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## **Problematizing human capital development in English language education in Bangladesh**

MD MAKSUD ALI, M. OBAIDUL HAMID, IAN HARDY & M. ADIL KHAN

### **Abstract**

This article draws on a framework based on Bernstein's three message systems of schooling and Ball's notion of policy cycle to examine how the human capital development goal incorporated into the Bangladesh secondary English curriculum has been translated into pedagogy and assessment practices. Data were collected from classroom observations and teacher and principal interviews and document analysis. Findings indicate that while the curriculum has emphasised human capital development as an important English language education policy goal, pedagogy and assessment appear to be pursuing divergent goals, and are mediated by the local structures shaped by the colonial past and the current political economic context. The article highlights how human capital development is inadequate for substantive pedagogical and assessment practices and contributes to comparative education policy enactment studies by revealing how neoliberally-oriented global education policy trends of human capital development unfold locally in schooling contexts in developing societies, namely Bangladesh.

### **Introduction**

Schooling fulfils multiple social goals such as developing productivity skills, inculcating desired values and attitudes and shaping compliance dispositions, as articulated by nation-state authorities who consider school-based education as an apparatus of the state (Carnoy 1982; Labaree 1997). Far from being fixed or static, such education goals are variable as they seek to respond to changing economic, social, political, geopolitical and demographic conditions locally and/or globally. How such education goals are articulated and justified in curriculum, and how they translate into pedagogical and assessment practices, are important questions for educational inquiry. In this article, we seek to shed light on the relationship between these education goals and the varied ways they are enacted. Empirically, we take Bangladesh as a case study and focus on English language education (ELE) as a curriculum area to provide insights into such enactment. This particular area of interest has not been

extensively researched in developing countries such as Bangladesh, where education has experienced significant reforms in a neoliberal environment demanding the country “increase the productivity of human resources to serve the global market” (Kabir and Chowdhury 2017, 176).

Under such neoliberal conditions, education policy around the world has exhibited a significant swing towards “economisation”. Economisation is achieved in many ways, including the alignment of education policy and curriculum with skills construed as important for securing jobs (Spring 2015). Economisation in education is a result of the influence of neoliberalism, which promotes market logics in all domains of society (Block 2017).

In a neoliberal environment, embodied skills and capacities, especially those that potentially contribute to a market economy, are considered human capital that can increase individuals’ productive capacity, employability and income (OECD 2001). This notion of skills as human capital in the employment market has shaped education policy in capitalist societies, leading to a significant focus on developing employment-oriented skills through school curriculum (Spring 2015). This human capital framing of education/economisation, having its origin in the United States, has later been globalised under neoliberal conditions (Rizvi and Lingard 2010) and been taken up in both developed and developing contexts, including Bangladesh. However, the globalisation of human capital framing of education has led to “confusion as to what knowledge, skills and attitudes are necessary to prepare the youth for problems associated with the uncertainties of the labor market and the consequences thereof” (Kirschner and Stoyanov 2018, 3). In other words, going beyond the abstract meaning of human capital, there is hardly any ‘consensus’ definition of what exactly constitutes human capital, and which specific skill sets and abilities constitute 21<sup>st</sup> century human capital in an ever-changing and volatile world (Kirschner and Stoyanov 2018). Moreover, it would be naïve to argue that skills and abilities are operationalised in the same way in different social contexts.

Skills considered as necessary for employment in one society may be significantly different from those in others (Kubota 2011). Also, importantly, some qualities such as creativity, curiosity and leadership often labelled “twenty-first century skills” “are not skills at all... but are rather traits/characteristics, which were always needed but which also cannot be taught” (Kirschner and Stoyanov 2018, 4). How such an amorphous and problematic concept becomes articulated amongst curriculum designers, textbooks writers and test developers seeking to plan for and implement what are construed as a human capital development goal presents as an interesting problematic. This situation is further complicated by how other substantive educational outcomes beyond human capital development are simultaneously emphasised in education.

Economisation has more recently extended to ELE policy in the developing world (see Shin 2016; Erling 2017), alongside the commodification of English globally (Cameron 2012). Commodification refers to a condition in which language skills are customised as a commodity to adapt them to the employment market (Bourdieu 1977; Park and Wee 2012). As these embodied skills are believed to increase individuals’ employability, they are considered a form of human capital (Chiswick and Miller 2003). This notion has come to influence ELE policy in developing societies, leading to the economisation of ELE through an emphasis on the development of learners’ employment-relevant communication skills in English (Erling 2017). While the earlier goals of foreign language education which aimed for broader intercultural, humanistic and citizenship purposes are not denied, a more instrumentalist goal of human capital development has recently shaped ELE in developing societies (see Ali and Hamid 2021; Price 2014; Sayer 2019). Although the top-down imposition of human capital agenda in ELE has recently been problematised in different jurisdictions (Shin 2016; Soto and Pérez-Milans 2018; Sayer 2019), not much is known about how such an agenda introduced within the ELE

curriculum translates into pedagogy and assessment and how this affects education provision in local developing settings, including in Bangladesh.

Drawing on Bernstein's (2003) conceptualisation of the three message systems of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in relation to schooling, and the notion of policy cycle (Ball 1993; Bowe, Ball and Gold 1992), this paper examines how human capital development, as an emerging global policy trend in ELE, plays out in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment policy and practices. We base our analysis on a case study of such policy practices in Bangladesh and explore how human capital framing of ELE has shaped the secondary English curriculum, and how this curricular goal has translated (or failed to translate) into pedagogy and assessment practices. Our analysis indicates that translation of human capital framing of education is problematic, creating conceptual, operational and pedagogical challenges as it is enacted as part of a policy cycle in local contexts. Our findings also indicate that local social structures play a significant role in policy translation processes (Kabir 2021). Such structures include how individuals' dispositions are shaped by ideologies embedded in the colonial past, as well as the current local political economic context. Bernstein's message system of curriculum helps identify the broader policy goal of human capital development as part of a broader policy cycle that also includes how this goal plays out in practice (via teaching and assessment practices), as well as how local structures (Kabir, 2021) helped to mediate the enactment of the global policy trend of human capital development in local settings. By doing so, the research makes a significant contribution to the comparative education literature by highlighting how the neoliberally-oriented global education policy trend of human capital development unfolds in schooling in local contexts in developing societies – specifically Bangladesh.

## **Conceptual Framework**

We first draw on Bernstein's (2003) conceptualisation of the three message systems of schooling of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to understand how the human capital development goal within the secondary English curriculum translates into pedagogy and assessment. Bernstein (2003) argued that "curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge [i.e. discourses that are legitimised in the curriculum including education goals], pedagogy defines what counts as valid transmission of knowledge, and evaluation defines what counts as valid realisation of this knowledge on the part of the taught" (Bernstein 2003, 85). According to Hay et al. (2012, 189), "Bernstein's use of the term 'message system' is significant as it draws attention to what is being communicated, as well as the means of communicating the message". Transmission is enabled by engaging with the curriculum as the specific knowledge, skills and abilities that are to be taught. Transmission occurs most overtly through pedagogy, which defines the ways in which these knowledge, skills and abilities are to be conveyed. The transmission is further fostered by assessment practices which seek to "define, communicate and ascribe value" (Hay et al. 2012, 189). Bernstein's framework is deployed to emphasise the convergence of these systems in pursuing education goals. It can provide an understanding of how human capital is operationalised in the secondary ELE curriculum and how it is translated into pedagogy and assessment. The relationship between these systems is "symbiotic" (Lingard 2012, 3), as "outcomes [of education programmes] are always reliant upon and reflective of the connectivity between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment" (Penney 2013, 10). Thus, "there needs to be alignment within schools of the three message systems of schooling" (Lingard et al. 2000, 111).

While we subscribe to Bernstein's theorisation to suggest that the integration of the message systems is critical for the continuation of policy goals into pedagogy and assessment, we also recognise that such policy goals are not enacted in a straightforward way but are characterised by discontinuities or tensions. As such, we draw on the notion of policy cycle,

which rejects any approach that separates policy production from its implementation (Ball, 2005) – or what Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) have since more accurately described as ‘enactment’. Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992, 10) argue that a more traditional approach leads to “reinforcing a linear conception of policy in which theory and practice are separate and the former is privileged”. According to Ball (1993), education policy and the context of schooling are sites of struggle, where micro-political processes, to a large extent, shape the nature of the policy and its implementation; such micropolitics is also expressed in relation to global policy in localized contexts, such as Bangladesh (Kabir 2021). The policy cycle approach emphasises that education policy is not simply ‘implemented’ by schools as it is given by the state authority, but it is ‘recontextualised’, influenced by the reality of the schooling context. Such recontextualisation represents micro-political processes whereby “policies, most of which are formulated by the central state, are effectively ‘produced’ and given particular inflections” (Hatcher and Troyna 1994, 156). In other words, translation and enactment of policy are often messy and mediated.

The concept of policy cycle and the idea of messiness in policy processes have some purchase for understanding the translation of human capital development goal into schooling practices. While a global policy trend of human capital development has been installed in the national English curriculum, a policy cycle analysis approach helps in understanding how local conditions/structures mediate translation of such an agenda. Understanding local structures, particularly in relation to education, is important to unpack the nature of schooling including its message systems. In the context of Bangladesh, Kabir (2021) argues that the local structures have been largely shaped by the colonial introduction of education. As manifest in Lord Macauley’s *Minute on Indian Education*, the British rulers introduced an education system in the Subcontinent to create “a class of persons [who were] Indian in blood- and colour, but [would be] English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Sharp 1965, 116). This

system of education has continued for decades into the postcolonial era, shaping the dispositions of individuals. Such dispositions may have rendered a structure within the schooling processes in the form of a colonial mentality. In other words, a colonial lens may also be promising for understanding the local structures (as shaped by a colonial past) and how such structures may mediate policy translation processes. Regarding English language and ELE, Pennycook (2007) argues that the instrumentalist discourses of English need to be traced back to colonial times, when English was represented as a language of employment opportunity and social prestige. At the same time, these are also sites of production of new conditions, practices and processes, even as these may be characterised by ambivalence, uncertainty and resistance (Bhabha, 1994). The local educational structures are also shaped by the broader context, including in relation to political economic factors and political priorities as emphasised by the state authority (Ali and Hamid 2020). Thus, particularly for ELE, the implication is that global language education policies need to consider the local structures of developing societies and articulate a plan in light of such structures for translating curriculum policy into the other two message systems of pedagogy and assessment.

We have drawn upon and across these concepts of the message systems, policy cycle and local structures to provide an analytical framework for exploring the enactment of the goal of human capital development in the Bangladesh context. Bernstein's theorising of the message systems informed the methodological choices of focusing upon the curriculum, teaching and assessment practices of ELE to understand the specific enactment of the goal of human capital development. At the same time, the policy enactment theorising made it possible to understand how such practices were clearly associated with particular processes of policy production and enactment. While policy actors are able to exert influence and agency, Kabir's (2021) notion of structures also makes it possible to examine how particular local structures in Bangladesh—including the broader policy context, dispositions shaped by a colonial past, local schooling



context, and traditional teaching/learning practices— mediated the enactment of the globally mobile policy trend of human capital development in local schooling contexts.

### **Economisation of English Language Education in Bangladesh**

Economisation as a response to globalisation has had a significant impact on education policy in Bangladesh (Chowdhury and Kabir 2014). Accordingly, the secondary English curriculum was revised in 2012 under the auspices of Secondary Education Sector Development Project (SESDP, 2007-2013) jointly funded by the Bangladesh Government and Asian Development Bank (ADB). SESDP emphasised human capital development as an important goal of ELE and revised the curriculum to align it with the demands of the employment market (Asian Development Bank 2015). As ADB explained:

The curriculum reform that began in the 1990s [in Bangladesh] aimed to align student learning with the skills needed in the emerging open market economy by improving the quality and relevance of the curriculum. This approach to curriculum reform, underpinned by neoliberal economic principles and informed by human capital theory sought to increase secondary school graduates' potential future earnings. (Asian Development Bank 2015, 12)

In relation to the reforms that have taken place since the 1990s, SESDP reaffirmed the importance of human capital development in ELE through the employment of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). In this article, we interrogate this top-down imposition of human capital policy and curricular goal of English language education in the realms of pedagogy and assessment. We are particularly interested in exploring how this goal translates across these message systems of schooling and what outcomes and implications can be drawn from this translation process. Although the human capital agenda has started receiving research attention in the country (Roshid 2018), studies so far have maintained a more isolated focus on the nature of the policy and curriculum (Chowdhury and Kabir 2014; Hamid 2010), pedagogy (Rahman et al. 2018) and assessment (Ali, Hamid and Hardy 2020). More substantially, and in relation to the framework highlighted in the previous section, it is important to understand how the

curriculum message system as policy is enacted in teaching and assessment, and how these message systems are mediated by local structures/context. Research is needed to understand how curriculum, pedagogy and assessment connect with each other in relation to the human capital development goal and how this inter-connection is mediated by local structures. Accordingly, this paper investigates the following research question:

How do local structures mediate the translation of the human capital development goal of the secondary English language education curriculum into pedagogy and assessment in Bangladesh?

## **Research Methods**

This paper presents findings from a larger study on English and human capital development in Bangladesh. Ethics approval for the research was granted by the University of Queensland, Australia. Our aim in this paper is to illustrate how the human capital development goal has played out in the Bangladesh secondary ELE curriculum and how the goal then translates into the other two message systems: pedagogy and assessment. We undertook document analysis, interviewed four secondary school principals and nine English teachers, and observed English lessons of the teachers in four schools. The documents included secondary English curriculum, official English textbooks, Secondary School Certificate (SSC<sup>1</sup>) English examination policy documents and past exam papers. The documents were published by official educational bodies such as the Ministry of Education and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), and were directly relevant to the three message systems of curriculum, teaching and assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> SSC is a high-stakes school leaving public examination administered across the country following the completion of Year 10.

Following Bernstein's message system, first, we focused on the English curriculum document to understand how the human capital development goal has come to shape this primary message system, along with other goals. We then moved to the next phase of the policy cycle to understand the transmission of the curriculum into pedagogy. As pedagogy entails both teaching materials and school practices, we examined the official textbook called *English for Today: For Classes 9 and 10* (NCTB 2017). We chose the textbook from Year 9 and 10 because students sit the first school-leaving examination called Secondary School Certificate (SSC) at the end of Year 10. While many students continue their Year 11-12 schooling usually in a college, a large portion of students also enter the world of work obtaining this terminal qualification. The dispositions of the textbook writers commissioned by NCTB are an important element of the local structure that can be examined through such texts, in relation to how English and job skills have been represented.

Importantly, pedagogical transmission of curriculum takes place in the school setting, and much of its success depends on how school leaders and subject teachers interpret and translate curriculum in the classroom. Thus, to understand how the human capital goal of the curriculum played out in schools, four schools (one government and three non-government) were selected. School 1 and School 2 (non-government) were located in rural areas, while School 3 (non-government) and School 4 (government) were situated in urban areas. Different school types and the urban-rural settings were included to develop a roughly representative picture of the varied schooling settings and practices in Bangladesh. Principals and teachers were recruited using purposive sampling (Creswell 2009). In recruiting the teachers, we were guided by the following criteria: (a) they were involved in teaching English in Year 9/10; and (b) they had a minimum of five years of teaching experience. Before data collection, all participants were informed about the study and their written consent was obtained, including an assurance of anonymity. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between half an

hour and one hour. They were conducted in Bangla to prioritise the participants' choices. The interviews were critical to understand the participants' views regarding the new policy of human capital development and its translation. Following the interviews, two English language lessons from each teacher were observed to understand how their views about the curricular goal translated into classroom practices. All interviews and classroom observations were aimed at generating qualitative data and they were audio recorded using a digital recorder. Notes about key activities that occurred during the class were also taken during the observations to complement the audio recordings. Although we planned to video record the observations, we ended up doing audio recording as participants were not comfortable with video recording.

In relation to the last message system, assessment, we tried to understand how the human capital development goal played out in the secondary ELE assessment policy and practices. This was achieved through the analysis of SSC English examination policy documents and past exam papers for English Paper 1 (henceforth, Eng-1) and English Paper 2 (henceforth, Eng-2). We utilised these documents as they provided evidence of the relationship of assessment practices to curriculum and pedagogy.

We employed qualitative content analysis (Creswell 2009) to examine the policy documents and past exam papers. Interview and observation data were analysed employing thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). First, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and were later translated into English. We paid careful attention to the translation processes, which included being reflexive in choosing appropriate expressions and vocabulary from the English language and engaged in constant interrogation of our practices in relation to cultural differences and worldviews (Blenkinsopp and Pajouh 2010). This process was further validated through member checking as the participants were provided with the transcripts and requested to inform the researchers if they had any concerns or issues with the translation. All documents were available in English, so they did not require translation. During classroom observations,

notes were written in English. However, classroom interactions included code-switching between Bangla and English, so they were transcribed verbatim and later translated into English. In analysing the data, the documents, transcripts and observation notes were read several times, and emerging ideas were labelled with relevant phrases (i.e., codes). This process initially took place on the texts, where we tried to identify key words and their meanings, which were later expressed through the codes. The initial codes were then studied further to identify patterns and reduce them to probable themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). Table 1 below provides an example of how a theme was developed through the analysis process.

<Insert Table 1 here>

The coding process was informed by Bernstein's three message systems and Ball's notion of policy cycle, notably the idea of situatedness and recontextualisation of policy in schools in relation to local structures. Thus, while inductive in detail, the analysis was simultaneously deductive, informed as it was by Bernsteinian and policy cycle theorising.

During the analysis, we continuously revised the data and the codes to improve the specificity and quality of interpretation. Based on the analysis, three dominant themes were identified in relation to the translation of human capital development goal into pedagogy and assessment practices, including: (a) policy without planning, (b) dispositions and context, and (c) ambiguity and conflict. The first theme was based on codes which indicated a lack of conceptual clarity in relation to human capital development, and the subsequent absence of curricular guidelines in relation to such development. This theme provides insights into how human capital development was emphasised within the curriculum but without an articulated plan for its translation into the other message systems. The theme of *dispositions and context* illustrates how translation of the curricular goal of human capital development as pedagogy was heavily influenced by the perceptions/understanding, knowledge, skills and expertise of

different education actors, as well as the realities of the school context — conceptualised as local structure in relation to the framework. Finally, the theme of *ambiguity and conflict* sheds light on the disjuncture between the curricular goal of human capital and assessment policy and practices within secondary education. In sum, the findings generated insights into the structural relationship between the message systems in relation to human capital development.

### **Findings: Policy without Planning, Dispositions and Context, Conflict and Ambiguity**

This section presents an overview of the policy cycle process in relation to ELE curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices. This includes how the human capital development goal has been enacted in local school contexts. The findings begin with: 1) an overview of human capital development in relation to the curriculum; 2) followed by an account of the enactment of such curriculum in relation to pedagogical practices, and; 3) enactment in relation to assessment practices.

#### *Human Capital Development in the Curriculum: A Policy without Planning*

The most recent national education policy highlights the Bangladesh government's consideration of human development as the key requirement for transforming Bangladesh into a middle-income country by 2021 (Ministry of Education 2010). This vision of national economic development is embedded in the government's policy response to globalisation and the promotion of neoliberal ideologies in the country. Such a vision constitutes a dominant structure at the broader policy level, which has eventually come to shape schooling curricula. Skills and capabilities relevant to enhancing students' employability have been emphasised both by national policy makers and global aid agencies (e.g., World Bank) to support the government's strategy of human capital development for economic growth. This is evident in broad policies, such as the 6<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, in which human capital development is heavily

emphasised as a national priority in relation to economic development (see Planning Commission 2011).

In this context, the secondary English curriculum was revised, and now it aims at “creating knowledgeable, skilled, rational, creative and patriotic human resources full of human, social and moral qualities through holistic development of learners” (NCTB 2012, 11). Thus, the curriculum fosters multiple educational goals such as developing: (a) nationalistic dispositions; (b) social and moral values; and (c) skilled human resources. Reflecting the structural influence of human capital approaches, the curriculum has incorporated the human capital development goal in the changing political economic context of Bangladesh (Kabir and Chowdhury 2017). With regard to this particular goal, the secondary English curriculum aims “to help learners acquire the basic skills of [the] English language for effective communication in different spheres including contemporary workplaces, and higher education” (NCTB 2012, 11). Thus, the curriculum emphasises developing learners’ language capacity more broadly, and employment-relevant communication skills in particular. The following extract makes the human capital development goal of the English curriculum explicit:

The curriculum focuses on teaching-learning English as a *skill-based* subject so that learners can use English in their real-life situations by acquiring necessary knowledge and skills, learning about cultures and values, developing positive attitudes, pursuing higher education and finding better jobs, nationally and globally. (NCTB 2012, 73)

Economisation of ELE is, therefore, notable at the policy level in the alignment of the curricular goal and the requirements of ‘contemporary workplaces’. With such a goal, the century-old traditional grammar-translation based pedagogical model has been delegitimised in the curriculum and replaced with CLT. The new pedagogical approach is grounded in principles which consider language use in real-life contexts as the ultimate goal of foreign language instruction (Larsen-Freeman and Alderson 2011). In line with these principles, CLT encourages the development of learners’ broader communicative capacity, including

development of soft skills such as negotiation, working in teams, leadership and decision-making skills through such techniques as pair and group work, role plays and problem solving (Ali and Hamid 2021).

While human capital development is a significant structural influence in the Bangladesh context, and has been emphasised in the secondary curriculum as an important goal, along with other ideological goals, our analysis of the documents revealed that there was no conception of critiques of human capital development, or an articulation plan at the policy level in relation to a more nuanced understanding of this curricular goal and its relationship with the local context of Bangladesh. There are also no guidelines or instructions in the curriculum for textbook writers or test developers about how they may engage more nuanced conceptions of the human capital goal in teaching and testing. The attention to more national or ideological goals also seems not to contribute to the more human capital development goal. In the following sections, we illustrate how such a policy goal in the curriculum played out in the other two message systems of pedagogy and assessment.

#### *Human Capital Development in Pedagogy: Dispositions and Context*

While the national policy response to the demand of globalisation and aspirations for economic development at the macro level constituted a key structural influence for economising the English curriculum, our examination revealed a disconnect between the first two message systems due to the nature of competing structural influences at the micro context of pedagogy and schooling. In the context of a lack of substantive curricular engagement, neither language learning more broadly nor human capital development in particular were actually translated into pedagogy. Our analysis of the official English textbook revealed that while economisation could be traced in the material, there was ambiguity in relation to skill development. The economisation of English is illustrated by Lesson 5 of Unit 4 entitled “Let’s



become a skilled workforce” (NCTB 2017, 52-53). The lesson starts with the following dialogue between two students, Rumi and Habib:

Rumi: You remember my brother Raihan, don't you? He applied for a front desk job in a 5-star hotel.

Habib: What happened? Has he got the job?

Rumi: No! He couldn't answer most of the questions in the interview.

Habib: Why? He did well in the HSC [Higher Secondary Certificate, examination], didn't he?

Rumi: Yes, he did. But the recruiting officer in the interview asked him questions in English and he couldn't understand most of them.

Habib: Sorry, but I have a different story to tell you. My cousin Sheela did her HSC from a college in Mymensingh. She couldn't do as well as Raihan in her exam, but she got a job as a crew member in Biman Bangladesh<sup>2</sup>. She said she answered all questions in English both in her written test and interview.

Rumi: Great! She must be good in English. Well, then the key to getting some jobs is English, isn't it?

Habib: Yes, you're right.

This text shows convergence between policy makers' and textbook writers' dispositions in relation to the instrumentalist ideology of English. English is represented as a gatekeeper of employment. Such dispositions reflect local structures pertaining to materials/textbook production, showing how these are shaped by instrumentalist discourses of English, which emerged during the colonial period, and have been sustained in the postcolonial era (Pennycook, 2007). However, such convergence was not found in the operationalisation of the

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<sup>2</sup> Biman Bangladesh refers to the national airline of Bangladesh.

curricular goals into pedagogy. As noted above, the disposition is shaped by discourses of English, rather than practical experiences in the use of English in workplaces. The above extract is only a commentary on the importance of English for employment. It is unclear what job-relevant capacities the material seeks to develop; it does not even provide an account of the ‘skills’ seen as relevant in more instrumental conceptions of human capital.

At the same time, teachers’ dispositions appeared as an important structure which mediated the translation of the curricular goals of language learning more broadly and English for human capital in particular into pedagogical practices. As the principal of School 2 opined:

Principal 2: We face many problems in implementing the current policy (i.e., communication skills development using CLT). For example, our [English subject] teachers are habituated to the traditional methods (i.e., grammar-translation based language/teaching). We ourselves were taught through the old method.

The extract reveals how implementation of the new ELE policy was influenced by local structure, notably the local understanding of pedagogy which has been shaped in a particular socio-cultural setting over an extended period of time. This century-old structure was in tension with the new CLT based approaches, which have been legitimised in the curriculum for human capital development. The influence of such local structure was visible in the teachers’ pedagogical practices in all schools included in the study. The tension was also visible in what Sumon (pseudonym for an English teacher from School 2) stated:

Sumon: There are some common writing tasks in the SSC examination such as paragraph writing, letter, application, compositions... I try to help students to memorise some common tasks [that are important for examination] ... I give them targets that they have to memorise one paragraph in each class. I tell them that I would not let them go if they cannot do so!

Sumon’s statement reveals how sedimented pedagogical practices were in tension with the curriculum. Memorisation is a traditional schooling practice in Bangladesh, where teachers would get students to memorise content such as paragraphs in preparation for examination.

This local understanding of schooling was found in the teachers as a durable disposition – a local structure shaped by traditional pedagogical understandings. Practices such as ‘memorisation’ and the teacher’s authority in the classroom denote the influence of a local structure shaped by a particular socio-cultural genealogy of the philosophy of education in this context, where teachers are considered as ‘gurus’ and students are their disciples. As such, teachers have the authority to control the class in their preferred ways. This local understanding of pedagogy as a dominant structure, with its roots in the colonial past, is often in conflict with the more recent curricular goals in which teachers’ authority is minimised as their role is re-articulated as a facilitator of students’ learning (Larsen-Freeman and Alderson 2011); this includes more human capital development approaches. A colonial mentality is also manifest in not only the focus on English but also on how students were kept in control and conditioned to submit to the teacher’s orders for memorisation. Such relationships manifested in other schools too. Classroom observations in School 3, for example, revealed that the classroom was dominated by teacher talk with minimum student engagement. Teachers stood in the front of the classroom, read and translated texts, while students were passive listeners, writing words and taking notes when they were instructed to do so.

In School 1, teachers were similarly found to transmit knowledge and develop learners’ understanding and dispositions surrounding themes such as “May Day” and “International Mother Language Day” providing minimum attention to language skills development. They read the texts and translated them into Bangla and explained meaning to the students. Reflecting the influence of existing structures, and the lack of linearity in policy enactment practices (Ball 1993; 2005), such practices may have been informed by teachers’ heavily structured dispositions, which had been shaped by the way they had themselves been taught using the grammar-translation method, which placed emphasis on translation and explanation. The tensions between the CLT-based policy and dominant pedagogical practices in schools

were noted in Rokya's (pseudonym for a teacher in School 1) class, as indicated by the transactional way in which English teaching was undertaken in schools:

- Rokya: Open your note *khata* (i.e., book), write the difficult words.  
Students: [*All students were talking with one another. They were not engaged.*]  
Rokya: [*Teacher writes on blackboard*] Memorable  
Students: [*students copy*]  
Rokya: [*Teacher writes*] Observe  
Students: [*students copying and talking with one another*]  
Rokya: [*Teacher writes*] Tribute  
Students: [*students copying and talking with one another*].

(Observation 2, Grade 9)

These practices of focusing on discrete words and discussing grammatical points were observed in all schools included in this study. For example, Rojina (a teacher in School 4) also discussed grammar items discretely, even as this practice did not align with CLT pedagogy. She highlighted grammatical difference between 'skill' and 'skilled' and categorised them as a noun and an adjective, respectively. This indicated her durable disposition in relation to her exposure to the previous grammar-translation method. Practices such as teaching discrete words and grammar without putting them into communicative contexts were structurally dominant, even as they were in contradiction with the human capital development goal emphasised in the policy. However, this pedagogical practice is well aligned with the grammar-translation method, embedded in the Bangladeshi socio-cultural setting of ELE practices for more than a century. In other words, local structures mediated the classroom practices (Rahman et al. 2018), leading to a tension with CLT-based policy which had been legitimised in the curriculum.

The influence of local structure on pedagogy is also understandable from Rokya's choice of lexis such as 'difficult words'. The notion of 'difficult words' reflects a colonial mindset and is associated with notions of cultural supremacy in Bangladesh where people

knowing difficult English words are classified and regarded as knowledgeable, thereby perpetuating colonial linguistic divides between English “haves” and “have nots” (Hamid and Jahan 2015). Such practices are reflective of cultural production even as this is a fraught and uncertain process (Bhabha, 1994).

### *Human Capital in Assessment: Ambiguity and Conflict*

Our analysis revealed similar ambiguities and misalignment between the curricular goal and assessment practices, and the continued structural influence of established practices. Examination of the tasks in the past Eng-1 and Eng-2 test papers (from 2018 to 2020) revealed divergence between these two message systems. Eng-1 assesses reading and writing skills, while Eng-2 assesses grammar knowledge and writing skills (see Table 2 and Table 3).

<Insert Table 2 and 3 here>

As illustrated in Table 2 and Table 3, while reading, writing and grammar were assessed, it is not clear what skills and abilities the tests intended to measure through the tasks. No discussion was found in the test documents about what language goals would be tested, including any employment-relevant capacities and skills. Although a few tasks, such as writing emails, formal job applications and CVs, could be related to employment, in the absence of test specifications, it is difficult to understand how such tasks might relate to productive employment post-school in a postcolonial setting such as Bangladesh. In relation to the employment domain, email is an important topic emphasised in the syllabus for Eng-2, but our analysis of the question papers revealed that this content was not assessed at all. Reflecting the issues of local structures within a policy cycle, it appears that test designers’ dispositions acted as a structure that mediated the translation of the goal of human capital development into assessment practices. In Bangladesh, there is a shortage of qualified testers, who can integrate the assessment with the curriculum (see Ali et al. 2020). More significantly, these teachers are

not trained to align tests with a broad range of goals, including the local and global employment markets. Their dispositions, shaped by the more traditional assessment practices (as highlighted in Table 2 and 3), resulted in the reinforcement of such traditional approaches.

In addition, traditional practices persisted in schooling and assessment in response to earlier cultural influences which served as residual policy traces. For example, the grammar test in Eng-2 is a century-old traditional practice in the English exam, which does not align with CLT. Such assessment practices reflect a dominant structure in the form of the colonial legacy which has been retained in the civil service recruitment tests in Bangladesh. This local structure pertaining to assessment culture, a policy vestige/trace embedded in the colonial past, is in tension with the assessment logics emphasised by CLT pedagogy. In other words, the relationship between the various curricular goals and test practices were problematic. Furthermore, and reflecting the complexity and non-linearity of policy enactment more broadly (Ball 1993; 2005), two major skills of listening and speaking were not assessed at all in the tests (see Tables 2 and 3). This was in conflict with what was claimed in the test documents:

Students' ability to listen to/understand English with acceptable pronunciation (such as sound, stress, and intonation through student-student, student-teacher, and student-technology interaction) will be assessed. (NCTB 2012, 80)

Students' ability to speak acceptable English with understandable pronunciation (such as sound, stress, and intonation through student-student, student-teacher, interaction) will be assessed. (NCTB 2012, 80)

As a result, test writers and teachers seemed unsure as to how they could assess relevant abilities around each of the four macro skills of the English language. Furthermore, as a result of ignoring listening and speaking in the public examination, as well as ambiguity in test documents, formative assessment of these skills hardly played out in the schooling practices in any of the school sites (Ali and Hamid 2020).

The test's failure to translate the curricular goal of language learning, including work-related capacity development, into the assessment, may have been mediated by other factors as

well. Local economic structures clearly rendered a key challenge to aligning assessment practices with the curricular goal. In the context of scarcity of resources, assessment of reading and writing skills was prioritised, often ignoring oral and aural skills. Such priorities were also informed by the political context. Unable to create equitable learning/teaching arrangements across the country, the government seemed to create an easy ‘exit’ point for rural students by compromising test validity and reliability (see Ali and Hamid 2020). Such a strategy is also loaded with political intrigue in that high pass rates are interpreted as the success of the government in reducing educational disparity between urban and rural contexts. Assessment priorities informed by local structures, including in relation to personnel, political and contextual issues, have resulted in the compromise of assessment practices in relation to the goals emphasised in the English curriculum (Ali et al. 2020). Again, this is a process of cultural engagement in which those involved exist in something of an ‘in-between’ state (Bhabha 1994) even as this may be one of deep contestation, challenging what was intended at the broader policy level.

## **Discussion**

In this section, we primarily draw on the reported findings but also gesture towards additional associated issues that constituted part of the broader research of which the findings presented in this article were a key part. Examination of language learning more broadly, and the human capital development goal in particular, in the Bangladesh secondary English curriculum, revealed discontinuity between the broader policy conditions and texts and the curriculum. At the same time, and clearly mediated by a variety of local structures, there was a significant level of dislocation between the curriculum and policy translation/enactment in relation to pedagogy and assessment. We argue that this lack of convergence between the three message systems prevailed due to not only the lack of conceptual clarity, necessary critique,

and operational guidelines for developing more robust language learning, including in relation to work-relevant skills and capacities, but also the continuation of the colonial legacy which ascribes value to English, even as it fails to actually support substantive engagement with the language. Policy enactment of ELE was always a site of production of something ‘new’, even as it was a site of ambivalence, uncertainty and resistance (Bhabha, 1994). Substantive educational experiences that are actually needed to cultivate the sorts of higher-order skills of creativity, curiosity and leadership are not finite English skills to be identified, but capacities to be developed by cultivating substantive educational experiences through various disciplinary and cross-disciplinary knowledge and learning (Kirschner and Stoyanov 2018). In other words, acritical subscription to fostering English language learning in the context of an economic mindset, and on the basis of market logics, is problematic, leading to the production of contested and conflicted identities.

Translation of a human capital goal of the curriculum into the other two message systems of pedagogy and assessment in the local context was heavily mediated by the local structures/context (Kabir, 2021). Materials writers’ dispositions constituted key structures reflective of, perhaps, more acritical subscription to the colonial discourses of English in the absence of adequate curricular guidelines to provide an alternative for these writers. Such constraints, arguably, resulted in the production of a textbook that perpetuated existing inequalities and failed to foster substantive language learning capacities more broadly, including for local, national and global employment purposes. Such an approach did not provide the opportunity for more substantive engagement with specific topics to develop a deep, ongoing learning disposition on the part of students. The traditional understanding of pedagogy as well as teachers’ durable dispositions served as key structures which influenced teachers’ pedagogies in that teachers were observed to primarily emphasise the knowledge surrounding the topics indicated, but not substantively. This points to the tension between



broader policy goals to substantially develop students' language capacities, and more specific curricular foci and associated, and often heavily sedimented, pedagogical practices. Practices of CLT in schools are still far from what would be expected in relation to English provision for employment purposes, let alone more substantive educational outcomes, including broader humanistic and citizenship-oriented goals. Our analysis suggested that such a relationship between curriculum and pedagogy, in terms of human capital development, was heavily mediated by local structures including the colonial mentality and traditional understandings of teaching/learning in Bangladesh.

Furthermore, no skills and abilities seem to have been defined for assessment in relation to employment, in spite of its supposed importance in policy. Although the English tests partially responded to the curriculum by assessing reading and writing skills and included a few employment-related tasks, such as job applications and CV writing, in the absence of substantive testing specifications, it was not clear what abilities the tests intended to measure (see also Sultana 2018). While such ambiguity at the policy level was a key reason for the tests' failure to adequately respond to the curricular goals, it appears that the divergence between the two message systems was exacerbated by local structures, including the shortage of professional testers, incompatible dispositions of the test designers, contextual/socioeconomic realities, and political priorities influencing assessment practices.

Therefore, in a way, the policy for human capital development seems to have been 'lost in translation' in relation to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. It appears that the human capital development goal within the curriculum, as well as broader goals of fostering language competencies for their own sake and genuinely productive multi-lingual capacities beyond reductive foci upon English, were lost in the curriculum, teaching and assessment message systems because of the continued colonial discourses that pervade education in Bangladesh that eulogise English learning, to the detriment of the national and ethnic minority languages; we

attend to these foci within the broader study of which the findings presented here are but a part. The lack of an articulated plan for translating employment-related goals into curriculum, pedagogy and assessment reflected a broader continuation of colonial dispositions that struggle to break from the hegemony of the English language – and particularly when such language learning is allied with overt human capital development proclivities. Our policy cycle analysis vis-a-vis an integrated approach to policy text and policy translation suggests that the top-down imposition of the global policy trend of human capital development in the curriculum in a context such as Bangladesh, is unlikely to be implemented as intended (Bowe, Ball and Gold 1992). Such policies are recontextualised in curriculum documents, in assessment policies, and then again in schools. All these policy and school sites are influenced by local structures and practices, including in relation to the historical (e.g., colonial past), socio-cultural (e.g., social/cultural understanding of education and pedagogy), and political economic context (e.g., distribution of resources) of developing societies such as Bangladesh (Kabir 2021).

## **Conclusion**

The research presented in this article shows how the enactment of globally mobile policy trends in the context of inadequate planning in relation to the local schooling structures of developing societies may simply lead to confusion with regards to substantive schooling and assessment practices. Drawing upon a policy cycle approach in the context of the message systems of schooling, and key structures that exert influence within societies, this study contributes to the comparative education literature by illustrating the fractious and disjointed way in which ELE for human capital development plays out locally in developing societies such as Bangladesh. This is the case when attempts are made to activate a ‘globally relevant’ policy trend of human capital development in the ELE curriculum without an adequately articulated understanding of the historical and contextual conditions of policy enactment (Ball

et al. 2012). Failing to take account of local structures within developing societies is a recipe for failure. As illustrated by the case of Bangladesh, the policy goal of human capital development does not smoothly translate into substantive curriculum, teaching/pedagogical and assessment practices. Within an inadequately integrated system, it is not clear as to how students will develop relevant capacities and skills for further education and work. Thus, we argue that there is naivety at the policy level; the human capital development goal is imposed with a simplistic belief that ‘implementation’ will occur in relation to the curriculum, subsequently influencing pedagogy and assessment. Under such circumstances, complexities in the enactment of policy processes in relation to local conditions and circumstances have not been given adequate consideration. The human capital development agenda is informed by discourses of English for local, national and global employment which assert that English will increase productivity and employability of individuals (Erling 2017). However, the agenda is not adequately articulated in relation to more substantive disciplinary and cross-disciplinary educational goals/outcomes or any recognition of the complexity of the different contexts in which it seeks to exert influence. Such an agenda, with its roots in the colonial past, needs to be subjected to critical scrutiny for how communication skills in English relate to employment processes, and assumptions that capacities, skills and abilities can be generalised to different cultures (Kirschner and Stoyanov 2018; Kubota 2011). In addition, the higher-order nature of these “skills” remains unexamined and unassessed in existing traditional practices. The validity of traditional testing approaches for either the assessment of human capital in an ever-changing local/national/global employment market, or in relation to broader educational capacities, is highly questionable and needs to be further interrogated.

The overarching contribution of this article lies in its illustration of how the globally mobile policy of human capital development may be inadequately conceptualised in the curriculum and subsequently simply “lost in translation” in relation to broader teaching and

assessment practices in developing settings, such as Bangladesh. While ELE curricula are being continuously shaped by the globally mobile policy trend of economisation in developing countries, acritical ‘subscription’ to such a trend may simply reinforce misunderstandings about the capacities and skills needed for employment purposes, and how these might be operationalised into pedagogy and assessment. Innovations within the curricular space without clear guidelines for their complexity, and subsequent operationalisation, result in a myriad of challenges for those who are responsible for cultivating appropriate educational experiences in developing settings. This understanding has immense implications for policy makers and curriculum designers in developing countries such as Bangladesh, where significant national as well as donor investments are being made to innovate curricula in response to the demands posed by economic conceptions of globalisation.

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Table 1: Example of coding and finalising theme

Example excerpts from interview data	Codes	Theme
Not having proficiency in <i>English</i> is a disadvantage in the <i>job market</i> . If we don't know English well, we will not get good jobs. So, it's <i>very important</i> to know the language.	Perceptions of English in relation to employment	Pedagogy: Disposition and context
I give them target that they <i>have to memorise</i> one paragraph in each class.	Traditional understanding of teaching/learning	
The old <i>method</i> was not that much problematic. It was better for <i>contexts</i> like ours.	Contextual relevance of method	

Table 2: An overview of the skills assessed and techniques employed in SSC Eng-1 test

Skill(s)	Test tasks
Reading	Answering multiple choice questions based on reading passage
	Answering short questions
	Gapped summary
	Information transfer
	Matching phrases to make sentences
	Ordering scrambled sentences to make coherent story
	Writing summary of the given passage



Writing	Writing paragraph based on prompts
	Developing a story based on the given prompt
	Describing a graph
	Writing informal letter
	Dialogue

Table 3: An overview of the skills assessed and techniques employed in SSC Eng-2 test

Skill(s)	Test tasks
Grammar	Close test with and without clues
	Substitution table
	Right forms of verbs
	Use of articles
	Completing sentences
	Tag questions
	Changing sentences (change of voice, narrative style, sentence patterns, degree)
Writing	Formal/informal letters/emails
	CV writing
	Completing story/paragraph writing/ Dialogue writing
	Writing essay (200-250 words)