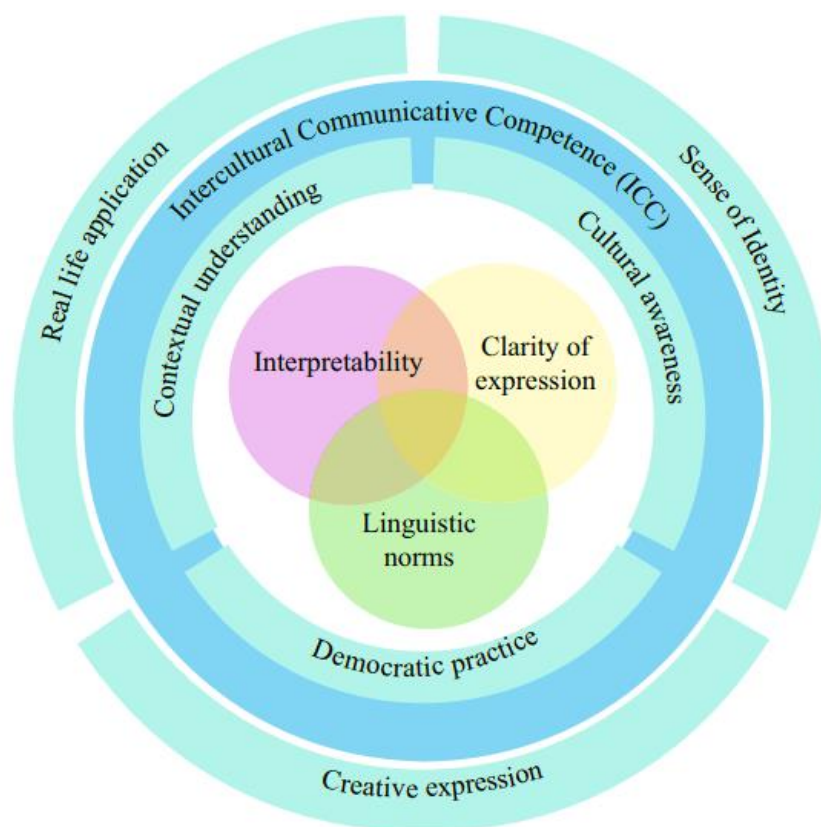
### ***Emphasis on Listening and Speaking***

The curriculum advises to "emphasise English listening and speaking skills on which to develop reading and writing skills" (NCTB, 2012, p. 151).

Notwithstanding these directives, the application has been uneven. The PEC examination's concentration on reading and writing skills conflicted with the curriculum's stress on all four language competencies, highlighting a discrepancy between policy intentions and actual implementation (Rahman et al., 2018).

**Figure 4**

*Subject Conceptualization (English)*



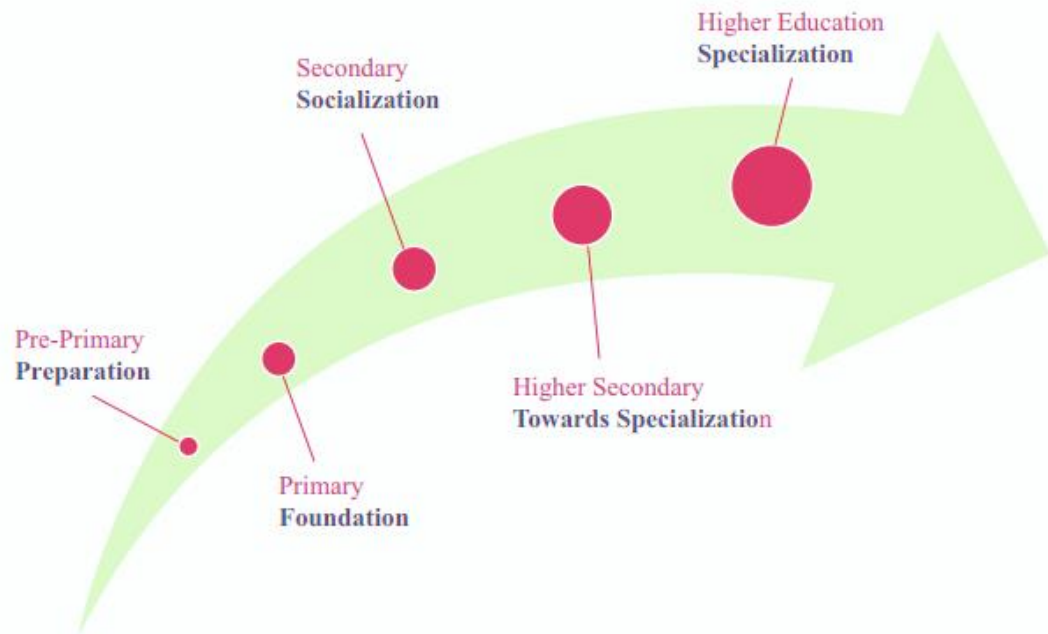
(MoE, 2022)

### **National Curriculum Framework 2021**

The National Curriculum Framework 2021 will be experiential, interdisciplinary learning in order to produce holistic individuals with knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. Critical thinking, creativity and communicative competence are among its primary focuses to develop a student as a linguistically proficient, clear in expression and a person ready to handle global challenges.

**Figure 5**

*Selection of subjects from the learning area*



(MoE, 2022)

The implementation of class five is scheduled for 2025 (bdnews24.com, 2021), but there are many unresolved questions for stakeholders. Failures from previous policies and frameworks still weigh on the site.

### **The Constitutional Document of Bangladesh**

The constitution underscores the importance of education in serving societal needs:

#### **Educational Objectives**

"The State shall adopt effective measures to relate education to the needs of society and produce properly trained and motivated citizens to serve those needs" (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, Part II, Section 17[b]).

Given English's role in global communication, providing effective English language education aligns with constitutional objectives. However, the current testing practices fail to develop learners' communicative abilities, limiting their capacity to participate in international contexts (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014).

#### **International Perspectives and Policies**

International perspectives emphasise aligning language education policies with global trends, prioritizing communicative competence over grammatical perfection through frameworks like CLT and English as an International Language (EIL).

### ***Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)***

CLT was adopted in Bangladesh in the 1990s to enhance students' communicative proficiency (Podder, 2016). CLT focuses on interaction and the practical use of language in real-life situations (Richards, 2006). While the curriculum embraced CLT principles, the testing system did not align with these methodologies, leading to a misalignment between teaching and assessment (Ali & Walker, 2014).

### ***English as an International Language (EIL)***

The notion of EIL is closely aligned with ELF, highlighting the utilisation of English for global communication rather than adhering to standards set by native speakers. (Matsuda, 2012). Incorporating EIL principles into policy can help develop assessments that value communicative competence over grammatical perfection, aligning with global trends in language education.

## **Review of Relevant Literature**

The relevant literature review critically analysed English language education in Bangladesh, especially under the CLT and the PEC. The studies also recognise startling, continued challenges: failing teacher preparation, poor testing policies, and negative washback impacts, which have undercut communicative competence. Factors such as test validity, reliability and anxiety on the part of learners added to increasing the effectiveness of language tests. These issues were compounded by life skills courses being constrained in the time that was allowed and by providing pedagogic experiences that reflect the values of the targeted population without denying the societal perspective. While life skills policy mandated that these courses be conducted on a regular basis, these were also contextually limited by resource constraints and societal attitudes. The findings of these were synthesised into a comprehensive review of the barriers and opportunities for realising meaningful English language learning outcomes in Bangladesh.

### **Challenges in Implementing CLT**

In Bangladesh, CLT was implemented by Rasul (2014), who found that the implementation was impeded by small teacher training, teacher-centred instruction, poor testing policies, examination-oriented teaching, negative washback, passive

learning and ineffective teaching materials. These challenges impair development towards communicative competence and represent a barrier between policy intention and classroom reports.

### **Negative Washback Effects**

Ali & Hamid (2020) looked at the aspects that contribute to adverse washback effects in the teaching of English in secondary education in Bangladesh. However, they also found that high-stakes exams, such as the PEC, encourage teachers to target test-specific content at the expense of broader language skills. Our analysis of a hierarchical design and external socio-political factors further indicates that policy reforms must address systemic problems inherent in the socio-political environment outside the classroom.

### **Test Validity and Reliability**

Sultana (2018b) focused on the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) English exam and pointed to some of the concerns with the exam being able to do justice to communicative proficiency in an adequate way. In other words, the exam fails to be valid and reliable, since its focus is on reading and writing. The same issues appear in the PEC exam, where the language proficiency is assessed incompletely, with the exclusion of speaking and listening skills.

### **Test Anxiety Among Learners**

Aydin (2013) investigated test anxiety experienced by elementary-level EFL learners and discovered that high-stakes exams create anxiety and also affect the performance of students. This reflects ELF principles in which communication rather than perfection is the focus of assessments, which also demands assessments that facilitate rather than impede learning.

### **Education Realities in Bangladesh**

In this work, Chowdhury and Sarkar (2018) address changing contexts and emerging realities of Bangladeshi education. While policy reforms were reached, resource limits, collegial preparedness of teachers, and societal attitudes continue to restrict the further development of education quality. These factors must be taken into account in the implementation of policy to realise the desired outcomes.

### **Research Gap**

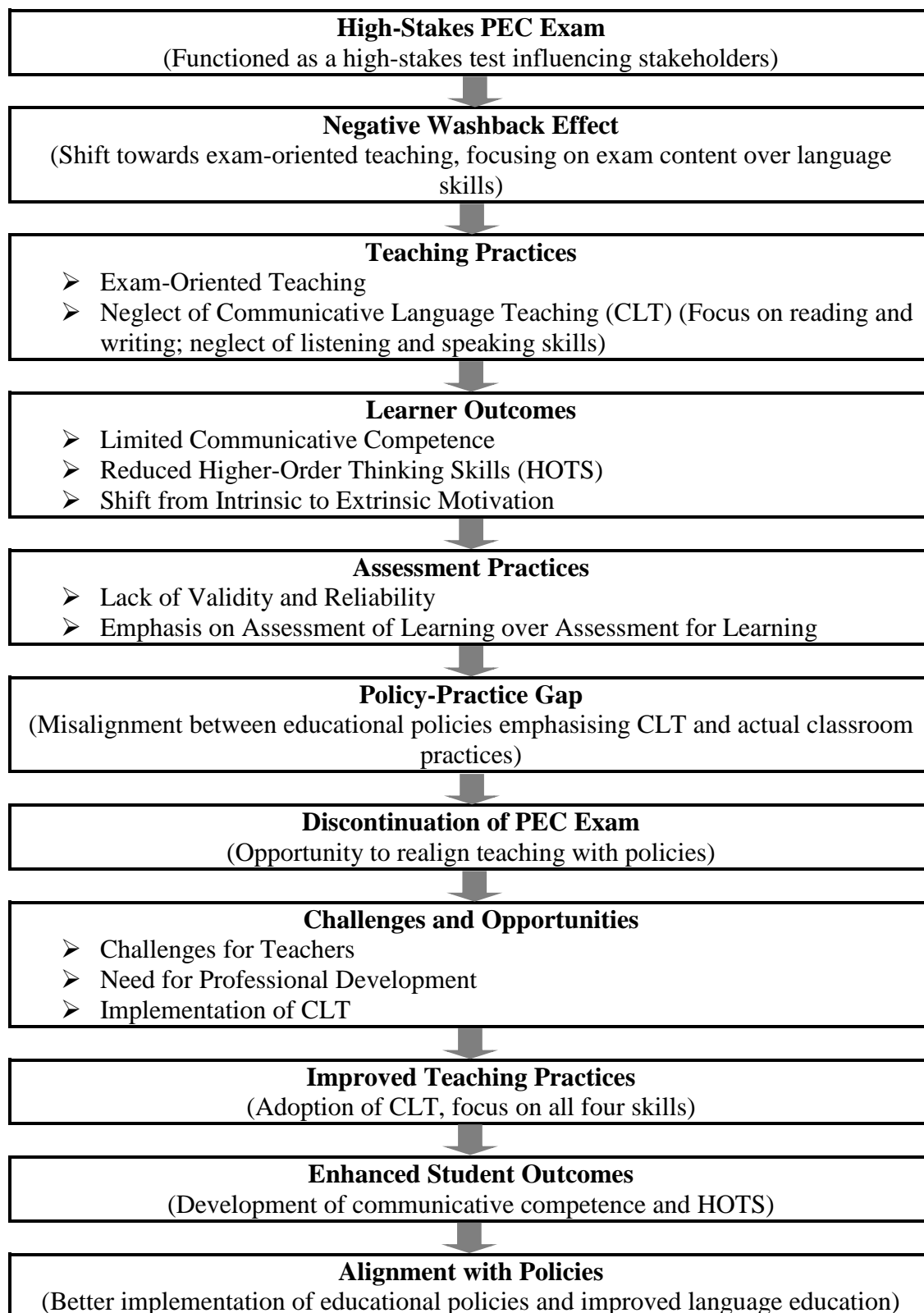
Previous research in Bangladesh has mainly concentrated on the secondary level examinations, and there is little research on the PEC examination. In addition, Bangladesh is also confronted with the paucity of research to explore the effects of

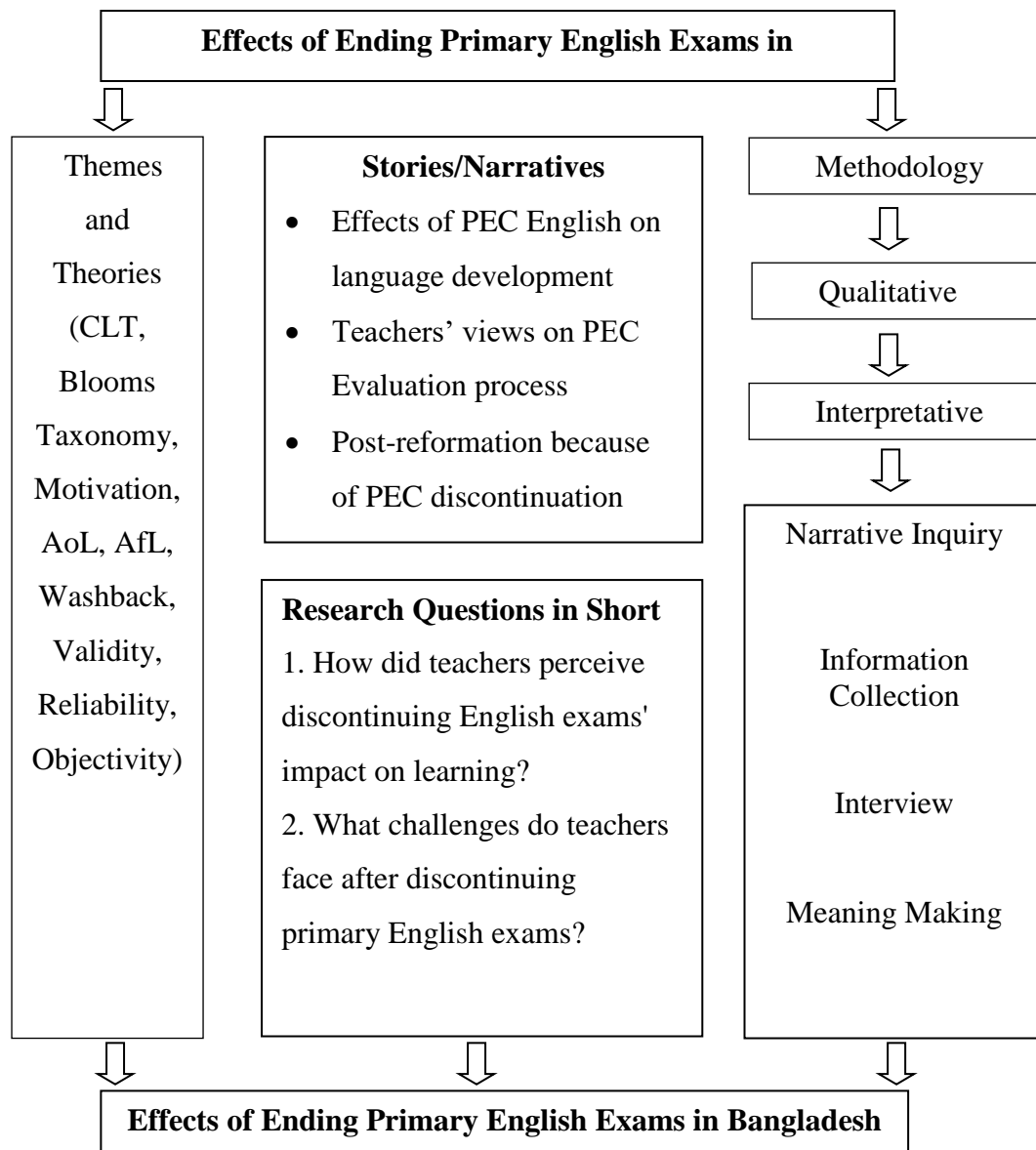
ELF. Given Bangladesh's low ranking on global education indices (The Legatum Institute Foundation, 2021), primary level English assessments can be analysed, and the necessary reforms to the assessments are needed to help uplift these education outcomes.

Both national policies and ELF principles state that listening, speaking, and thinking are moralised alike, while the PEC exam emphasises lower-order thinking skills and overlooks the latter two. Research was needed to address this gap, and it identified what PEC exam design, implementation, and impact on learners could be to help policymakers shape assessments to both curricular goals and global communication needs.

### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

The overall planning of how the research was conducted is shown in this framework. From these conceptual frameworks of inquiry, I attempted to examine how the views and methods English language teachers have about the PEC are linked to each other. It was the teachers who shared their thoughts, ideas and feelings in the PEC test and in the English language and how they had faced various challenges in their daily life, starting from making multiple plans to preparing necessary contents. Finally, the frameworks looked at how time-consuming their work was and, at times, how learners view the PEC test. These frameworks allowed me to identify how these perceptions and practices of teachers and learners influenced new insights about the PEC English test.

**Figure 6***Conceptual Framework Outline 1*

**Figure 7***Conceptual Framework Outline 2*

## **Chapter II Summary**

Chapter II provided a comprehensive review of the literature and theoretical underpinnings relevant to the study. The chapter began by examining the role of English public examinations in Bangladesh, particularly focusing on their influence on communicative competence across productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (listening and reading) skills. It highlighted the emphasis on exam-centric practices in public exams such as the PEC exam, which predominantly assessed reading and writing skills while neglecting listening and speaking, leading to a narrow and flawed assessment system.

The chapter critically reviewed theoretical frameworks, including CLT, Bloom's Taxonomy, and the Washback Effect, to analyze the impact of high-stakes testing on teaching practices, learner outcomes, and assessment strategies. Additionally, concepts such as motivation (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) and the policy-practice gap were explored to contextualise the challenges faced by educators and stakeholders within the Bangladeshi education system.

The review also addressed policy frameworks, including the National Education Policy 2010, National Curriculum 2012, and the National Curriculum Framework 2021, which emphasised the development of holistic language skills. However, the chapter highlighted the misalignment between these policies and classroom practices, further complicated by the exam-oriented teaching culture entrenched in the PEC exam.

The chapter introduced two conceptual frameworks to structure the study. The first focused on the systemic effects of the PEC exam, including its washback effects, assessment practices, and policy gaps. The second framework incorporated qualitative insights through narrative inquiry, addressing teacher and stakeholder perspectives, methodological approaches, and post-reform experiences.

In conclusion, Chapter II identified critical gaps in existing research, particularly the lack of in-depth studies on the PEC exam's design, its systemic impact, and its discontinuation's implications. By bridging theoretical insights with practical experiences, this chapter lays the foundation for understanding the complex relationship between high-stakes testing, teaching practices, and language learning outcomes in Bangladesh.



### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is just the approach or the policy used by researchers in their research problem exploration (Thomas, 2021). Chapter III described the methodology used in this study, which includes the rationale behind an interpretative research paradigm and the research framework, basic theories, data collection procedures and analysis. Since it is increasingly focused on understanding individual's knowledge of personal understanding, experiences and meaning making while discontinuation of PEC English exam in Bangladesh, my study focused on the use of narrative approach as its main research method to find out the thoughts and activities of them for dealing with the present from English language teachers about discontinuation of PEC English exam in Bangladesh.

The resourcing of rich, detailed personal accounts for collection offered me the opportunity to explore the effects of the exam's discontinuation on participants' lives and practice. In line with this, this chapter describes the methodological choices made in order to capture the subjective and experiential nature of these stakeholders' perspectives on educational reform in order to deeply understand and situate them within the broader scope of educational reform.

#### **Research Design**

My study draws from narrative inquiry, which is a suitable qualitative research design for making sense of the lived and interpreted experiences of individuals. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is important for making sense of the complexities of human behaviour and the factors that influence it within context. This design focused on narratives to help capture some of the richness of teachers' lived experiences, particularly regarding the discontinuation of the PEC exam.

Participants shared their stories, describing how this reform shaped their teaching practices, assessment strategies and perceptions of language learning through narrative inquiry. It thus allowed us to probe deeper into how these educators hopped over the challenges and opportunities the change in policy entailed. The study

explored themes including the washback effect, teaching practices and the change of orientation towards the communicative approaches from exam-oriented.

To complement the participant narratives, a review of existing literature is undertaken, in the contextualisation of the findings, from educational policies to the historical significance of the PEC exam. The combined use of participant voices and documented sources provided a complex understanding of the reform's implications. The research design, therefore, ensured that the study captured not only the participants' personal reflections but also those systemic and institutional dynamics that impacted their experiences.

### **Philosophical Considerations**

In the research philosophy, my primary assumptions were founded, and the research plan was founded on these assumptions. Research philosophy is made up of a couple of subfields that link to fields of academia. The four cornerstone principles that make up the pursuit for knowledge are ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology.

#### **Ontology**

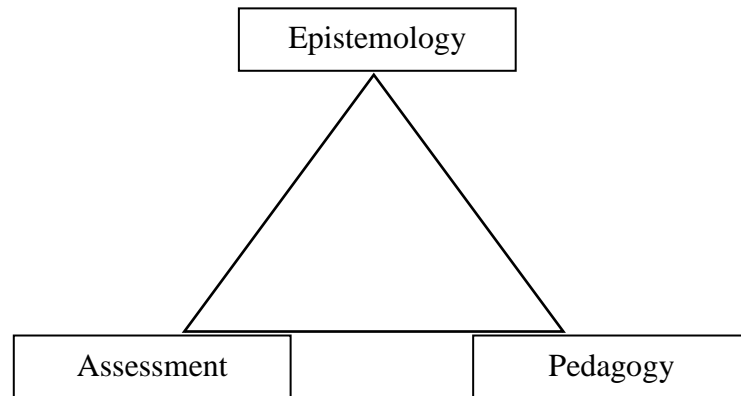
Ontology is reality, as researchers know and determine what is sensible in the social world (Moon & Blackman, 2021). This was a constructivist ontological stance on my study because it was a stance that reinterpreted reality as being subjective and produced through social interaction. Reality in this research has been interpreted as the students, teachers and guardians' perceptions on PEC examinations and their discontinuation.

Ontology in the interpretative paradigm is concerned with numerous realities influenced by individuals and is, therefore, ontological. This study aimed to uncover such subjective realities by looking into how the removal of the exam has been understood, and how it has been received, by different stakeholders, who included teachers, students and guardians. My study also adopted an approach based on the interpretative research that is concerned with understanding human observations, as Merriam and Tisdell (2015) have stated, that is, the interpretation of the social context in which we are being studied.

## Epistemology

**Figure 8**

*The Epistemology Assessment-Pedagogy*



(Knight et al., 2014)

Formulated as epistemology, the nature and scope of the knowledge are in question, as well as how we know and what knowledge is accepted as valid (Moon & Blackman, 2021). In my project, knowledge was experienced as subjective and co-constructed between the researcher and the participants. This interpretivist epistemology views meaning as not found but, in some way, constructed in interaction. The lived experiences and perceptions that the interviewees had of the PEC exam reform were interpreted to gain some knowledge from the perspective of my research on the PEC exam reform.

This being in line with this approach, I used semi-structured interviews and open-ended survey questions so that participants could express their views in their own words. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) suggest, the flexible form of qualitative interviews offers the latitude needed to pursue the ‘floating’ emergent themes. The interviews were structured in such a way as to give the English language teachers a chance to tell their own stories, telling us how they perceive their educational experiences.

## Axiology

According to Deane (2018),

“Axiological concerns infuse research. Two general examples are: what makes a good researcher (e.g., impartial, curious, caring, diligent, etc.); and what is

worthwhile science (e.g., correlational, causal, problem-centred, hypothesis-centred, experimental, applied, private, public, etc.).” (para 8)

Axiology refers to the impact of the researcher’s values on the investigative process, in particular focusing on how these values influence the direction or mould of the study (Biddle & Schafft, 2015). In interpretative research, values are recognised as fundamental to the shaping of the research methodology, the choice of methods and indeed the interpretation of findings. These values affect the research, and the researcher is transparent about them.

This is something that I was aware of in my study because I knew that their belief in equitable education and the importance of measuring language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing may play a role in how the results are interpreted. But the aim was to offer an unbiased representation of the multiplicity of views of participants (teachers, students and guardians), while hearkening to all readings as legitimate. Mertens (2014) advises that researchers should consider their own biases because they are part of the research process and a way in which researchers ensure authenticity; otherwise, researchers risk imposing their own views on the data.

### **Interpretative Research Paradigm**

I developed my study on a grounded theory that grew out of an interpretative research paradigm focusing on how meaning is created through subjective human experience. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), interpretative paradigms arise out of the founding assumption that reality is socially constructed and is, in turn, shaped by an individual's interactions with his or her environment. The study adopted this paradigm to unveil the halting, multifaceted methods by which teachers, students, and other stakeholders perceived and went through the discontinuation of the PEC exam.

The study is aligned with the interpretative paradigm, which guides the study of social and educational dynamics surrounding the reform within interpretation rather than measurement. By offering this paradigm, the research was therefore able to begin to explore the perspectives of English language primary school teachers, exploring how their professional practices, pedagogical strategies, and broader approaches were shaped by this removal of the high-stakes PEC exam.

Furthermore, this paradigm supported the use of qualitative methods, such as narrative inquiry, to gather rich, detailed accounts from participants. These narratives

provided a platform for teachers to articulate their experiences, challenges, and adaptations to the changing educational landscape. Additionally, by incorporating insights from existing literature and policy documents, the study captured a holistic view of the reform, ensuring that participants' subjective accounts were contextualized within the broader educational system.

By interpreting participants' stories and contextualizing them within the theoretical frameworks of CLT and the washback effect, the research contributed to a deeper understanding of how systemic changes impact classroom practices and educational outcomes.

### **Narrative-based Inquiry as A Research Approach**

In my study, I used narrative inquiry to record the rich stories of research participants surrounding how the discontinuation of the PEC exam affected them. It is widely recognised that such human experiences are fundamentally narrative in nature, and as a consequence, narrative inquiry is a necessary approach to understanding educational contexts. The foundation on which this study is built is their advocacy for exploring the stories as the bridges between the personal and social dimensions. Narrative inquiry gives participants (teachers, students, and guardians) ways to speak about their experiences of the discontinuation of the PEC exam, which offers readers an opportunity to listen in on those participants' perspectives of the exam's ending.

The narratives of primary English school teachers were the principal data source I used to generate rich insights in this study. In-depth interviews were used to collect the data, and interviewees reported their experiences and reflections on the discontinuation of the PEC exam. They were willing and open to sharing their stories. I first started with interviews to learn their perceptions, beliefs and values regarding how the PEC exam has affected their teaching practices and the impacts on the students.

Webster and Mertova (2007) describe narrative inquiry as a powerful tool for making meaning of experiences. A theme echoed in recent works by Clandinin (2016), for example, is that the scope of narrative inquiry is not simply recording an event, but the description of how personal experience fits with broader social change in a dynamic interchange. Here, participants' stories reveal how the PEC exam influenced teaching practices, assessment methods, and the nature of classrooms, as well as the consequences of its undoing. In particular, teachers' stories told us about

their professional journeys, their personal growth, and their changing perception of English as a subject of study in Bangladesh.

I first piloted the interview questions and got the insight of further participants to transcribe to. However, after reading through the transcriptions, I noticed that the text was notes rather than a coherent or holistic picture of the participants' lived experiences. There were no stories; everything was fragmented and shallow. I responded by changing my strategy, and in the additional round, I was trying to capture more complete stories.

Related to their utility for exploring complex educational reforms involving multiple stakeholders, Kim (2016) emphasises the importance of narrative inquiry. This is consistent with the study's aim in finding out how teachers, students, and guardians navigate through the stumbling blocks and opportunities raised by discontinuing the PEC exam. Participants' narratives revealed the complex ways in which policy shifts interacted with classroom realities to reveal both the systemic holes and human-centred emanations of the reform.

In the second stage of in-depth interviews, I was able to collect the full stories of the participants, including the aftermath of the PEC exam from the past to the present. Generally, these interviews were open-ended (Creswell, 2012) and unstructured, thus allowing for natural storytelling. I interviewed them with an interview guide to achieve consistency, but left room for them to recall events and express their thoughts and views about how the PEC exam had impacted their teaching practices and their classrooms. Introductory prompts, focused inquiries and probing questions were used to extend the narratives. We recorded all interviews using a modern recording system and with the participants' consent.

As Sartre (1964, as cited in Webster & Mertova, 2007) observed, "People are always tellers of tales. They live surrounded by their stories and the stories of others; they see everything that happens to them through those stories. (p. 1)" This chimed with the participants in this study, whose narratives illuminated how the PEC exam conditioned their practices, perceptions and experiences of education. Riessman (2008) similarly argues that, while narrative research does this by emphasising the subjectivity and diversity of human experiences, it is a way to explore how different people give meaning to complex social phenomena. Participants' reflections provided depth and context to the study and were evident in this.

After interviewing the participants, I transcribed the data carefully so that their exact words and intent were written down. I followed up with participants to make sure the transcriptions were accurate — I met with them again and gave them printed versions of their transcribed interviews to review in case I had failed to capture their points. I also made informal notes when I was collecting data. These notes were not systematically organised, but they helped me cross-check the participants' attitude and behaviour with the interview data.

Another characteristic of narrative inquiry, which recognises that human experiences are not static, is that narrative inquiry allows human experience to evolve through the reworking of the past as individuals refigure their past within the context of the present. According to Clandinin and Rosiek (2019), narrative inquiry encourages researchers to learn about these transformations, which is important for educational research. Through this method, I was able to explore the ongoing shifts in teaching practices, professional development and language education resulting from the discontinuation of the PEC exam.

After all, Polkinghorne (1988) recalled that narratives do not only transport information but are constitutive of knowledge production. The study took this perspective and presented its findings as 'supportable' given the inherent subjectivity within participants' lived experiences. The educational shift brought by the reform was captured by moving beyond personal stories and introducing broader theoretical insights, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and possibilities of the reform.

### **Research Site and Research Participants**

The centre of my study is educational research, and hence, research participants were three males and three females from five different schools over Cumilla, Sylhet, Jhenaidah and Dinajpur. This was done based on the research method and the practical constraints of contacting a bigger pool of people on account of the available resources. Individual interviews were also conducted with the teachers, along with a student from Kushtia and an official from Mymensingh, who also took part in the last full-fledged PEC exam in 2019, to get a wider outlook. The use of sampling was used because it was easier and much cheaper for everything, as according to The Dhaka Tribune (2022), the population of Bangladesh is 165,158,616, and hence it would be faster and comparatively cheaper to select from this enormous population.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

After verifying the transcribed narratives of the primary English language teachers, I edited the information and gave a pseudonym in order to respect confidentiality. Then I started to reread my conversations with the teachers more closely, and found that even when there were many different reasons for teaching English, quite often — perhaps for the sake of something else — it was because they felt there was some pressure to make their students better at the language, but they really wanted to do it well. I went over the transcription several times until I literally transformed this into a very personal narrative portrayal, telling their whole stories, teaching experience, and how they observed.

The narratives were categorised into prominent themes, such as the goal of improving students' performance, the achievement of stakeholders, teachers' self-initiatives in teaching English, pros and cons of the PEC exam, and the impact of teacher training. After completing each narrative portrayal, I added a personal reflection as a researcher in order to contextualise the participants' insights better. I completed these portrayals and started to flesh out the overall write-up of the study.

A qualitative data analysis paradigm employing a thematic analysis of narrative interviews and open-ended responses was used. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined the use of thematic analysis, in which patterns and themes with qualitative data are identified, analysed and reported. In my study, I coded my data and grouped them into themes related to the effects of discontinuing the PEC exam, including changes in teaching practices, student learning outcomes, and stakeholder perceptions.

This allowed me to systematically analyse the qualitative data, throwing deeper insight into the PEC exam's removal in the Bangladeshi education context.

### **Meaning Making**

While writing, I generated themes to organize the data more effectively, focusing on two broad themes closely related to my research questions: the PEC English examination, its desirability and undesirability and the advantages and disadvantages of terminating the teacher training. I then derived sub-themes from these overarching themes and how the narratives resonated with me with repeated reading. Therefore, the next step was to introduce the stories of the elementary school English language teachers, my research participants, in the context of these themes. I ensured that critical incidents and key moments from their experiences are included, including scene, plot, and character development in a narrative form. In this regard, it



too resonates with the understanding that personal stories are intricate and cannot be overlooked in the comfort of categorical tables or survey results (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

In a subsequent phase, I analysed the data through a blend of thematic analysis and dialogical analysis, tasks guided by approaches proposed by Riessman (2008). By utilising thematic analysis, I was able to identify and explore the emerging patterns and key themes that developed out of the teachers' stories. However, the dialogical analysis provided the opportunity to reconstruct these narratives as a dialogical process and to go further and have an insight into what participants perceived as weaknesses and strengths in discontinuing the PEC English test from this perspective of their lived experience and observation.

I scrutinised how the participants engaged in English language teaching, their instructional purposes, and how they managed the vagaries of teaching without an officially testable PEC. The narrative inquiry framework of Riessman (2008) served as a rich structure for interpreting the narratives, allowing me to explore the mutual interplay between teacher training, pedagogy, and changing circumstances in the educational environment, away from when the PEC exam plays an important role. As a result, classroom practices around the language exam's absence and language learning's effectiveness were better understood.

### **Quality Standard**

Conclusions in narrative research are not prescriptive and cannot be generalised universally. The validity here rather is concerned with whether research has a supportable theory or evidence, whereas reliability depends on the trustworthiness of the data taken in notes or transcript (Polkinghorne, 1988). The following quality standards were set for my study:

#### **Credibility**

Validity in relation to credibility is the composition of accuracy and trustworthiness of findings. I engaged with the participants deeply, having prolonged interactions with them to gain an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the participants in the classrooms involved with differentiated learning. I also reported on their teaching practices in terms of how they applied differentiated instructions. The alignment between the reported behaviour and what participants reported in conversation added another layer of credibility to these observations.

I requested feedback during interviews to see if participants had any questions or wanted to clarify their own perceptions so that the data accurately reflected what they were thinking. Meanwhile, such a reflexive process – where participants themselves co-shaped the dialogue – helped to enhance the credibility of the findings. This authenticating case means that if allowed to re-tell their stories and make their narratives clearer, participants will end up giving the model of Webster and Mertova (2007).

### **Transferability**

We know that the transferability of a study is its applicability to other settings. To compensate for this, I answered this by writing out detailed descriptions and covering them completely during the research process, which readers can use as a tool to make a decision if the study insight can apply to their settings. It corresponds to the concept that readers should be able to extend insights arising from the narratives to contexts of their own education (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The rich and descriptive nature of the aspects of this standard makes it open to other educational settings and contexts to apply it to the impact of the PEC English exam discontinuation.

### **Dependability**

The second reason for dependability is that it makes the research process consistent and repetitive. I made sure the data were collected in a uniform way, as much as possible, in interviews. The data gathering procedure was uniform since each participant was presented with an identical series in a unifying sequence. Additionally, I adhered to the core principles of qualitative research to maintain the integrity of the data analysis in alignment with the standard for data to reflect the participants' responses.

This conforms to Polkinghorne's (1988) process, which relies on standard and caring processes to construct trustworthy data that reflect experiences in living. In my study, detailed documentation of methodological choices provided a clear audit trail, seen through the eyes of others to see if they agree with the choices in the research procedure.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability aims at maintaining objectivity and hence giving a voice to the participants, rather than giving one to the researcher personally. For this study, I carefully logged all data collection processes and made sure that the findings really

were participants' experiences. And with this attention to neutrality, there was no undue influence of personal biases in interpreting the data.

Confirmability, as described by Polit and Beck (2012, as cited in Elo et al., 2014), is when findings are based on the participants' narratives and not dispositions of a researcher. This research took that standard to heart, laboriously centring on the stories of participants, allowing their stories to shape the study's conclusions.

### **Verisimilitude or Truthfulness**

In this study, verisimilitude is our perception of how close we are to the truth, as perceived by the researcher and the readers. My collected narratives resonated with my own research experience, and they were plausible and realistic in their telling to readers as well. I grounded the stories of elementary school English language teachers in their lived experience and reported them in a way that readers can relate to and perceive as real (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

The truthfulness of the narratives was validated with critical events and reflections of participants, which were in line with the model. That approach made the research both theoretically sound and rooted in the realities of the participants' experience of what was happening.

### **Authenticity**

This study was authentic in that we created a real context that looked like the participants' lived experiences. Teachers' narratives were reported in such a way that they made sense in their reality and were not misrepresented or distorted. This process was also driven by fairness and ontological authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The research retained a balanced and true portrayal of the problems related to discontinuing the PEC English exam through the inclusion of not less than one side of the coin.

### **Praxis**

According to Taylor and Wallace (2007), Praxis is the application of knowledge to produce practical change. This research aimed to inform and encourage improvements in English pedagogy in both the context of training and assessment reforms. My study was to document the personal narratives of primary school teachers whose teaching practise has been influenced by the discontinuation of the PEC exam to inspire reflection on ways in which the discontinuation of the PEC exam has disrupted teaching methods and incorporate practical solutions to turn this change

into an opportunity to improve teaching methods that suit the needs of those they teach in the new educational context.

The research of my study was not just meant to contribute to the framework of academic knowledge but to engender actionable insights to help educational practitioners enhance English Language instruction in Bangladesh. The study used storytelling to illustrate the hurdles and experiences of English language teachers with the aim of applying the findings in order to guide future educational practice.

### **Meaningfulness**

In this study, the stories of the participants have been presented as meaningful representational voices of their authentic experiences during the context of primary-level English education in Bangladesh. The narratives of the teachers, students and officials convey the real-life repercussions of the discontinuation of the PEC English test. These stories reveal the lived experiences of the participants and inform the changes in teaching practices, student learning outcomes and stakeholders' perceptions, all of which have underlying relevance to the research objectives.

Stories are believed to be true because they are meaningful, and they are meaningful because they are true, according to Doan and Parry (1994). This supported the interpretative framework used in this study, which generates meaning from the individuals' experience and understanding of how they recognise the discontinuation of the PEC exam. According to Josselson (2006), meaning-building from lived experiences is the heart of narrative inquiry. Like in this case, meaningfulness was a central concern for this research as the participants' stories not only articulate their personal and professional realities, but also go beyond to provide a broader picture as to how educational reforms are interfering with how English is taught in Bangladesh.

Through the way of presenting the participants' narratives, my study was able to help us understand the consequences, the result of PEC examination reform and the impact on the educational landscape. What made the content behind these narratives meaningful was not only in their content but also in their use of contextually grounded stories that were illuminating and served to connect to salient educational purposes. An enriched narrative approach provided the means for this study to explore the discontinuation of the PEC exam and to give the findings meaning and impact that all educators, policymakers, and researchers can employ to enrich their own work.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Being mindful of the ethical implications throughout the research process, I adhered to the following ethical guidelines to confirm the integrity and credibility of my study on the discontinuation of the PEC English exam in Bangladesh:

### **Confidentiality**

Participants shared personal and sensitive information about their experiences with the PEC English exam and its discontinuation. Often, this information involved professional opinion, teaching practices, and perceptions of the education system, and required careful handling. The privacy of all participants was voiced as a concern, and a number directly asked that their identities be covered. So, I made sure that before we interviewed and got their stories told, they knew that any information they shared would be kept strictly confidential. This was consistent with ethical standards set out by Punch (2014) with respect to sensitive issues, including institutional practices and educational policies.

All participants were given pseudonyms, and the information collected was all privacy-protected, not mentioning names, schools, or precise locations. Additionally, I promised participants that neither their interviews nor personal insights would be shared with a third party. All files recorded were stored securely as per Babbie (2016), and exposure of any personal or sensitive information that could potentially identify the participants has been taken care of. Surrounding the PEC exam, cultural and professional sensitivities surrounded privacy in this way and respecting privacy in this way was crucial.

### **Respect for Autonomy**

Autonomy was a key ethical concern in this study. To minimise this, I was sure that all participants were well informed of the study's purposes and procedures before agreeing to participate. It was totally voluntary, and I explicitly told everyone that they could withdraw from the experiment at any time, without any real consequences being faced. This corresponds to the ethical principles that Hammersley and Traianou (2012) emphasise regarding getting informed consent and voluntary participation in educational research. I also made sure that participants could express their ideas and learn in their time and on their own time, and could do so without being pressured or coerced. There was such an atmosphere of mutual regard that people felt comfortable sharing their thoughts openly.

## **Justice**

I did this study in a way that was fair and equitable for all participants. It was not discrimination by gender, age, ethnicity, teaching experience, or social background. Equal treatment was given to all participants, with all having the same opportunity to share their experiences. The research process equated each participant's story so their voices would be fairly represented in the study. Fulfilling the principle of justice as Israel (2014) outlined, treating all participants with respect, making all participants achieve equal opportunity to interact, and not marginalising any perspective.

I conducted my research ethically, though these ethical considerations regarding confidentiality, respect of autonomy and justice were ensured that the permission and privilege of the participants were also safeguarded throughout the process. However, following these ethical standards constructed trust with my participants and, in so doing, guaranteed the validity and integrity of my study.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter III describes the methodological framework in which an interpretative research approach is used to explore the cessation of the PEC English examination in Bangladesh. Having many different teachers, students and guardians' perspectives and experiences, narrative inquiry was used as my main research methodology because I thought that it would help to collect rich, personal stories from the participants. Five schools were part of the research site, and within these schools, the sampling of the latter was purposive, identifying key stakeholders who had been exposed to the last full PEC exam.

After Riessman's narrative analysis method, data analysis followed, which gave a thematic, dialogical understanding of how participants live their experiences. The ethical standard that needs to be adhered to is maintaining confidentiality, honouring individual autonomy and fairness throughout the entire endeavour of my research. This chapter focuses on emphasising trustworthiness, authenticity and meaningfulness as quality standards.

## CHAPTER IV

### NARRATIVE PORTRAYAL

The cases in the narratives of six primary school English language teachers in chapter IV provide a wealth of experiences of how their work changed, and how they changed, in response to the discontinuation of the PEC exam. This sharing of the stories gives a whole understanding of how the exam affected their teaching practices, the dynamics of their classrooms and their professional growth. In response to the first research question, this chapter focuses on teachers' lived experiences of the PEC exam removal and its effects, as well as how it has changed teaching practices and academic outcomes at the primary level. These narratives further inform subsequent chapters of analysis in the relationship between the administration of educational policies and its classroom space.

#### **Dena Sultana: Navigating the Shift from Exam-Oriented Teaching**

Dena Sultana, a primary school English language teacher from Sylhet, described the profound impact the PEC exam had on her approach to teaching, noting how the test dominated her curriculum planning. She explained,

*Before the PEC was discontinued, ..... everything I did was focused on getting my students to pass the exam. I wasn't teaching English; I was teaching them how to pass.*

This gets us to the first research question, since it demonstrates how the PEC exam impacted teaching practices by favouring rote learning over true acquisition of meaningful language. Dena's experience also conforms to the opinions discussed in Chapter II on washback, where high-stakes testing was seen to dictate classroom practices that often ignore communicative competence.

When the PEC exam was discontinued, Dena initially struggled to adjust. She said,

*I felt lost, .....  
Without the PEC, I didn't know how to structure my lessons.*

This sentiment highlights the systemic reliance on exams as a guiding framework for teaching, a challenge identified in Chapter III. However, over time,

Dena began to see the discontinuation as an opportunity to reorient her teaching towards communicative competence. She shared,

*I've started incorporating more speaking activities, .....*

*Now, my students practice conversations, role-plays, and group discussions—things that were impossible to fit in before because we were so focused on the exam.*

Dena's evolving approach ties directly to the first research question, demonstrating how the removal of the PEC exam allowed her to explore CLT principles. Her efforts to adopt more interactive methods align with the theoretical emphasis on communicative competence in Chapter II, showcasing the potential for meaningful pedagogical change in a post-PEC environment.

### **Rithi Rani Kundu: Reimagining Assessment in the Absence of PEC**

For Rithi Rani Kundu, a teacher from Jhenaidah, the discontinuation of the PEC exam posed a particular challenge in terms of assessment. She said,

*Without the PEC, .....*

*How do we know if students are progressing? What do we measure their success by?*

The second research question is about the challenges teachers experience in adapting to new systems. This is also relevant to the discussions in Chapter III, where assessment for learning (AfL) was considered an alternative to traditional, summative exams. Rithi's story is about navigating from a strict required testing system to more flexible and adaptive methods.

Rithi's approach to this dilemma was to develop her own assessment tools, inspired by AfL principles. She explained,

*I started using informal assessments—things like class participation, oral presentations, and peer feedback, .....*

*It was a bit uncomfortable at first because I was used to the security of the PEC, but now I feel like I'm actually seeing my students improve in real time.*

This research puts forth her efforts to make sense of the first research question in that she demonstrates how teachers modify their assessment practices so they more accurately capture students' language development. Chapter II discusses how Rithi's narrative indicates the potential for moving away from the use of summative assessments to gain a more holistic understanding of student progress.



Moreover, Rithi's narrative underscores the importance of professional development in helping teachers adjust to this new assessment landscape. She emphasised,

*We need more training, .....*

*I've had to figure this out on my own, but not every teacher has the time or the resources to do that.*

In particular, this statement reinforces the importance of professional development, which has been a theme of Chapters II and III, and contributes to the second research question by corroborating the fact that educators do not find educational reforms alone, and that they require systemic support to successfully champion reform.

### **Latifur Rahman: The Pressure to Perform**

A particularly poignant story, Latifur Rahman, a teacher from Dinajpur, told of how he got to monitor the American PEC exam and said that he faced pressure from the administration of his school as well as the parents of his students. He recalled,

*Every year, I was under so much pressure to get my students to pass, .....*

*The parents would come to me, demanding that their children get A+ grades, and the school would threaten to lower my evaluation if the results weren't good enough.*

The first research question is answered by this narrative of how the PEC exam created teachers' work from external pressures. As explained in Chapter I, in this high-stakes exam, performance metrics overshadowed valid learning outcomes.

Moreover, the discontinuation of the PEC exam brought relief to Latifur, but it also raised new challenges.

*Without the exam, .....*

*..... the parents didn't know what to expect. They kept asking me, 'How will we know if our children are doing well?'*

This concern highlights a recurring theme in the interviews: the deep-seated reliance on standardised tests as a metric of success for the student. In Chapter II, we considered what washback is: the way an exam is designed can, in turn, shape not only particular teaching practices, but also wider expectations for educational practice. For example, Latifur's story shows us how the turn to exams has influenced

both teachers and parents to equate their low grades in exams with low achievement in school.

Despite these challenges, Latifur embraced the opportunity to shift his teaching focus.

*I've been able to do more creative projects with my students, .....  
We've done group debates, writing workshops, and even some drama activities in English.*

They correspond to HOTS, as shown in Chapter II, and how teachers can pay more attention to communication and critical thinking, instead of strict exams. Finally, Latifur's narrative intersects with both research questions by highlighting the pressures and opportunities of moving to a post-PEC system.

### **Afzal Hossain: The Role of Teacher Training in the Post-PEC Era**

Afzal Hossain, an educator from Sylhet, stressed the significance of teacher training in responding to the discontinuation of the PEC exam. He shared,

*I've been teaching English for over 20 years, .....  
..... and the training I received early on was all about preparing students for the exam. Now that the PEC is gone, I feel like I need to relearn how to teach.*

This perspective directly answers the second research question by demonstrating the difficulties in the new minimally tested days, that is, the non-prepared teachers' ability to deal with a much more communicative, skills-based approach. Afzal's narrative also highlights a significant theme discussed in Chapter II: the need for ongoing professional development opportunities to help build a capacity within teachers to understand educational reforms.

Afzal noted that the lack of formal training on how to teach English without the PEC has been a significant barrier for many of his colleagues. He said,

*Most of us were trained in traditional methods—grammar translation, drilling, that sort of thing....  
Now, with CLT and all these new ideas about communicative competence, we're kind of left in the dark.*

This comment illustrates that wide gaps exist between policy aspiration, as with the implementation of CLT, and what is available and what is feasible for teachers. This first research question is addressed by Afzal's narrative, as this gap is demonstrated to impact the effectiveness of post-PEC teaching.

Despite these challenges, Afzal has made efforts to adapt.

*I've started attending online workshops and reading more about CLT,*

.....

*I'm trying to integrate more speaking and listening activities into my lessons, but it's a slow process.*

This was an effort to implement innovative methods based on findings in the previous chapter III, where the paramount role of teacher agency and self-driven professional development in tackling systemic limitations is discussed. By this, Afzal illustrates the necessity of structured teacher training programmes to modify how educators apply post-PEC pedagogical approaches.

### **Selina Akter: The Impact on Student Motivation**

Selina Akter, a teacher from Cumilla, shared her observations on how the removal of the PEC exam has affected her students' motivation.

*When the exam was still in place, my students were always focused on getting good grades, .....*

*Now, some of them don't seem as motivated to study.*

This narrative addresses the first research question by highlighting a significant consequence of the PEC exam's removal: from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. In Chapter II, the lack of high-stakes exams has lessened external pressures, potentially reducing the students' drive to engage with their studies. However, Selina also pointed out that the lack of exams has enabled a calmer, more supportive classroom environment.

*The students who used to be afraid of failing are now more willing to participate in class, .....*

*I've seen shy students speaking up more during group activities because they don't feel the same pressure to get everything right.*

This change is consistent with the content of Chapter II and the principles of intrinsic motivation, in which a learner-centred and supportive classroom space encourages deeper engagement. The second research question is addressed by Selina as she describes how teachers use their methods to keep students engaged even when authentic assessments are not viable. In looking further, the fact that the exam has been replaced means that more interactive and collaborative methods are being exposed to students for language learning:

*We're doing more group discussions and activities that focus on real communication, not just memorising answers.*

As explained in Chapter III, an assessment for learning shift that avoids the assessment of learning aids students to view the process of language acquisition as a transformative phenomenon instead of a rigid goal. This is where Selina's narrative shows how the transition paves a path towards deeper, more meaningful experiences of language learning.

### **Proshanto Saha: Looking to the Future of English Language Education**

Proshanto Saha, a teacher from Cumilla, offered a forward-looking perspective on the discontinuation of the PEC exam.

*I think this is a chance for us to rethink how we teach English in this country,*

.....

*The PEC was holding us back in a lot of ways—it was too focused on testing and not enough on real communication.*

Proshanto's narrative directly addresses the first research question, reflecting on how the removal of the PEC exam enables teachers to focus on communicative competence rather than rote learning. He expressed hope for a future where English instruction prioritises speaking and listening skills, stating:

*Now that the exam is gone, we have the freedom to experiment with new methods, .....*

*We can focus more on speaking and listening, which are the skills students really need if they're going to use English in the real world.*

This vision aligns with the theoretical discussions in Chapter II, where the benefits of integrating CLT and HOTS into the curriculum were explored.

However, Proshanto also acknowledged the challenges that lie ahead.

*This isn't going to happen overnight, ....*

*We need more resources, more training, and more support from the government if we're really going to change the way English is taught.*

The second research question that the narrative addresses is the systemic challenges around the implementation of sustainable educational reform. The power of his story is only reinforced by this, as discussed in Chapter III, that policy and resources need to be made available to support teachers in bringing about a more communicative and skills-based English language curriculum.

There is no shortage of experiences from the six English language teachers who work at the primary level English Language teacher of Bangladesh stood down, including Dena Sultana, Rithi Rani Kundu, Latifur Rahman, Afzal Hossain, Selina Akter, and Proshanto Saha, who show just how PEC exam discontinuation has redefined English Language education at primary level in Bangladesh. The narratives give an in-depth understanding of the gains and losses that this important policy change brings, along with answering the two research questions.

The stories told by the teachers about the PEC exam showed its effect on the teaching practices. Dena and Latifur shared that in their classrooms, high-stakes testing filled so much space that it shifted the goals to only rote learning and test prep. The exam did not leave a lot of room for them to develop authentic communicative competence. This is an uncertainty that teachers, parents, and students alike felt during the initial removal of the PEC exam—an uncertainty reflected by Rithi and Selina. However, such a shift also marked the beginnings of more exciting and skills-oriented ways of language teaching. For example, Proshanto mentioned how he started arranging speaking and listening activities at the top of the list, and Dena worked with interactive ways like role plays and group discussions.

They also exposed critical gaps that exist in teacher training and preparedness in implementing CLT. The story of Afzal illustrated the challenge of taking your organisation out of the traditional ways of functioning unless there's adequate professional development. Rithi had similar difficulty with creating meaningful assessments without standardised tests. However, these challenges were not a deterrent to the teachers. Afzal and Proshanto took it upon themselves to engage in workshops and to take up self-learning to sharpen their teaching skills, while Latifur and Selina devised creative and learner-backed activities to keep their students engaged.

The stories demonstrate that teachers find ways of being resilient and adaptive to change. Yet they persist in emphasising the need for support at the systemic level to aid in making educational reforms a success. To foster communicative competence in classrooms, teachers need appropriate professional training, a set of innovative assessment frameworks, and consistent policy guidance.

To sum up, then, the six educators' narratives show that the discontinuation of the PEC exam had far-reaching consequences. The experiences shed light not only on the obstacles of a transition to a new system, but also on the opportunity for meaningful

change when teachers are supported in their work. These findings provide important foundations for subsequent chapters, which take an expanded view of how such narratives offer implications for policy, pedagogy, and teacher training.

### **Chapter Summary**

The narrative in this chapter describes how six primary school English language teachers in Bangladesh constructed their experiences with the discontinuation of the PEC exam. The stories about their experiences highlight many different challenges and opportunities this reform has brought, giving us a rich tapestry of the changes in the dynamics of English language teaching in the primary sector.

The narratives of teachers such as Dena and Latifur showed the following key themes: teachers learned to put rote learning above meaningful engagement with language in response to the high-stakes PEC exam. At first, the removal of the exam was unsettling for some, but then others, such as Proshanto, were able to use this to adopt more communicative, skills-based approaches that are in accordance with the principles of CLT. Rithi and Selina's two reflections bring in the curiosities of assessment and student motivation without the use of standardised exams, while Afzal brings in the crucial necessity for professional development so that teachers can get over such transitions.

Taken together, the stories of all the participants illustrated systemic problems: teacher training gaps and resource constraints, but also possibilities for transformative change. For example, these narratives not only answer the study's research questions but also demonstrate the necessity to seamlessly link policy reforms with supportive measures for teachers and learners. This chapter thus provides a setting for the subsequent analysis of these themes in subsequent chapters.

## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS IN PEC

Chapter V used the perceptions of teachers regarding discontinuation of the PEC exam drawn from the narratives in the previous chapter. Their attitudes, beliefs and reflections were examined more closely in terms of the changes in assessment practice and teaching method and in student behaviour following the removal of the exam. The second research question, as this chapter continued, was asked by identifying the patterns, themes, and underlying factors in all teachers' responses to the reform. The study also interpreted these perceptions and highlighted the broader implications for policy change in the realm of English language education in primary schools.

#### **Shift in Teaching Practices**

The theme that appeared from participants' discussion is the change in teaching practice after stopping the PEC English exam is completed. Significant changes in teachers' instructional approaches, curriculum focus and classroom dynamics were reported.

#### **Reduced Emphasis on English Language Instruction**

Without the pressure of the PEC English exam, English language instruction in primary schools has become less accentuated according to the teachers' observation. Rani, an English language teacher from Jhenaidah, shared:

*Before, much of our class time was dedicated to preparing students for the PEC English exam. We focused on grammar, vocabulary, and exam strategies. Now, with the exam gone, English has taken a backseat. The priority has shifted to subjects that are still examined at the national level.*

This shift has led to a reduction in the allocated time for English lessons, with some schools reallocating resources to other subjects perceived as more critical for students' academic progression.

#### **Changes in Teaching Methods**

The removal of the exam has also influenced teaching methods. Some teachers have embraced more communicative and interactive approaches, focusing on

developing students' practical language skills rather than exam-oriented content.

Dena, a teacher from Sylhet, explained:

*Without the exam, I feel freer to explore different teaching methods. I now use more storytelling, songs, and games to engage the students in learning English. It's less about memorising for the exam and more about actually using the language.*

However, not all teachers have made this shift. Some feel uncertain about how to teach English effectively without the structure and goals provided by the exam.

Latifur, a teacher from Dinajpur, expressed his concerns:

*The exam gave us a clear target. Now, I'm not sure what to focus on. There is no standardized curriculum to guide us, and it's challenging to keep the students motivated without the exam as a goal.*

### **Impact on Teacher Motivation and Professional Development**

Teachers' motivation and involvement in professional development have also been reduced since the PEC English exam was discontinued. The once valued English has eroded some of the motivation for some teachers to improve their English teaching skills.

Dena, a teacher from Sylhet, mentioned:

*Previously, I attended workshops and training to improve my English teaching because I wanted my students to do well in the PEC exam. Now, there is less incentive for me to invest time in developing those skills.*

Conversely, other teachers see this as an opportunity to innovate and improve their teaching. Rani, from Jhenaidah, shared:

*I believe that English is still important for our students' futures. Without the exam pressure, I can focus on making my classes more engaging and relevant. I've started collaborating with other teachers to develop new materials and activities.*

### **Shifts in Student Motivation and Academic Results**

The discontinued PEC English exam has had a major influence on student motivation and learning outcomes, as reported by both teachers and guardians.

#### **Decrease in Student Engagement with English**

Many teachers observed a decline in students' interest and engagement with the English language. Without the exam as a motivating factor, students are less inclined to put effort into learning English.



Afzal noted:

*Students used to work hard because they knew they would be tested. Now, they often ask why they need to learn English if there is no exam. It's difficult to motivate them.*

Parents echoed this sentiment. Hasan, a guardian from Sylhet, expressed his concern according to Afzal's statement:

*My son used to study English diligently because of the PEC exam. Now, he hardly pays attention to it. I'm worried that he will fall behind in English, which is important for his future education.*

### **Variations in Learning Outcomes**

The change in assessment practices has led to variations in learning outcomes among students. Some students benefit from the reduced pressure and enjoy learning English in a more relaxed environment. Selina observed:

*Some of my students are more relaxed and participate more in class activities. They are less stressed and seem to enjoy learning English for its own sake.*

However, others are not progressing as expected. Proshanto highlighted:

*Without the exam, some students have lost focus. Their reading and writing skills are not improving as they should. I'm concerned about how this will affect them in higher grades.*

### **The Importance of Testing in English Language Education**

The discontinuation of the PEC English exam has sparked discussions among participants about the value of assessment in language instruction and how it influences teaching and learning.

### **Assessment as a Motivational Tool**

Participants acknowledged that standardized exams like the PEC can serve as a motivational tool for both students and teachers. Selina stated:

*Exams give students a goal to work towards. They also hold teachers accountable for their students' performance. Without the PEC exam, there is less urgency to ensure that students achieve a certain level of proficiency.*

### **Anxiety about the deficiency of standardized assessments**

There is concern among teachers and guardians about the absence of a standardized assessment to measure students' English language proficiency at the primary level.

**Proshanto** expressed:

*Without a national exam, how do we know if our children are learning what they should? There needs to be some way to assess their progress and identify areas where they need support.*

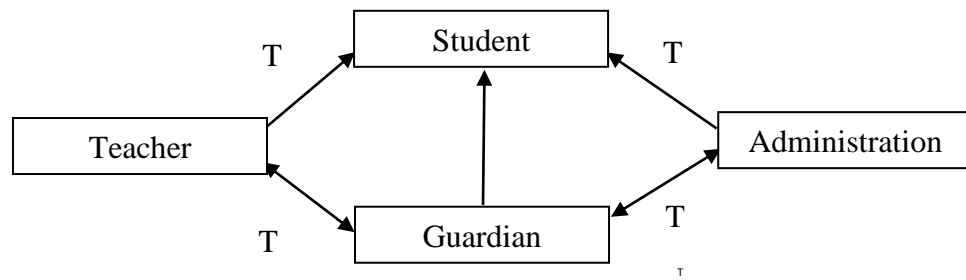
Teachers also worry about the long-term effects on students' readiness for secondary education. Selina commented:

*I'm afraid that students will enter secondary school without a solid foundation in English. This could affect their performance in all subjects, as English is often the medium of instruction in higher grades.*

### Implications for Stakeholders

**Figure 9**

*A Quadrilateral Tension Among Administration, Teachers, Guardians, And Students*



On the whole, administration, teachers, guardians and students are generally anxious towards the public exam, and such anxiety multiplies into a quadrilateral tension (T), which manifests itself through tension in ties with the aim of attaining good grades. Students get pressure from them, and guardians push administration, teachers, and students. As the gatekeeper for secondary school entry and the JSC, SSC and HSC, directly or indirectly, passing the PEC with good marks is always important. Students who don't pass the first time have to wait a full calendar year before taking the PEC test again. This means that students are placed under constant pressure by their educational troops, families and communities to pass the test, which in turn is administered by the governing power. Feeney and Freeman (2014) explained that poor administration can make a test invalid and unreliable. In response, they emphasised that the administrative practices during test implementation should be appropriate. It can also sometimes contain assignments and answers to questions on the test, and these assignments and answers might reflect the beliefs and language

of the instructor to ensure that learners get good grades (Hardy, Kordonowy & Liss, 2022). and might somehow limit the freedom for learners to think.

Under the lips continues the discontinuation of the PEC English exam and has implications for both stakeholders, namely teachers, students, guardians and the entire education system.

### **Challenges for Teachers**

Teachers face the challenge of adapting their teaching strategies and finding new ways to motivate students without the exam. They also need support and guidance to navigate this transition.

Latifur suggested:

*The education authorities should provide us with a new curriculum and resources to help us teach English effectively without the exam. Professional development opportunities would also be helpful.*

### **Concerns of Guardians**

Guardians are anxious about the students' English education and future prospects. They recognize the importance of English for higher education and employment opportunities.

Rani quoted from a guardian, named Hasan, that:

*English is essential in today's world. I want my child to have the best opportunities, and that includes being proficient in English. The school needs to ensure that students continue to learn English effectively.*

### **Policy Implications**

The discontinuation of the PEC English exam raises questions about the amalgamation of English into education and the governing language policy. There is a need for clear guidelines and support to ensure that English language education remains a priority.

Dena advocated:

*The government should consider implementing alternative assessment methods or frameworks to guide English teaching at the primary level. Otherwise, we risk students falling behind in this critical subject.*

### **Opportunities for Innovation**

Despite the challenges, some participants see the discontinuation of the exam as a break to rethink English language education.

**Sushanto** shared:

*Without the constraints of the exam, we can focus on developing students' communicative skills and making learning more enjoyable. This could lead to better long-term outcomes if approached correctly.*

### **Emerging Themes from the Participants' Narratives**

Several important themes emerge from the participants' narratives:

#### **Dependency on Exams for Motivation**

Teachers and students alike found inspiration in the PEC English test. The lack of the test has shown a flaw in the natural drive to pick up English.

#### **Demand for Curriculum Guidance**

It looks like teachers who want to teach English in the classroom without a test structure need new lessons or rules.

#### **The Value of English for Future Prospects**

The people who took part think that students need to know English to do well in their current study and in the jobs they will have in the future.

#### **Variability in Teaching Practices**

These discontinuations have been followed by visual variability in the way teaching is practised in some cases, whereas some teachers are innovating, and others are unsure.

#### **Role of Stakeholders in Supporting Education**

This transition is supported by guardians and the educational governing body in supporting teachers and students.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

The discontinuation of the PEC English exam has had multi-pronged implications for English language pedagogy in Bangladesh. The removal of the exam has changed the education landscape, changing motivation, teaching practices and perception of the value of English education.

#### **Dependency on High-Stakes Testing**

The narratives come to focus on an overreliance on high-stakes testing to drive educational outcomes. The PEC was utilised as a driver of teaching and learning and brought crystal clear objectives and accountability. That void, though, cannot be adequately filled by other drivers or assessments of a motivational structure.

Following from this dependence on exams, the question arises: what underlies the intrinsic vs. the extrinsic motivation in education? Now, the question is whether

we can motivate both students and teachers to love English, to learn it as a sport, not just out of an obligation to pass exams.

### **Need for Systemic Support**

Teachers express a need for systemic planning in the form of curriculum development, professional training, and resources. The transition requires guidance to ensure that English education remains effective and relevant. Educational authorities have a major role in ensuring this support. Developing a comprehensive language education policy that addresses assessment, curriculum, and teacher development is essential.

### **Importance of English in a Global Context**

Even though that's hard, everyone agrees that English fluency is crucial to the eventual growth and success of the students. Higher education and employment opportunities continue to depend on English as a global language.

The fact that these understandings are shared makes the need for English language education as a priority, even without the PEC exam, all the more in place. For this aim, perhaps there may be a need for innovative teaching methods as well as other forms of assessment.

### **Variability in Responses**

Teachers' responses to discontinuation are variable, with differences depending on individual capacity, resources, and attitude. The exam provides a structure that some teachers prefer, and others despise the chance to innovate.

Due to this variability, the student learning outputs can be disparate, and not all students can learn at the same pace in all situations; hence, added standardised support and professional development are required to ensure equitable education.

### **Role of Guardians**

They are the active stakeholders in their children's English education. The quality of English education overall is a cause for concern between schools and them. Involving guardians in the process of pedagogy will reinforce the importance of English while assisting in supporting students' learning at home.

The discontinuation of the PEC English exam has left teachers, students and guardians in Bangladesh in a state of shock. It has presented challenges, but it also provides an opportunity to rethink and possibly improve the way we do English language education.

To transition, we need to address the dependency on examinations, give systemic support to teachers, and engage with stakeholders. Therefore, to continue to develop the English proficiency that students will need for their future, the education system can focus on helping students learn to develop intrinsic motivation to learning English, innovating teaching practices, and establishing a supportive policy framework.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter V analysed the effect of discontinuation of the PEC English exam on the language learning process in Bangladesh on the basis of teachers' narratives. The findings highlight dramatic generic change in teaching practices, student motivation and perceptions of English education.

Reduced focus on English instruction, changes in teaching methods, difficulty in student engagement and the need for systemic support are key themes. The stories of the participants reveal the significance of English proficiency in determining future opportunities and why assessments serve an important role in driving and guiding education.

However, the analysis really underscores the need for a holistic approach to English language education — inclusive of its national curriculum development, teachers' professional training, stakeholders' engagements and policy support. However, by focusing on those areas, the discontinuation of the exam can become an opportunity to work on creating and improving innovation within education.

## CHAPTER VI

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN PRIMARY LEVEL

The broader implications of teaching the English language were explored in light of the discontinuation of the PEC examination, and Chapter VI found out the challenges faced by teachers in changing their pattern of teaching after the discontinuation of the PEC exam. In the post-PEC reform context, I addressed the second research question, in which I examined the obstacles teachers encountered and the strategies they used to overcome them. Insights from this chapter added to a nuanced understanding of the relationship between systemic changes in educational policy and the teaching and learning process, and suggest future improvements in curriculum and teacher training.

#### **The Prevalence of Exam-Oriented Teaching**

One of the themes that emerged from the sixth interviews, but that is widespread, is teaching English mainly at the primary level, focusing on exam-oriented realities. Across the interviews, teachers were concerned about the focus of many schools on making students ready for public English exams rather than on real language teaching. Obviously, the focus on these exams also tends to promote rote memorisation at the expense of developing an understanding of language skills.

Latifur Rahman (Interview Code 003) remarked, *"The pressure to make students ready for the Primary Education Certificate (PEC) exam often restricts us from doing what we need to do to educate them."* This means that we have to put students' communicative skills at the back of our priority, and instead we memorise the answers to the text and students rather than learn the language. The facts corroborate the findings of Chapter II, where there was an inadequacy of public exams to verify the comprehensive skills of language. The curriculum and testing framework within which the teaching is done has a very rigid structure; furthermore, it is totally divorced from CTL.

In classrooms, instructional materials also emphasise the use of exam preparation. Teachers add that sometimes they are forced to use exam guides and model question papers so as to proclaim English language learning as a narrow thing,

generally focusing on reading and writing. Afzal Hossain (Interview Code 004), who was frustrated with his colleagues, said, *"We have to use exam guides, because parents, and the school administration require us to deliver good results.... They're not meant to teach the language; they're meant to teach students what the exam questions are."* This echoes the concerns of Chapter III that external pressures play a dominant role in dictating what should take place in primary school language teaching, delivering very little flexibility to innovate or be creative.

### **The Disconnect Between Exams and Communicative Competence**

The teachers identified a recurring issue of disconnect between public English exams and communicative competence. The expanding focus on CLT in educational discourse, however, did not seem to persuade teachers that the exams do not adequately test listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Reading comprehension and grammar mostly feature on the exams, leaving little to measure speaking and listening skills that are important in acquiring a language.

Dena Sultana (Interview Code 001) said, *"The PEC exams test reading comprehension and grammar rules, but don't assess whether the students can actually use English in real-life situations. They are the most important, and yet, speaking and listening are completely ignored"*. Chapter I also discussed this lack of alignment between the content of the exam and communicative competence, as the historical background of public English exams has traced how they have indeed been designed to test knowledge, not language use.

Additionally, teachers are getting more frustrated because their assessments are not different from students' exam performances. Thus, they are to concentrate on what is tested rather than communicative competence that they perceive as being important. Selina Akter (Interview Code 005) said, *"We know that speaking and listening are important, but if you're not going to test these skills, then there's no point focusing on speaking and listening. We have to prepare them for that, for the students to pass the exam."* The implications of the phenomenon are larger and spread in the education system, in which the curriculum and the ways of teaching are determined by assessment instead of the sake of understanding. This can be a signal of a problem in today's educational system, in which critical thinking and the building of the world are subtly devalued in favour of test preparation. For this reason, educators and policymakers need to redesign evaluation frameworks to support rather than undermine authentic opportunities for learning.



### **Impact of Public Exams on Teachers' Motivation**

Besides the drastic impact on students, the rigid structure of public English exams has also dragged down teachers' motivation and professional development. The teachers said the idea of focusing on exams and rote learning stifles their creativity and their passion to teach. However, the curriculum is prescribed, and the pressure to produce good exam results means there is little room for innovation or the taking on of new teaching methods.

Rithi Rani Kundu (Interview Code 002) expressed her disillusionment, *"I went into the teaching profession because I wanted to help students learn and grow. The reality is that I'm just doing these exams. That's disheartening, and that takes away the joy of teaching."* The description in her narrative is consistent with the discussion in Chapter IV, which reviewed the theoretical review on communicative competence and CLT, indicating the gap between the planned accomplishments of language learning and practice in the classroom.

Also, teachers' professional growth is affected by the pressure to conform to teaching in terms of exams. Several teachers said they are stuck in the cycle of preparing students for exams with very little ongoing professional development. Proshanto Saha (Interview Code 006) said, *"We go to communication workshops and seminars on communicative language teaching, that's not the issue, nothing changes when we come back to our classrooms. Luckily, we still have to teach for the exams. We're just going through the motions."* It feels like these parallel issues I've mentioned in chapter III regarding the educational system's focus on exam results to the detriment of holistic language education efforts.

### **Teachers' Perspectives on the Washback Effect**

Public exams brought in a washback effect on both teaching and learning, as a key theme drawn out in the interviews. Teachers talked about the role of the structure and content of the PEC exam in the teaching practices and learning experiences of students. The exams take the focus away from exam-related content, giving a warped view of what language learning is.

Latifur Rahman (Interview Code 003) said about his observation, *"one of the things we do in the classroom, everything we do, is affected by the exam. There's something about parents and students; they just want to know what's on the test. Like*

*they limit our ability to get creative and introduce new ideas.*” This is congruent with what is found in Chapter V, where analysis centred on how high-stakes exams influence teaching practices through washback, and how exams programme a surface-level focus on learning rather than deeper language acquisition.

The negative washback also continues in the attitudes of students towards language learning. Students tend to lose interest in studying English after the exam. Afzal Hossain (Interview Code 004) said, *“After the exam, students forget what they learned. English is not something that they value for anything outside of the exam. Then it’s just another subject they have to pass.”* This is an important observation of the limitation of the current assessment system that does not promote a lifelong interest to learn languages or developing practical language skills.

### **Navigating the Tension Between Policy and Practice**

The interviews expressed the tension between policy directives calling for CLT and the reality of exam-oriented instruction. Yet teachers complained of a gap between what the government claimed as its mission — to encourage communicative competence — and their being forced to rely on exams that test only a few linguistic skills.

Selina Akter (Interview Code 005) said, *“But the exams don’t test that, ..... They tell us to focus on language communication, but we don’t test that. But we have mixed messages, and it’s confusing us as teachers. We’re supposed to teach communication, but on the other hand, we have to prepare students for an exam that doesn’t value communication at all.”* Thus, her narrative is understood by the broader contradictions in policy discussed in Chapter II, where one contradicts the other — that is, the introduction of CLT in the Bangladeshi curriculum was examined, with a note of division between the curriculum’s aims and the language testing framework.

Educators also complained that policies are onerous while they’re not followed, and they were definitely not supportive or clear as to how to handle conflicting expectations. Rithi Rani Kundu (Interview Code 002) told, *“We’re stuck in the middle. We want to help students build real language skills, but the system isn’t set up to help us. It’s frustrating because we know we’re not giving the students what they really need.”* This tension poses the issue of needing systemic reform, which is discussed in Chapter V, where test characteristics that serve as the basis for a successful test (validity, reliability, and educational goal alignment) are explored.

### **Role of Teachers in Exam Reform**

Despite facing each and every difficulty, teachers interviewed as part of my study had a strong commitment to being involved in the process of exam reform. As a firsthand experience of the current exam system limitations, it provides its expertise to offer some tips and recommendations on how the English test system at the primary level can be improved.

Proshanto Saha (Interview Code 006) shared, *"I hope we can be part of the discussion. It is the teachers who spend every day in the classroom. We understand what works and what doesn't. To improve English education in Bangladesh, we really have no choice but to listen to the teachers."* His feelings echoed what was mentioned in the concluding part of Chapter IV, which was how the stakeholders decided to formulate policy on education, stating how teacher involvement in assessing reform was important.

Teachers also hope that the discontinuation of the PEC exam will give them the chance to rethink how English language skills are assessed. Dena Sultana (Interview Code 001) said, *"We have a chance to do something different after the PEC exam was discontinued. What we really need to do is to assess listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, and these exams need to reflect what students actually need to know."* This is also aligned with Chapter V discourse on ways English language assessment could be changed, with a discussion of the need for more holistic, communicative assessment methods.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter VI explored the understanding and thoughts of English language teachers with public English exams at the primary level, focusing on the impact of exam-oriented teaching, the disconnect between exams and communicative competence, and the broader implications for teachers and students. The educators' accounts exposed the difficulties of operating within a system that values examination scores over substantive language acquisition. These narratives also underscored the detrimental backwash effect of the PEC examination on instructional methods and learner achievements.

Despite these challenges, the teachers expressed a strong desire for reform, emphasising the need for exams that reflect the areas of CLT and assess all four language skills. As the PEC exam is discontinued, there is an opportunity to reimagine English language assessment in Bangladesh and create a system that better supports both students and teachers in their English language learning journeys.

## CHAPTER VII

### KEY INSIGHTS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The key findings, conclusions and recommendations from the research are synthesised in Chapter VII. It merged data from the six teacher interviews discussed in the preceding chapters to provide a complete understanding of how the discontinuation of the PEC English exam affected Bangladesh. The chapter is split into three segments: it offers key insights, conclusions and recommendations for stakeholders that are engaged in the education sector. It ended by reflecting on my research journey for the project.

#### **Key Insights**

This research investigated how English language teachers at the elementary level have responded to the discontinuation of the PEC English exam by looking at what they have experienced and what this means for teaching, learning, and assessment more generally. What emerges from the findings is a complex story of the challenges and opportunities raised by this important educational reform.

The central question that this study attempts to answer is teachers' perceptions of students' learning outcomes and grades after the removal of the PEC exam. One striking observation about the data is how much the high-stakes exams, such as the PEC, have influenced the system of education. Such exams have a 'washback effect' according to Cheng et al. (2011), which affects not only what is taught but how it is taught. In my study, teachers repeatedly spoke about how their lessons and evaluations were moulded by the exam requirements. One teacher reflected, *“Without the exam, we are struggling to maintain the same level of focus among students. The exam was like a milestone for them—it kept them on track, and now we have to find new ways to engage them.”*

This comment sheds light on a system heavily reliant on extrinsic motivation to drive learning. The absence of the PEC exam has created a void, leaving both teachers and students without a clear external target. Ryan and Deci's (2000) work on extrinsic motivation supports this finding, emphasising the role of external incentives, particularly in language education, to keep students engaged. The challenge now lies

in shifting from extrinsic motivators to fostering intrinsic motivation through more meaningful, student-centred approaches.

The issue of motivation came through strongly, particularly among rural teachers. One teacher explained, *“When the exam was there, students knew they had to prepare for it. Now, they don't see the point in studying English as much, especially when their parents also see no immediate benefit.”* This sentiment resonates with Hamid and Baldauf's (2014) findings, which highlight how parental attitudes and societal perceptions influence the value placed on learning English. In contexts where exams served as a tangible goal, their removal has led to a deprioritisation of English, particularly in communities where its immediate utility is not evident.

The absence of the PEC exam has also disrupted established assessment practices, leaving teachers unsure about how to measure progress effectively. Several participants expressed frustration about the lack of guidance or frameworks to help them navigate this transition. One teacher shared, *“The exam was a way for us to understand how well students were doing. Now, we don't have that measure. I'm not sure how to evaluate them fairly, and the students aren't sure what they should be aiming for.”* This gap in assessment practices is echoed in the literature, with Brookhart (2017) noting that removing high-stakes exams often creates a temporary void in assessment systems, leaving educators without clear benchmarks.

This lack of certainty indicates that we have a need for additional formative assessment models that provide useful feedback in order to help foster ongoing learning. Particularly in concept, Black and Wiliam's (2009) concept of Assessment for Learning (AfL) could be useful here, by way of ongoing, student-engaged, continuous feedback cycles that are clear in their positive and possible approach to improvement.

The second research question focused on explaining the challenges of teachers in the English teaching and learning process and the strategies used to overcome these challenges. Many teachers have also begun to experiment with more communicative approaches because the PEC exam did not dictate the curriculum. This subscribes to CLT principles (Richards, 2006) and, beyond that, places increasing reliance on communicative skills, including speaking and listening. Nonetheless, it has not been without difficulty. One teacher candidly shared their struggles: *“Now that the pressure of the PEC exam is gone, I've been trying to teach my students more*

*conversational English. But it's not easy. The materials we have are still very much focused on exam preparation, and I have to come up with new activities myself."*

This comment highlights a familiar issue in educational reform: But policy changes are usually not accompanied by the needed resources, training or guidance for teachers on the ground. Aligning the policy with the practice and providing educators with the means and tools to adapt is a major way of thinking about educational change, according to Fullan (2015).

Third, the study has another key insight: that national language policies do not always correlate with how the policies are actually implemented in the classroom. While the removal of the PEC exam was supposed to reduce rote learning, it's also exposed deeper structural problems. Certainly, teachers, especially in under-resourced areas, are not equipped with CLT strategies that they haven't been trained to implement or have materials. One of the participants observed, *"Communicative English is a good idea, but we don't have enough training to teach in that way. The materials we have are still geared towards the old exam system, and we don't have much guidance on what to do now."*

This finding is consistent with Wedell (2009), who suggests that reforms in language education require significant teacher training and in-service training. In rural and marginalised settings, for example, teachers are particularly hit by the lack of alignment between policy goals and classroom realities with big classrooms and little resources (Kirkpatrick, 2020).

Compared to these challenges, the research also found opportunities for significant reform. The removal of the PEC exam has allowed some teachers the freedom to explore new, innovative, student-centred approaches. Proshanto showed us how a well-supported shift could make English language education less about command of the system and more about the communicative and skills side of things. Nevertheless, a number of participants saw that this transformation will require significant system support—new curricular resources, ongoing training, and alternative assessment frameworks to inform teaching as well as learning.

### **Conclusion**

While the PEC English exam has been discontinued, it is a change that representatives from Bangladesh's education system, including its teachers and students, can and will feel profound effects. The system has been driven traditionally through high-stakes exams such as the PEC, hence shaping the curriculum, teaching

practice and motivation of the students. Removal of this exam has exposed the systematic excess dependency on processes such as these exams: this suggests that frames for measuring proficiency of English have to be created that include much more. Without the PEC exam, teachers have no clear benchmarks they have relied upon to guide their instruction, and their feedback is no longer meaningful. It translates to the fact that students and teachers are at odds with an instructional void created by the once-dominant method of preparing students for exams.

The policy shift is intended to advance more communicative and student-centred learning, but there are still gaps between what is intended and what happens in classrooms. However, many teachers, especially in rural areas, are not adequately skilled in CLT, and schools are inadequate in terms of resources, which means that this method cannot be put into practice. The policy promotes interactive learning, but the limits of undertraining and material conditions make it practically difficult for teachers. For that reason, students' language learning experiences are restricted by backward pedagogies, as while shifting away from an exam-centric approach, they haven't accompanied the teachers with the necessary support to adopt the new method. Educational reforms are often characterised by a disproportion between policy and practice that is a common challenge worldwide (Hattie, 2023).

In addition, the elimination of the PEC exam has so far dampened student motivation primarily in non-urban areas, where the preparation for an exam has been a central driving force of engagement with English for decades. When you take away the external incentive of an exam, many students feel as if language learning is not something of prime importance, which only further demotivates them. However, with the advent of teachers willing to innovate with more interactive teaching methods, these efforts are isolated and standardised due to systemic factors: limited training and resource shortages. In order for educational authorities to sustain these innovations, stronger teacher development, resource allocation and clearer assessment frameworks are needed. The potential benefits of the policy change to communicative teaching will not be realised without such support, because consistent and supported implementation in schools is the essence of educational reform (Sahlberg, 2021).

### **Recommendations**

Based on the principal findings and inferences of my research, some suggestions for policymakers, educators and other interested parties within the educational framework of Bangladesh are described here. The discontinuation of the

PEC exam stands as an opportune time to introduce alternative means of assessment, emphasising listening, speaking, reading and writing. The more formative assessments, continuous evaluation, and project-based learning, the more complete a picture we can have of the student's progress.

It is important that educators know the techniques used to effectively implement CLT. And in so doing, this goal can be attained through specialised training programmes that promote contemporary teaching methods, evaluation of language skills, and development of effective classroom organisation. The shift to the CLT necessitates new teaching materials and resources. This should be prioritised as a concern of policymakers in the development and dissemination of textbooks, apps, and digital tools that will align with the new curriculum. If educational reform were to be a success, all the stakeholders have to be involved, including teachers, guardians, and policymakers. The establishment of platforms for dialogue where teachers can raise their concerns about, and contribute to, the shaping of future reform should be a platforms.

The chance to experiment with new teaching strategies and get students actively involved in the use of language is one opportunity teachers should embrace. Practical communication skills in English can be developed by students through pair work, group discussions, storytelling, and role-plays. Sharing of best practices and resources can happen through the collaboration of teachers. Schools must be fostering the development of professional learning communities of teachers who are willing to exchange ideas, support one another, and explore novel language instruction strategies. Without a formal exam, teachers could use continuous assessments to monitor progress in the absence of a formal exam. Use of regular quizzes, oral presentations and language portfolios can be great tools for tracking development and giving feedback.

Establishing a home setting tuned to both value and encourage the language at which all children are working should spur parents and caregivers to transfer their efforts towards fostering their children's English language acquisition. English language books, TV programmes and games will help students to be exposed to that language. Guardians are important because they are responsible for ensuring that their children's educational needs are met. They have to get together with educators and school officials who can champion the resources needed for language instruction programmes and their allocation.



Finally, additional studies are needed to evaluate the enduring effects of abolishing the PEC examination on students' academic performance. Deeper insights into how this policy change affects language proficiency and academic performance with time can be provided through longitudinal studies. While this research investigated educators' experiences, subsequent investigations should explore the experiences of the pupils to more fully explore their incentives, obstacles and their behaviours surrounding language acquisition in the absence of a state examination.

### **Reflections**

My passion for English developed when I started teaching English in Bangladesh in 2010, and I coached grade V students on teaching for the PEC English exam in Bangla and English versions for two years. I also taught students to prepare for other high-stakes exams at various educational levels in Bangladesh. So, for my professional development, I joined English language teachers' and research organisations like Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association (BELTA), Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA) and Star Scholars Network. I also focused on strengthening my local and international English teachers and researchers' communities. Before embarking on this research, I explored this idea with other stakeholders and looked at the Junior School Certificate (JSC) exam. I had good reasons to investigate the discontinued PEC English exam from the teacher's point of view, as they were principal stakeholders in this change. My experience with my three nephews and nieces who passed the PEC exam and my mother's more than four decades of teaching experience in primary schools also spurred me on. Through these personal and professional connections, I was curious about what the PEC English exam's discontinuance meant. Thus, I investigated this shift in assessment: its history and its ramifications for teaching and learning. This research offers an opportunity to examine the wider effects of such assessment structures and how their removal impacts teachers and students.

At the beginning of this research, I experienced several iterations of research questions that I thought about regarding what exactly the PEC exam was about. With guidance from my supervisors, I eventually narrowed my focus to two key questions: An analysis of the PEC exam and how it influences students' academic performance and their overall learning outcomes and a look into what teachers experience when shifting goal directions. The literature review enlarged my view of how an assessment framework and language learning theories are interwoven with socio-cultural context

of English in Bangladesh. I examined different theories and realised that theories such as washback effect, communicative competence and assessment for learning (AfL) were suitable for my research. In addition, the theoretical review had a strong foundation for analysing how assessments shape teaching methodologies and how changes in policy create both challenges and opportunities in education.

Narrative inquiry allowed me to collect rich, personal stories from six English language teachers. Uncovering the challenges teachers face when they discontinue their PEC was through their voices. They discussed issues of alignment between the curriculum they wanted to teach and that which they had to teach, the limitations of the classroom reality, and the discrepancies between policy and practice. Similarly, some teachers talked about the importance of an outdated exam and material focus, while other teachers did not have any opportunity for professional development when it comes to implementing CLT. Through a qualitative approach, I had the opportunity to dig deep into what they went through; things that might not have been captured through quantitative methods. I maintained my openness to new insights because I revised my interpretation continuously as the narratives generated themes that continued to develop.

On the basis of the teachers' stories, I applied theories of communicative competence, AfL, and washback to place teachers' experiences. The widening gap between policy intentions and classroom practice became more obvious, emphasising the importance of trainer training and adequate resource allocation. What these narratives of the teachers show is being caught in a trap of transitioning to a more communicative, student-centred approach without the right support or preparation to do so through the CLT strategies. The importance of systemic support and ongoing professional learning to educational reform success was particularly highlighted. As the findings revealed, reforms without such support are likely to be superficial and end up making little or no difference to teaching and learning.

On this research journey, thinking about what it means to strike the balance between policy and practice, I realise this is very important. Removing the PEC exam provides an opportunity to let go of the more concentrated and textual language teaching in favour of more holistic and CLT. Yet, without robust institutional frameworks, updated resources, and the proper teacher training, these changes will likely remain aspirational and devoid of impact. My work has gone further to clarify how language policy, assessment practice, and classroom life converge. I hope that

the findings of this study not only move the discussion around reforming assessment practices but also spur further study on how to bridge policy with practice in the Bangladeshi education system. Now, as the country drifts towards a new curriculum, I think these insights can have a role in crafting a more inclusive and effective method for English language education.

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## APPENDIX

**Sample of Participants' Transcribed Narratives****Date:** 17-12-2023**Location:** Cumilla**Interviewer:** Md Ariful Hasan**Interviewee Code:** 005 (Transcribed Text)**Pseudonym:** Selina Akter**Occupation:** Primary School Teacher**Mode:** In-person**Interviewer:** How many years have you been teaching in primary school?**Participant:** For 43 years.**Interviewer:** How many years have you been teaching in class five?**Participant:** I was the class teacher of class five for nine years.**Interviewer:** Do you think the English exam of the PEC Examination helped the students to develop their English language skills?**Participant:** Yes, of course. Usually, primary-level students have a reluctance to learn the English language, but because of the PEC Examination, they showed a little interest in English, and they improved as well.**Interviewer:** So, did the PEC Examination mainly help their reading and writing skills?**Participant:** Of course it did.**Interviewer:** How much did it help to develop their reading and writing skills?**Participant:** The PEC exam significantly helped students improve their reading and writing skills. It provided structured questions that required them to engage with texts more thoroughly, which enhanced their understanding. Additionally, the exam format motivated students to practice writing more, thereby boosting their overall abilities.**Interviewer:** Okay, do you think the design of the question paper of the PEC Examination helped their listening and speaking skills?**Participant:** If I compare it to other subjects, since it's international, the subject of English should be better taken care of. While the PEC exam encouraged students to

study, I believe there should have been a more effective approach to teaching English, especially for developing listening and speaking skills. These areas were not adequately addressed by the exam, and a more accessible method could have made a bigger impact.

**Interviewer:** Was listening and speaking practised separately in your classroom?

**Participant:** No, there was no such separate practice. This subject was taught in the same way as it was taught in other subjects. However, as the subject was difficult, and children were reluctant to participate, the subject was not treated accordingly.

**Interviewer:** Since you have taught class five for nine long years, and have seen for yourself that reading and writing are emphasized in the classroom, not listening and speaking, to improve their skills, how do you think listening and speaking should be practised alongside reading and writing?

**Participant:** Reading and speaking, if children are given a little pressure to speak, their interest in reading will increase. However, in our country, students are not encouraged to speak in that way, nor is it used in class.

**Interviewer:** There were 13 questions in the English PEC Examination, or has it changed now?

**Participant:** No, till now, there have been 13 questions, but they have not been changed yet.

**Interviewer:** Do the 13 items for English in the PEC exam help to develop the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, or do they only help to develop the skills of reading and writing? Or is it problematic for students? What do you think?

**Participant:** Of course, it is somewhat problematic. It encourages students to memorise some answers, like paragraphs or essays. The students who want to get good marks, memorise their items. If they had understood and written these items instead of memorising them, their listening and speaking skills would have improved even more.

**Interviewer:** Yes, like, there was writing five sentences, letter writing....

**Participant:** Yes, there was letter writing, five sentences, and a form fill-up.

**Interviewer:** Was there any unseen question in the PEC English exam paper?

**Participant:** Yes, there was an unseen passage, and students had to answer a few questions from that passage. There were fill-in-the-blanks, answering the questions, and writing tasks. The 'unseen' passages were often not truly unfamiliar, as they were closely related to stories or concepts the students had already studied. This made it

easier for them to answer the questions, but limited their opportunity to think critically or demonstrate creativity. The unseen passages should be unseen so that they can showcase their creativity, but I think it was designed in a way that students can answer them, as they already know students' weaknesses.

**Interviewer:** Were these items problematic or fine? What do you think?

**Participant:** It's, of course, problematic. When a child can read and speak well, they can write well. But in our country, everybody only emphasises the writing part.

**Interviewer:** That also encourages them to memorise.

**Participant:** Yes, the exam structure encouraged students to memorise answers, particularly for tasks like paragraph and letter writing. Many students rely on memorisation to score well, focusing more on rote learning than on developing a true understanding of the material.

**Interviewer:** There were some grammatical items, right?

**Participant:** Yes, there were some grammatical items. They were not separated as grammatical items; those items were from unseen passages.

**Interviewer:** For those items, have you taught grammar separately in the classroom?

**Participant:** No, grammar was not separated, but after the PEC was called off, we used to take grammar classes separately. In our school, we created a 200-mark exam system for English and Bangla.

**Interviewer:** Okay, you all taught separately, so that students could learn well. As you and your colleagues were taking this grammar or some extra tests informally, weren't they supposed to get good marks?

**Participant:** We are taking these exams to develop our speaking and reading ability. But in reality, it didn't have that motive.

**Interviewer:** So, the main target was to get good results in the PEC Examination, right?

**Participant:** Yes, previously, the only motive was to get good results in the PEC Examination. The most important thing for the students was to be learning speaking, writing, and reading skills, but the main focus was only on getting good grades.

**Interviewer:** Okay, since there is no PEC Examination now, but when the PEC exam used to happen, was there any fear among the students, teachers, school administration, and families? Or, was there any excitement among them? What do you think?



**Participant:** There was fear among everyone. Teachers, students, guardians, and everyone were terrified.

**Interviewer:** Was there any excitement among them? What do you think?

**Participant:** Yes, they used to give the PEC exam importance; they were very excited and attentive about this exam. Exams give students a goal to work towards. They also hold teachers accountable for their students' performance. Without the PEC exam, there is less urgency to ensure that students achieve a certain level of proficiency.

**Interviewer:** Have you guys taken extra care of these students?

**Participant:** Yes, we did. There were extra procedures for them. We used to observe them and do parent meetings for weak kids. We used to do parent-teacher meetings so that they could be aware of what to do, and students could bring good results for themselves and the school. Through this, the school can gain a good reputation.

**Interviewer:** Now, the PEC Examination has been called off. What's your opinion on this?

**Participant:** Since everybody is talking about the new curriculum on TV and in interviews, we think the curriculum might change, and the PEC Examination will be taken again.

**Interviewer:** The previous government brought a lot of changes to the education system. What do you know about?

**Participant:** No, I don't know. All I know is that everybody is saying that it might change.

**R:** Till now, what kind of training have you had?

**Participant:** I got one year of primary school education training from PTE. Then, I did my B.Ed. as well.

**Interviewer:** Other than that, you didn't get any seminars, right?

**Participant:** No, we didn't get any chance to join seminars. We have two to seven days of training for block system classes for the primary students. Only two primary school teachers were allowed to attend, and I was one of them. It happened two years ago. I also took 1-day course training from two different places. Other government primary school teachers gave us those training sessions.

**Interviewer:** Do you know anything about continuous assessment?

**Participant:** Continuous assessment, I don't remember about it now. But the method I learnt in a training before was the letter sequence, meaning the method was to teach letters first and then slowly move to sentences. The training we did was an alphabet

sequence, where we first say the sentence, get to know the sentence, and get to know the fact.

**Interviewer:** Continuous assessment is taking regular tests, taking tests every week, and taking tests monthly, through which an average score is given to the children. Instead of depending on two or three tests, these institutions take tests daily, weekly, biweekly and monthly.

**Participant:** No, such things didn't happen in our school.

**Interviewer:** Is it?

**Participant:** Yes, we were supposed to launch it in the school, but because of the overcrowding problem, we stopped it again. Tried to introduce class tests, weekly tests, monthly tests, fortnightly tests, and six-monthly tests, but failed. I couldn't cope with the large number of students. Because of the training we took, it was in classes 3, 4, and 5 for a maximum number of 40 students in one class, and not more than 20 to 25 students in the lower classes, but our school couldn't fulfill the requirement.

**Interviewer:** So, there is no continuous assessment now?

**Participant:** But there are benefits to continuous assessment. We were taught many things in training, but we could not implement them in practice.

**Interviewer:** If reading, writing, listening, and speaking were added to the assessment and the textbook, what percentage would you assign to each? Would you give 25% for each? What do you think?

**Participant:** No, it is better if you do a little more and a little less, if you balance it a little less and more, and if the students do a little worse in one, then they can get good marks in another.

**Interviewer:** Well, if there is a balance, in what ways would it be beneficial?

**Participant:** Yes, yes, it should be. It will be very beneficial for children. I am speaking from my real experience, having been to government primary schools, I have seen that children must attend continuous assessment. Their opinion was that if they do not come for continuous assessment, how will they know everything? It increases students' interest in school.

**Interviewer:** Do you think the colleagues you have should be trained?

**Participant:** Of course I do. Training is very helpful for teachers.

**Interviewer:** You think training is very important, right?

**Participant:** Yes, it is very important. Basic training is very important. It is not only beneficial for his teaching but also for their personal life.

**Interviewer:** As far as I know, it is a rule that everyone should go for training, but schools don't send teachers? Why are schools not sending them to take training?

**Participant:** In our time, there were five of us, and all five of us were sent for compulsory training, but now the government is not giving importance to non-government schools; they are only giving it to government primary schools.

**Interviewer:** They are only focusing on government primary schools, that's why you people are not interested in it, and schools are also not getting the chance, right?

**Participant:** Yes, we are. We had the privilege a long time ago, but not now. Those who are running the school should have an idea about this, but they don't have an idea or experience with it.

**Interviewer:** What is your opinion about online training? Is physical training better than online training?

**Participant:** No, physical training is more beneficial than online training. The two training sessions that I took, the primary training and the physical training, were very beneficial.

**Interviewer:** Since you have many teachers, four or five of you get training, and they train the rest of your teachers 1-2 days a week? It usually happened before, did it?

**Participant:** Yes, it has been done to us before. It has some benefits, but it is not a hundred per cent. Nearly 60%.

**Interviewer:** In that case, it was better to go to the teachers' training college, wasn't it?

**Participant:** Yes, it is better to go. It was done in our school, where we were given structure from training and weekly training; in this case, the proper training goal was not achieved. There is no alternative to going in person and getting trained.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** It has been done before by the administration, but some teachers didn't care about it, passing the training as a waste of time. If they had physically gone there and taken this training, it would have stuck in their heads.

**Interviewer:** Do you think there should be listening and speaking practice in the classroom for learning the English language?

**Participant:** Yes. Of course.

**Interviewer:** How do you practice listening and speaking in the classroom, along with reading and writing?

**Participant:** By using English with children in class, children are interested and can learn. Introducing language to children through simple sentences will increase children's interest, and their reading and use will go hand in hand, which will benefit them.

**Interviewer:** Without PEC, there were three term exams and coaching classes for students, right?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** What was the selection procedure for Coaching classes?

**Participant:** The selection of students happened through analysing their skills in subjects.

**Interviewer:** Did you guys have separate batches for meritorious students, especially in Math and English?

**Participant:** No, such things never happened. But we had more classes in English and Math. If there were two classes for other subjects, then for English and Math, we used to have three classes a week.

**Interviewer:** Is this because children usually get relatively low marks in these two subjects?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Was the PEC exam a panic for kids, teachers, and guardians? Was there such an attitude, whether they would do well, or they would not? In some cases, did the children feel excited, that for them it is a milestone? Is it a reason to be terrified or excited?

**Participant:** The PEC exam was considered a major milestone for students, symbolizing an important academic achievement. It motivated students to study harder, as both they and their families viewed the exam as a key step in their educational journey and a source of pride in their community.

**Interviewer:** Is this exam used to motivate children?

**Participant:** Yes, it was a motivation for the students.

**Interviewer:** What kind of motivation?

**Participant:** They used to feel like an educated individual in society. They used to be happy by thinking. I passed in class five, and there is proof of that.

**Interviewer:** But if I talk about the English language, they could not learn the English language. They only passed the subject "English." What do you think?

**Participant:** I think both happen in them; they used to be excited to learn English, so that they could pass the English exam. You think 30% for the learning, and 30% for the excitement, a total of 60% of interest works in them. In rural areas, students didn't find interest in learning English as the PEC Examination is not happening. In urban areas, people learn as they know the need for English in the future.

**Interviewer:** Which one is better, the Scholarship exam or the PEC exam?

**Participant:** The PEC exam was better; only a few students got a chance to attend the scholarship exam, but in PEC, 100% of students got a chance to attend, and they felt privileged that they were going to another school and taking a board exam. However, in the scholarship exam, only 10% of students from each school got the chance.

**Interviewer:** A lot of students in the PEC Examination used to get an A+, do you think they were eligible to get that?

**Participant:** No, not all of them. But some children were really capable, and some of them were nearly capable, so all of them got it. And, in the country, the answer papers were not strictly evaluated; they were given marks liberally. That's why all of them got an A+.

**Interviewer:** Do you think the standard of evaluation of answer papers was not maintained properly?

**Participant:** Yes, the answer papers were not evaluated properly.

**Interviewer:** Is this because of the question items or because of the instructions you received?

**Participant:** The question is partly responsible for it; the instructions were also partly responsible. It also happened because of the surrounding situations; we know the situation in our society, so everyone can celebrate happily, that's why.

**Interviewer:** Do you think the assessment would have been better if listening and speaking had been combined? Or would it have gotten messier?

**Participant:** In my opinion, there should be PEC, and for English, the teaching methods, teachers need to learn, giving more emphasis should be placed on them, rather than passing the exam. It would have further developed the English language in our society.

**Interviewer:** Do you think the quality of the question could be improved a little for this?

**Participant:** Yes, the quality of the questions could have been improved a bit, to encourage the children more.

**Interviewer:** Do you think the listening and speaking connection and existing items in the current assessment system need improvement?

**Participant:** Yes, of course.

**Interviewer:** What items do you think need to be included from your experience?

**Participant:** In my opinion, the question should be designed more liberally for the children so that the children can read and understand it. Asking such questions will gradually increase the interest of the children, and it will be better if the English method and sentences are accessible and understandable to the children. And even if teaching is done that way, teaching English won't be perfect. In existing assessments, no importance is given to speaking and reading; most importance is given to passing the exam, precisely in writing.

**Interviewer:** Must get an A+, how do you think this thing could be changed?

Guardians, students, and teachers will not focus on getting an A+; English language learning will be their main target. How do you think it could be done?

**Participant:** Apart from the grading system, if it can be brought to a percentage, i.e., if students can feel that if they get a certain percentage, they are passing, then the attitude of getting an A+ will go away.

**Interviewer:** Don't you think it will affect the meritorious students?

**Participant:** Oh, yes. Of course, it will affect them. They will lose their interest. There should be alternatives for the development of talent.

**Interviewer:** Generally, some schools make primary school results matter for admission to class six, by excluding the A+ system. Is it possible that the entrance exam would be the main exam? How would that be?

**Participant:** It is good, I think, yes. As is done at the college and university level, it is better to do it in this way.

**Interviewer:** This used to happen before, but now it doesn't happen. It may happen again this year.

**Participant:** Yes, it may start again this year. It will be good.

**Interviewer:** What impact do you think the PEC exam has on learning English?

**Participant:** It has a great impact on children. English was compulsory.

**Interviewer:** Was it important to include listening and speaking skills in the PEC exam for the development of language education?

**Participant:** Yes, I think it's important.

**Interviewer:** Should listening and speaking be regularly practised in class to improve English language skills?

**Participant:** Should be done, but it is not happening.

**Interviewer:** In your opinion, what are the pros and cons of the PEC exam? Can you tell me a little?

**Participant:** The good thing is that the illiteracy of our society would be reduced because the children would be interested, they would feel that they could be educated at this age. Another aspect is that every child would know more or less English as a subject and as a language. Everyone in the villages and towns would have understood something of it, they would take an interest in it, and they would feel encouraged to practice English at least as it is necessary, not only in the country but also abroad. Even if it is a few sentences, they would be able to say it in front of the foreigners, which would help them express themselves.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and what are the bad sides?

**Participant:** The downside was that there was an attitude among school institutions that children should pass more and get better grades so that the reputation of their school would increase. And, if there were a scholarship-based exam for those children who were brilliant, the Guardians could have made their children more interested in studying, and they could have gained a good reputation. I'm afraid that students will enter secondary school without a solid foundation in English. This could affect their performance in all subjects, as English is often the medium of instruction in higher grades. There are a few downsides, but the upsides outweigh the downsides.

**Interviewer:** Do you think skipping the PEC exam was the right decision?

**Participant:** In my opinion, the PEC exam should have been retained because it provided a structured system of evaluation that motivated students to take their studies more seriously. It also ensured that all students, regardless of their background, were actively engaged in the learning process.

### **Sample Interview Questions**

1. How many years have you been teaching fifth grade?
2. Did the Primary Education Completion (PEC) English examination help students develop their language skills and become more interested in English?
3. What is your opinion on the decision to remove the PEC exam?
4. How effective was the PEC English examination in assessing students' English skills, particularly in writing and reading?
5. The exam included tasks like 'writing five sentences' and 'letter writing.' Do you believe these tasks helped improve students' writing and reading skills, or did they encourage memorisation?
6. Were the grammar components in the PEC exam sufficient to evaluate students' understanding of English grammar?
7. Do you regularly administer grammar and composition tests to fifth graders in your classroom?
8. What are your thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses of the PEC English examination?
9. Do you think the PEC examination caused stress and anxiety among students, teachers, and parents, and had negative effects on the education system?
10. Do you believe practising speaking and listening skills in class is essential for effectively learning English?
11. Was it important to include speaking and listening tests in the PEC English examination to improve language proficiency?
12. Are you aware of the upcoming changes in the English curriculum as per the government's decision?
13. What do you know about continuous assessment, and how do you think it will impact your teaching methods?
14. The new curriculum plans to assess listening and speaking through continuous assessment, using a 60:40 ratio between summative and continuous assessment. Do you believe this approach will effectively improve students' listening and speaking skills, considering classroom realities?
15. Do you think it is realistic to implement continuous assessment in your classroom environment?



16. What are your expectations from the new education curriculum and assessment system? Do you have any suggestions for improvements?
17. Do you think it's possible to adequately train all primary school teachers to implement the new curriculum effectively?
18. Would online training methods, such as MOOCs, be a better option for teacher training?