

Inclusion and Assessment of Listening and Speaking Skills of English at Secondary Schools of Chittagong



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**Inclusion and Assessment of Listening and Speaking Skills of English at Secondary Schools
of Chittagong**

by

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A Dissertation

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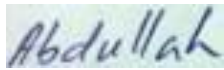
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Masters in Applied Linguistics and TESOL

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Abdullah".

_____ 21.08.23

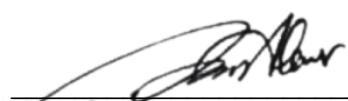
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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgment of collaborative research and discussions.



21.08.23

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my parents and husband. Thank you for all of your support and patience along the way.

Acknowledgments

My sincere gratefulness goes to the Almighty Allah for giving me the required patience and determination to complete this thesis.

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance of my supervisor Associate Professor Dr. Abdullah Al Mahmud who provided me with valuable pieces of advice and feedback over and over again. I am extremely thankful to him for giving me his precious time.

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Abstract

To be a competent English language user, a person has to be well acquainted with four basic skills. For effective English learning, all the skills should be equally emphasized, but in Bangladesh, the tendency of devaluing listening and speaking skills in the institutions is high. The students of Bangladesh need to be communicatively competent in English after their H.S.C. keeping in mind the usage of English in the tertiary level and the job sectors. But a gap in English learning is created because of neglecting listening and speaking in the institutions which makes the students achieve accuracy in English but they lack fluency to speak in English. Despite knowing the necessity of bringing a change in the evaluation system where listening and speaking should be included, there are some obstacles that we cannot ignore. This paper responds to those challenges by recommending some ways to solve them. The paper investigates the practice of listening and speaking skills and the existing challenges of including them particularly in the secondary schools of Chittagong- the business capital of Bangladesh. To carry on the research, data has been collected through survey questionnaires and classroom observation. The results will be useful for the teachers, researchers, and ELT practitioners to get an insight into the classroom practices and assessment in Chittagong and, by implication, in similar other cities.

Keywords: listening, speaking, classroom, teachers, students, evaluation, Secondary School Certificate, importance of listening and speaking, communicative competence in English, globalization, CLT, Chittagong

Introduction

Background and Problem of the Study

The goal of language teaching is to develop communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). So the goal of teaching the English language should be making the students communicatively competent. The public cannot judge the students' competencies only through their academic paper qualifications but they usually consider a person competent enough if he or she can carry on a conversation well. Spoken language has more value than written language as we learn to speak first and then keep the record in written language. To sharpen the communicative abilities in English, the importance of listening and speaking skills beggars description. The students of Bangladesh hardly use English in their daily life. It is only within the classrooms where they get exposure to this language and for this reason, the classes should be designed in such a way that real life activities should be incorporated emphasizing the practice of listening and speaking skills. In a country like Bangladesh, the importance of learning any foreign language is crucial but the students are offered very less opportunities to practice the TL outside the classroom and therefore, they find it difficult (Littlewood, 1992). It is mentioned in the objective of the National Curriculum & Textbook Board (NCTB) that the English curriculum is designed in such a way that it will help learners acquire the basic skills of the English language for effective communication in different spheres including contemporary workplaces, and higher education. The objective of the NCTB syllabus recognizes English as a skill needed for individual development by creating a strong workforce. Increased communicative competence in English, therefore constitutes a vital skill for learners at this stage (NCTB, p.136) and 'listening' and 'speaking' skills are recognized as two fundamental skills. But a lot of studies proved that among the four skills, listening and speaking are completely

ignored at the secondary level. The classrooms do not provide an atmosphere where the students can actually learn, speak and practice to communicate in English and it is conflicting with the language learning goal. A baseline study carried out by Kirkwood shows that speaking is the weakest among Bangladeshi students and there remains a low level of communicative skills which is not up to the expectation after giving a lot of effort for years studying English until higher secondary level (Kirkwood, 2013). The situation is much more disappointing when it is seen from the perspective of the introduction of the CLT approach. Though the CLT approach was introduced in the late 90s which mainly emphasizes interactive classes, the practice of speaking and listening to English in the class is hardly found. Because of this lack of practice, the students feel shy while communicating in English and cannot even utter a sentence correctly (Mazumder, 2021). In Bangladesh, there is a tendency of achieving good grades among students and it is very natural that if listening and speaking skills were tested in the true sense, they would have been motivated to learn the skill and do better. As proven through Bhuiyan and Huda's (2020) study, the testing of listening and speaking skills after the introduction of tests of these two skills in the internal examinations of the secondary level has not been implemented. So, the problem behind a low communicative competency in English at the secondary level can be identified for not including and assessing listening and speaking skills. Due to less scope of prior studies in Chittagong city regarding this issue, it needs to be seen whether the scenario is the same here or whether it differs from the other research which has been done before. Consequently, this research will explore the current classroom practices along with the assessment system focusing on the issue of the two most neglected skills of English so that a clear picture will be available for the teachers, policymakers and researchers of Chittagong. Hence, to provide a better understanding of the theories of communicative English and to exhibit

how listening and speaking skills contribute in this regard, the CLT principles used by Richards and Rodgers (2001) cited in Shurovi (2014), Dell Hymes' (1971) communicative competence, Constructivism by Piaget and Vygotsky (1964) and The interrelationship between teaching and testing by Hughes (1989) used by Bhuiyan & Huda (2020) these theories will be used. So this research will be essential to mark the importance of emphasizing listening and speaking skills of English at the Secondary level for producing communicatively competent English users. I am focusing on the schools of Chittagong and providing other researchers with a scope to conduct large-scale studies on the topic in the city that will benefit the students in the near future.

Secondary Education in Bangladesh

The Bangladeshi education system can be broadly divided into four categories- primary, secondary, tertiary, and higher education. Secondary education has sub-divisions like junior secondary, secondary, and higher secondary. The primary education program is comprised of grades one to five. Then from the 6th grade junior secondary starts and continues till the 8th grade which is followed by secondary (9th and 10th grade) and higher secondary (11th and 12th grade) education. The next level of education is tertiary education (bachelor's and master's degrees) where a bachelor's degree requires 4 years and a master's degree usually is done within a year. This level of education is followed by higher education.

The secondary education in Bangladesh is provided through three streams which are national secondary, the religious stream, and English medium education (Hassan et al., 2019). Among all the three streams the national secondary holds the highest percentage of students in Bangladesh (CAMPE, 2006). Moreover, there is junior secondary (6th to 8th grade), secondary (9th and 10th grades), and higher secondary (11th and 12th grades) which fall under the national secondary stream. At the end of the 10th grade, the students must appear for the SSC exam after

the completion of which they head towards higher education in colleges. Then they sit for another prestigious HSC exam. The SSC and HSC exams are conducted by eight education boards and the education administration is controlled by the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Secondary (DSHE) which is under the administration of the Ministry of Education (Hassan et al., 2019). The secondary level students mainly have two English papers which are English For Today and English Grammar and Composition. The national secondary has 83%, the religious stream and the EME have 16% and 1% of the total secondary enrolment in the country (CAMPE, 2006).

ELT at the Secondary Level of Chittagong

The port city of Chittagong offers education in all four streams i.e. from primary to higher education through religious, English, and Bangla medium categories. There are over hundred schools offering secondary education in the city and also around six schools in the tribal areas of Rangamati and Khagrachari. To include Chandpur, Comilla, Cox's Bazar, Feni, Lakshmipur, and Noakhali districts the number of secondary schools rises. In the 9th and 10th grades, there are two books in English i.e. English for Today and English Grammar and Composition. The English For Today has fourteen chapters in total. Each chapter has its individual learning outcomes. The textbook is designed to emphasize the four skills of English but less emphasis is seen given on the listening skill. According to Uddin (2021), due to the shortage of multimedia support in schools, students cannot even do the listening activities properly. There is also a mismatch between the learning outcomes of a unit and the activities that follow (Uddin, 2021). There is a large number of students in classes 9 and 10. These students are concerned about how to achieve the highest GPA on the public exam. On the other hand, the teachers of the schools are concerned about the reputation of the institution by keeping the record

of the highest GPA holder. This typical mentality is making the stakeholders of the school neglect listening and speaking skills of English since they are not assessed for the public exam. The teachers themselves are not fluent speakers and many of them are unaware of how to teach pronunciation, intonation, and stress of a language. The books also do not give any language focus. So basically the teachers follow the conventional way of teaching at the secondary level.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study will be to explore the present scenario of secondary schools in Chittagong regarding the practice and assessment of listening and speaking skills in English. In addition, the study will also attempt to find out the roles teachers and educational institutions are playing to emphasize the development of both skills at secondary schools in Chittagong. I would also like to find and analyze the challenges of including these two skills at the secondary level including institutional, and infrastructural challenges. My study will try to find out the answers to the following research questions:

1. How far listening and speaking skills of English are practiced in secondary-level classrooms?
2. What activities can be applied to make the learners comfortable with both skills?
3. How will a proper assessment of the skills at the secondary level help to reach the language learning goal?
4. What are the obstacles and disputes to practice and assess the skills at the secondary level?

Finally, I will try to provide some recommendations based on the findings and analysis. In my study, I have excluded the privileged students who have access to the English-speaking community

in and outside the family and the classroom along with the English medium schools. Here, my intention is to focus on the general Bangla medium students of the school.

Significance of the Study

Listening and speaking skills are the two most vital skills to achieve communicative competence but the studies that have been carried on before in Bangladesh explored that they have not yet achieved the place which is mentioned in the educational policy. The real situation of Chittagong city is still unexplored. Therefore, the significance of the study lies in exploring the status of listening and speaking skills of English in the secondary schools of Chittagong and also the challenges of including them in classroom practice and in the assessment system. I hope this study will help teachers and also policymakers to better understand and alter their teaching and testing methods.

Literature Review

The Teaching Process in the Secondary Level Schools of Bangladesh

The teaching and learning of the English language in Bangladesh has quite a long history. Though English forcibly entered and set its place in this country during British colonial rule, it has now become the modern lingua franca and the only means of bridging communication among nations. Today in the globalized world, if you cannot use English properly, you will have to suffer socially, economically, and politically. According to Salahuddin, Khan, Rahman (2013) “English as a subject is of paramount importance in equipping the students to take up the challenges of competitive survival and growing globalization in developing countries” (p.35). This is high time our country should produce English language users keeping up with the global standard.

So to maintain the global standard, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has taken many initiatives and described the major objectives to achieve in the process of teaching and learning English. The present English syllabus of NCTB is based on improving learners’ communicative skills by focusing on task-based activities. So ultimately the aim of the teachers should be to guide the students in using their knowledge of English for communicative purposes (Haider & Chowdhury, 2012). NCTB clearly puts emphasis on the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method in Bangladesh and CLT has been introduced in the year 1998-1999 which concentrates solely on learning the language by using the language itself, not by doing rigid exercises on the language. Dell Hymes (1971) defined communicative competence as a term in linguistics that refers to a language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology and the like, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use

utterances appropriately. Within this process, communicative competence is a way of describing what a language speaker knows which enables him or her to interact effectively with others. Therefore, teachers should give more importance to teaching skills in integration in order to encourage individuals to become communicatively competent (Tavil, 2010). Hymes's (1971) point of view is, “being able to communicate required more than linguistic competence, it required communicative competence-knowing when and how to say what to whom” (Cited in Diane Larsen-Freeman). The views of Richards and Rodgers regarding CLT can be known from another research,

According to Richards and Rodgers, CLT sees language from the following points of views:

Language is a system for the expression of meaning.

√ The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication.

√ The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.

√ The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.

So, from the views of the proponents of CLT, it can be assumed that speaking and listening should be the prior concern of the foreign language teaching that follows the CLT approach. (Richards & Rodgers quoted in Shurovi, 2014, p.1264).

The teachers also have a fairly good idea about the term communicative. According to Khan (2010) “They mentioned use of English in real life or practical situations and focus on the

four skills” (p. 132). But CLT is not used in the institutions in a real sense. One of the baseline studies done by the English in Action (EIA) project mentions that in most English classes at secondary and primary schools, teachers follow the instructive and top-down model of teaching and there was little use of interactive methods where students were mainly passive learners (English in Action [EIA], 2009). CLT is the method that concentrates on integrating four skills of English together since all the skills are interrelated. As reading triggers the writing, in the same way listening triggers speaking in the language. It is impossible in a CLT-based class for the students to remain silent. But here the teacher plays an authoritative role leading the students to develop a timid personality with a tendency of always getting scared to speak in front of the teacher. So actually the teachers follow the GTM other than CLT where there are a lot of grammatical exercises, rote learning, reading comprehension, and writing exercises. Rahman (2012) believes that “GTM lagged behind a student to their fluency. All the activities are mostly based on reading and writing so students feel uncomfortable when they go for higher education” (p. 20). Dewey’s child-centered theory emphasizes the needs of children and believes children's growth to be the goal of classroom teaching. The teacher will act as a facilitator or attendant, or advisor. The teacher's role is weakened, or sometimes teachers are just onlookers. Stephen Krashen (1985) stressed the significance of comprehensible input, or the aural reception of language that is just a little beyond the learner’s present ability (Brown, 2000). Krashen (1985) pinpoints, “learners are exposed to language only in the classroom where they spend less time in contact with the language, covering a smaller discourse type” (p. 46). But in Bangla medium institutions the medium of instruction is Bangla which lessens the opportunity to get in touch with the language for sufficient time. Mazumder (2020) also believes that whereas the sole target of introducing CLT in Bangladesh was to develop communicative competency this particular

skill has not reached the expected level because the standard of listening and speaking skills is not assessed. “Only the students of English medium and English version schools can achieve competence in English but their number is very small in comparing with the large students studying in government and non-government secondary schools” (Mazumder, 2020, p. 2). Ahmed (2020) carried out a study in Chittagong where he found out that English medium teachers are exercising better teaching practices than the Bangla medium teachers in the classroom in case of using the target language as a medium of instruction and for this reason, language learning becomes difficult for the Bangla curriculum students (Ahmed, 2020).

In Bengali medium schools, English classes are taken in Bengali emphasizing on grammatical discourses which makes the class monotonous (Hasan, 2005). The students supposedly achieve a good hold of English until they reach the secondary level but as they lack a communicative environment in the classroom for the reason of not seeing their teachers speak or conduct the class in English often, they suffer to achieve those skills. The students fail to achieve the knowledge or skills needed for the economy from secondary education. Outdated teaching methods and faulty evaluations are responsible for this failure (Rahaman, 2017).

The Importance of Listening and Speaking Skills to Become Communicatively Competent English Language User

The purpose of teaching the English language is to improve the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills of the students. Teaching communication skills is a part of language teaching and it does not mean teaching phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar but it means the ability to speak in the language. The first step in understanding the spoken language is listening.

Listening is an activity of paying attention to something we hear and trying to grasp the meaning. To go into detail, grasping the meaning involves understanding a speaker's accent,

pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Listening is an active process. A listener just does not listen to a comprehension passively and understand it. But they actually interpret the intended meaning of the speaker and try to respond accordingly (Xu, 2011). For successful communication, listening skill is essential.

It is known to us that verbal communication is reciprocal and this is why speaking is actually the result of listening. Listening and speaking work in a combined manner to help each other. But sometimes they work in isolation and complement each other by increasing oral proficiency in a language (Kabir, 2020). Kabir also believes that listening is the first step of learning English in an academic context as the other three skills are generated following this skill. He regards listening as a process of thinking for making oral discourse (Kabir, 2020). Stephen Krashen (1985) stressed the significance of comprehensible input, or the aural reception of language that is just a little beyond the learner's present ability (Brown, 2000).

That is, in Krashen's view, perceptive language behaviors such as listening or reading play the major role in the learning process, while everything else, including the development of speaking skills or the knowledge of grammar rules, will follow automatically as long as a sufficient amount and type of input is provided. Therefore, a student cannot be expected to produce "i+1" output without learning first about the "+1" element, that is, without receiving some sort of "i+1" input (Xu, 2011, p. 163).

So, this theory indicates that a good hold in aural comprehension will eventually lead to the development of oral production.

Now speaking is the second basic skill and it is used when we try to communicate in a language. As it is already mentioned that listening directs a learner towards speaking. If we want to communicate, we have to speak up. The skills of reading and writing are also important but

the tendency of the teachers generally is seen giving sole attention only to reading and writing and the matter of spoken English is left behind. Researchers estimate that we listen to twice as much language as we speak, four times as much as we read and five times as much as we write.

To make the students orally communicate in English by brushing up on this skill; discussions, presentations, and role-plays are organized. Now in a class, where there are only activities involving reading and writing skills, the students will only get to know about the technicalities or grammatical features of the language but they will not be able to use that knowledge to actually communicate with someone. According to Jeremy Harmer, various elements of language which a student acquires get stored in the brain and those are turned on automatically with speaking opportunities. Gradually students get to be self-directed language users who will be able to subconsciously use words and phrases fluently (Harmer, 1997). The activities promoting speaking ability are all crucial to be able to communicate properly. So the practice of listening and speaking skills play a significant role in creating communicatively competent English language users.

How Can the Emphasis on Listening and Speaking Skills and a Change in the Evaluation System Bring Positive Results for Bangladesh

The Switzerland-based international organization Education First (EF) conducted a survey in December 2019 measuring English proficiency where Bangladesh is placed in the very low category (Mahmud, 2020). English is a compulsory subject from the primary level in Bangladesh yet because of a faulty teaching-learning process the students remain incompetent. The teaching process of English in the Bengali medium institutions of Bangladesh has always been questionable. Language is something with which we can communicate with each other and it is a very common and gradual process that we begin with listening, then we try to speak, then

read and at last we learn to write. But in Bangladesh, the teaching process is dependent heavily on memorization and rote learning which involves going through some limited reading and writing activities. But the language learning process should have started with well-planned listening and speaking activities. But to quote Nipa Bhattacharjee (2013), “In the context of Bangladesh, our learners are never exposed to formal listening in the classroom” (p. 20). Because the students are never exposed to English speakers and especially in Bengali medium institutions where the teachers mostly conduct the classes in Bengali, they never experience how English is spoken and never find out if they are able to grasp the meaning in English. Listening and speaking are interrelated and listening smoothes the way to be able to speak. The textbook for secondary and higher secondary level English For Today (EFT) is designed with many listening and speaking activities. But they are not implemented in the classroom. Salahuddin et al. study suggests that EFT is the one and only material teachers use in teaching English (Salahuddin et al., 2013). And the book is quite resourceful as it provides sources for practicing and learning spoken English. If we analyze the lessons of the book, it will be more eminent. For example, Billah has expressed that there are 22 listening-focused lessons and 63 speaking-focused lessons in the EFT books at the Secondary level (Billah, 2012). In spite of having such an enormous opportunity, our teachers and students usually do not practice the EFT listening and speaking sessions. Now, the change should be brought in the mindset of the teachers who have the thinking of teaching the students neglecting two of the vital skills of English.

Kabir conducted research on 3 secondary schools and 1 college where she found the highest number of students confirming that they never used English in class and never did conversational exercises, never followed textbooks to practice English speaking skills. It was also mentioned in her study that 31.66% of participants responded the teachers used English

limitedly in the class while 10% responded they used English most of the time (Kabir, 2014). The result of research conducted by Wu (2006) showed that most students, even those who confessed that they did not have a good command of English, thought that EMI was an effective language policy. Kaiser and Khanam (2008) observe that the main focus is on reading and writing; listening and speaking are given less importance. This results in making the students poor in listening and, in most cases, students cannot understand the lectures of teachers when they speak or instruct in English, and do not understand the messages of authentic spoken English materials (Patwary & Rumman, 2019).

So these data prove that the lack of practicing listening and speaking in the English classes ultimately is making the students communicatively incompetent which is a serious issue. English is being taught as a mere subject in which the students have to carry good marks and this is why the emphasis is mainly given to memorization, reading, and writing which can bring good grades in a limited time. But it is not fulfilling the main aim of our curriculum.

Those who try to give emphasis on grammatical discourse, they also cannot deny that listening and speaking are necessary to become competent in English. Rahman (2012) also agrees that “GTM lagged behind a student to their fluency. All the activities are mostly based on reading and writing so students feel uncomfortable when they go for higher education” (p. 20).

In Bangladesh, the students are being mastered in grammatical discourse but when they will try to communicate, grammatical accuracy will be seen less than the fact of how comprehensibly they speak and this cannot be done without practicing speaking.

Now it is known to all that motivation is one of the significant factors in learning a new language. In Bangladesh, the students are mainly motivated to learn English considering the fact that they have to pass the examinations. Examinations are also important to identify the gaps and progress in student learning. The two most prestigious public examinations in the country are S.S.C. and H.S.C. exams. Utmost seriousness is seen in the teaching and learning process to bring good results in the examinations. The Bangladeshi education system is such that the competence of a student in all subjects is judged based on their performance in board exams. Since listening and speaking skills are not part of the assessment of the public examinations, they are neglected in the classroom. The present evaluation system is defective as it only evaluates reading and writing skills. The views of the teachers regarding this can be known by the study of Khan where they agree that SSC and HSC are partially evaluating communicative competence by giving sole attention to just reading and writing. Listening and speaking are neither taught nor tested.

Teaching and testing are inter-related: one influences the other. In this regard, Hughes (1989) says that the proper relationship between teaching and testing is that of partnership. Therefore, in order to foster positive backwash effects that will improve language education, tests must be integrated in all parts of language competence (Hughes quoted in Bhuiyan & Huda, 2020).

NCTB mentions for the secondary level in terms of evaluation that all the skills will be evaluated through classwork, continuous evaluation, public exams (NCTB, 2012). Although the present curriculum has shown the inclusion of listening and speaking in the evaluation system, the implementation is still pending because the education authority is not allocating the marks as

mentioned. Ali points out that academic supervisors or external examiners should be appointed for the successful evaluation of listening and speaking (Ali, 2016).

Methodology

CLT principles by Richards and Rodgers (2001), Constructivism by Piaget and Vygotsky (1964), Krashen's theory of second language acquisition (1982), Dell Hymes communicative competence (1971), and the inter relationship between teaching and testing by Hughes (1989) will be used to mark the importance of activities provoking listening and speaking skills of English in the classroom and importance of assessing them in the secondary level. These theoretical frameworks will help explain the present scenario of secondary schools neglecting two of the vital skills of English and help to conclude by analyzing the situation.

Research Design

The study will follow a mixed approach as I will be collecting, analyzing and mixing both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study to have a better understanding of the stated problem (Creswell, 2007).

To design the quantitative data, I will use the Likert scale to collect and analyze the numeric data. I will use the Likert scale's level of quality like 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair', and 'Poor' and ranges like 'Always', 'Most of the time', 'Sometimes', 'A little bit', and 'Never'.

Setting and Participants

Students from two secondary schools in Chittagong will be randomly chosen along with two teachers (one from each school) for the questionnaire. Total of two classes will be observed where one will be for class 9 and the other for class 10.

Data collection method and analysis

I will use questionnaires both for students and teachers to know about the teaching-learning process of English in secondary schools and the emphasis on listening and speaking skills that is given. Quantitative type of questions will be close-ended. Qualitative type of questions will be open-ended. The teachers will give the answers orally. After the collection of data, they will be analyzed and interpreted. The data will be tabulated and then summarized and interpreted separately using tables and charts. The classroom will be observed through an observation checklist having 4 sectors regarding the medium of instruction, teaching method, classroom environment, and used materials. Confidentiality of the institution and participants' names will be strictly maintained. Data collected will not be altered to maintain credibility.

Results

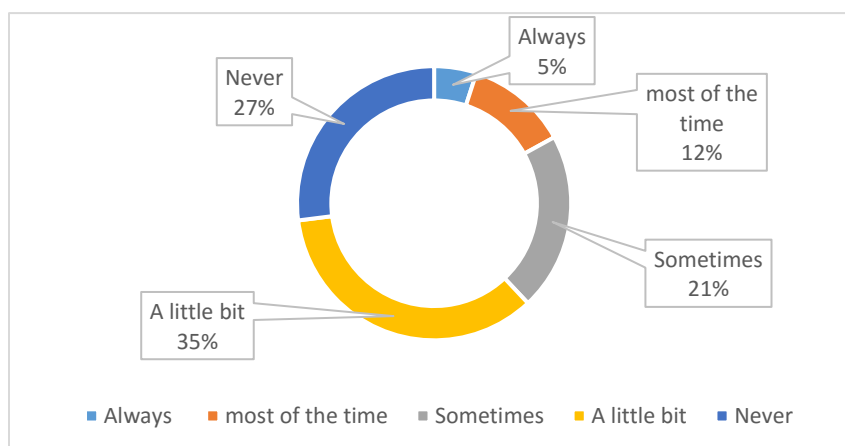
Summary of the Findings of the Close-ended Questions for Students

In this chapter, a summary of the findings from the students' responses regarding the close-ended questions will be given. There were 12 close-ended questions for the students with options to choose from. In the first question, the participants were asked to inform about how often English is used by them in the classroom. It is seen that the highest percentage of students that is 38% said that English is used 'a little bit' in their English class while 25% said English is used 'sometimes'. 7% of students said 'most of the time' it is used and 5% of them affirmed that they 'always' used English in their English class. On the other hand, 25% of students agree 'never' to use English in their English class.

The second question was about the peers' attitude towards the students in any of the mistakes while speaking English where 35 students said their peers laughed at them when they did any mistakes in speaking English. 10 of them said they inspired their peers. On the other hand, 8 of them said they correct the mistakes while 7 of them did not answer anything.

Figure 1

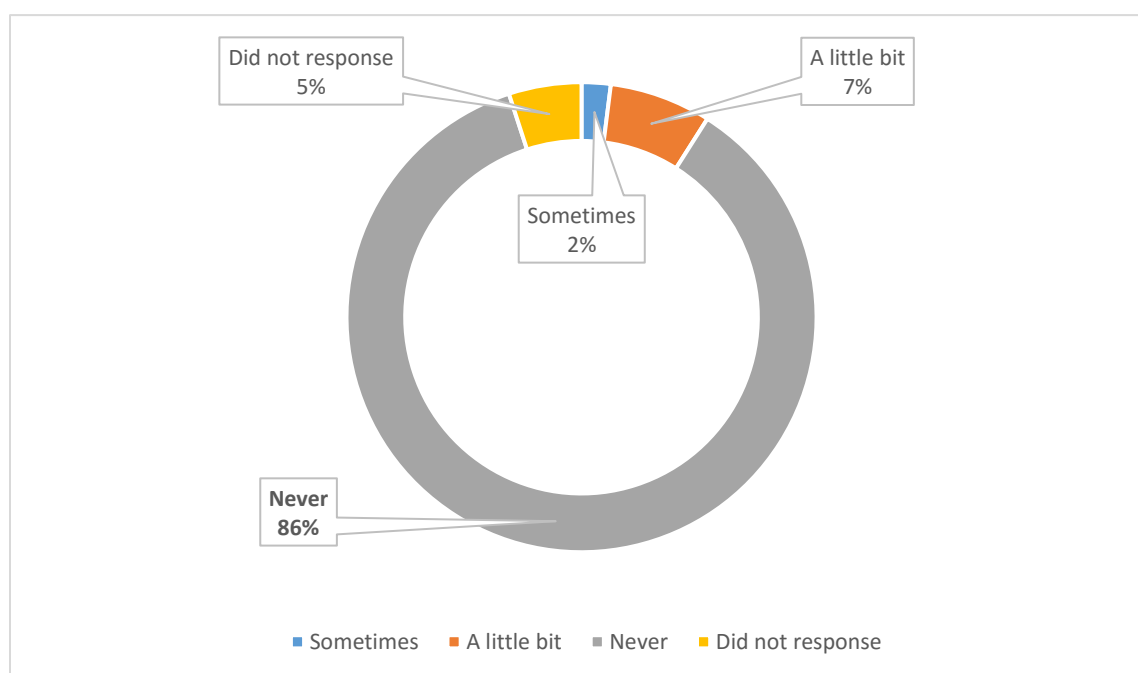
Teachers' Usage of English in the Class



The third question was about informing how often their teachers use English in the class. Interestingly enough, as much as 27% of the students affirmed their teachers ‘never’ used English and 35% said they used ‘a little bit’ of English in the class. Only 5% said they ‘always’ used English.

Figure 2

The Practice of Listening Skill in the Class



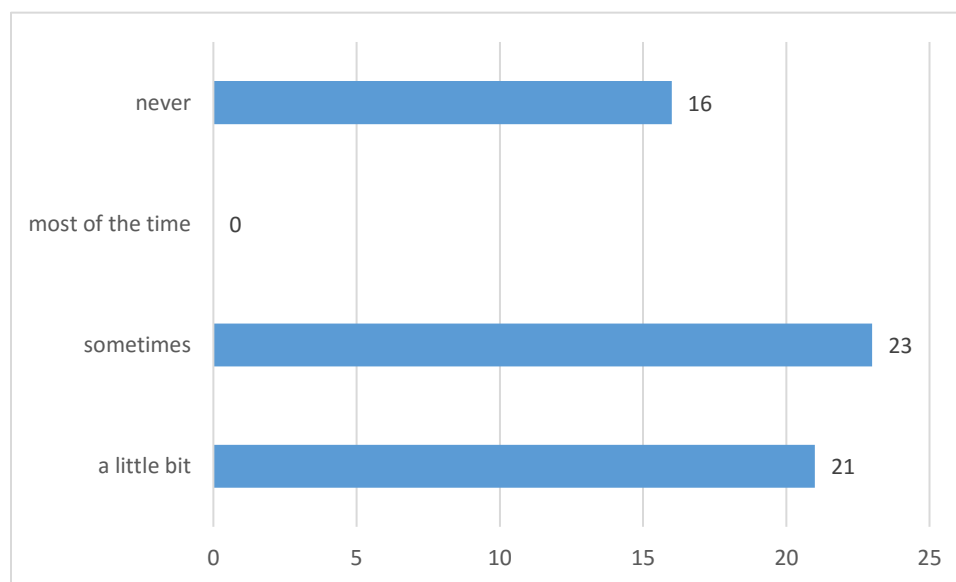
In terms of practicing the listening skill, 86% of the students affirmed that they ‘never’ practiced this skill in the classroom while 7% of the students said ‘a little bit’ and 2% said ‘sometimes’. There were 5% of students who did not respond and no students chose the options ‘always’ and ‘most of the time’.

When asked about how often teachers used the textbook for the practice of both skills, the highest number of responses was for the option ‘a little bit’.

The formative assessment ensures an ongoing assessment system to ultimately form the skills or abilities of the learners. The result of the question regarding holding any formative assessment of the listening skill was ‘no’. All the students said they do not have any formative assessment on listening and speaking. So the teachers do not arrange any formative assessment focusing on both skills. The next question was on their ability to comprehend the English spoken text which indicates their listening capabilities. As many as 36 students said they can comprehend an English spoken text ‘sometimes’ while 20 of them agreed to comprehend ‘most of the time’ and 4 of them chose ‘a little bit’. No respondents chose the options ‘Always’ and ‘Never’.

Figure 3

Teachers' Inspiration for Practicing Spoken English



Teachers' inspiration in practicing spoken English is very important since the learners get motivated and that acts as an extra push towards achieving competence in the language itself.

The result shows that 23 students informed that their teachers encouraged them ‘sometimes’ and none of the students chose ‘most of the time’. 21 of them said their teachers inspired them ‘a little bit’ in practicing spoken English and 16 of them said “never”.

The students were asked about their seating arrangement which is also an important aspect of a language class. The facility of the round table and chairs are important for group discussions, and pair work. All the participants, that is, 60 of them affirmed they had only bench.

In response to a question about the institution arranging any kind of English language test, 58 of the respondents affirmed that their institution does not arrange any English language test out of their conventional class hours. 2 of the respondents did not answer this question. So basically the students did not have access to sit for any English language test which will ensure their growth in all four skills. When asked if they think it to be necessary to sit for an English language test, 85% of respondents said that they felt the need to give a language test while 15% felt that they did not need it. Only classroom practice is enough.

Summary of the Findings from the Teacher’s Response

The participant teachers believed it is important for the students to have the listening and speaking skills of English in this age of globalization. English holds a very important place in higher education and also in communication and establish strong relations with the globalized world. If the students can comprehend and speak in English, that means they know the usage of English. When the teachers use English in the class, most of the students can comprehend their instructions while there are also students who ask to repeat the instruction. The teachers believe that they are weak in English and they need their teacher to repeat her instruction in Bangla so that they can grasp the meaning. The tendency of doing the classes in Bangla made them used to

the language and they themselves do not like to use English and do not understand their teachers when they use English as well. Since English is a foreign language to us, the teachers believe it is not expected that the students adopt native-like fluency, but they must achieve competency at their secondary level as they are ultimately in a quest to learn the language. When asked if interactive activities are effective for listening and speaking skill, one of the teachers agreed and said she arranges some activities sometimes in a class or two but the other teacher said because of a large number of students and limited time to complete the syllabus, it is not always possible to arrange activities. But undoubtedly, the activities are effective.

The Bangladesh education system gives emphasis on listening and speaking skills. When we look at the curriculum we get to know about it. The EFT book also is designed in such a way that had listening and speaking practice. But unfortunately, they could not be utilized properly for the lack of practice in the class. The teachers said that as the education system did not focus on the testing and evaluation of listening and speaking, they are not given proper importance. In response to the question about the supportive materials to teach listening and speaking English, both the teachers said they get inspiration from the institution but there is insufficient multimedia and projectors in the classroom which are very important for the practice of both skills. The next question was about the amount of time given by the teachers for teaching those skills where one of the teachers said she always allots time for improving the speaking skill of her students in 6th and 7th grade by arranging impromptu speeches may be for 15 minutes a week in the usual class time to give the students motivation but she did not arrange anything for the 9th and 10th-grade students. Another teacher said she did not always arrange something like this but she tried to make them practice the activities from the book. Both the teachers mentioned presentation and

impromptu speech, group discussion, and oral classroom participation as some of the strategies to teach spoken English.

Both the teachers said that most of the students show eagerness in speaking English themselves but there are some students who are shy and wanted to avoid it. One of the teachers said ‘The students get very excited when told about impromptu speech or group discussion but actually we run out of time if we arrange it more often. Since there is no evaluation of these two skills, the students get more concerned about passing the exams.

The next question was about the mistakes the students usually make in speaking English. One of the teachers said ‘They usually make mistakes in pronunciation’. The other teacher said the same and added some of the students not understanding the spoken text. One teacher mentioned that she corrected the mistakes by saying ‘Take good preparation again’. She did not correct it directly in front of other students. Another teacher said she corrected the mistakes in pronunciation most of the time. She believed if they are not corrected, they will be doing mistakes forever. Both teachers believed the lack of practice in English is the reason behind their mistakes. The students are not always surrounded by English and they had a different and strong accent that influences their spoken English. Because of this reason, they did mistakes. The teachers also mentioned that an English medium instruction helps the students to always be surrounded by English. When they will observe their teachers, they will develop listening skills and also try to speak in the way the teacher speaks. Since they are Bangla medium students, they needed a different type of approach to learning English and developing listening and speaking which they are not getting. The education system does not offer the assessment of both the skills so they believed they had to be generous enough to arrange a kind of formative assessment on both the skills to ensure they were learning properly. The participants believed the environment

played a crucial role where the students will get ample opportunities to listen, comprehend and respond appropriately in English.

Findings of Classroom Observation

I observed class 9 of a school and class 10 of another school in Chittagong. Both the schools are quite renowned and hold good position in the public exam. The schools give Bengali medium instruction. The first school where I observed class 9 had a big classroom with 50 students. The classroom had three lights, two fans and it had proper ventilation. Since the teacher used Bengali, the students also used Bengali in the class. The English class is held for 40 minutes. The teacher sometimes encouraged her students in speaking English but some of the students were shy and hesitant. Some students were excited to get the opportunity to speak in English. The teacher did not arrange anything special for the development of the listening skill. There was noise coming inside the classroom which sometimes distracted the students and the teacher.

The second school where I observed class 10 had a medium-sized classroom with 40 students. This classroom had two lights and one fan and it also had proper ventilation. Only at the left corner of the last bench, there is a very meager amount of natural light that reaches in. So the lights are always turned on for the student's convenience. The English class is held for 40 minutes. In this school, the teacher combined English and Bengali for teaching and the students mostly used Bengali. The teacher did not try to arrange any listening or spoken activities. The students read comprehension and tried to write answers to the questions.

Analysis of the Findings and Discussion

In this section, the findings of the study will be discussed and I will explain them connecting with my research questions and literature review.

The study finds out that though there are many listening activities in the textbook the teachers do not truly use them mainly for the lack of multimedia support. The main textbook English for Today has ten listening activities spread over seven units but unfortunately, their objectives are not achieved as they are not practiced properly. “Moreover, listening activities do not focus on basic pronunciation practices on letters and sounds, words and utterances which are integral part of listening components as per the curriculum document” (Uddin, 2021, p.87). In my study, 86% of the students said they never practiced the listening skill and in terms of the speaking skill, the students agreed to practice it a little bit or sometimes. The teachers also devised some ways to develop their spoken abilities. The teachers of my study agreed to make the students do those pair or group works but since they are not been marked, the teachers and the students both try to focus more on the things which will bring them a good result in the public examination. The teachers also mentioned hesitation and shyness while trying to speak in the language. This mainly happens because the local accent of Chittagong has a strong influence over their speaking. So when they try to speak, they are more concerned about their pronunciation and how their peers will be reacting to this. Most of the students also responded in the study that their peers laughed at them when they made a mistake while speaking English. So this acts as a hindrance in their way of speaking in English. The teachers also lack the fluency to speak in English therefore, they also avoid speaking in English. A positive and encouraging environment acts as a very important factor in making the students practice listening and speaking skills of English. The teachers in my study confirmed that they encouraged their

students to listen and speak in the language as much as they can. But in classes 9 and 10, they do not arrange it since there are no marks allocated for them in the public examination. Moreover, there is a large number of students and the class time is short. The students said their teachers encouraged them sometimes in the class for practicing spoken English.

The students of Bangladesh have a tendency of getting good grades and passing in exams. An assessment actually motivates them to do good in a particular subject. So when asked if the teachers assess two very important skills listening and speaking, they replied negatively. One of the teachers informed me that according to the curriculum they received in January this year, the institutions were not expected to hold any kind of listening or speaking assessment in classes 9 and 10. So they also do not bother to arrange those tests. On the other hand, if both the skills were assessed, and the marks somehow added to their overall SSC exam, the students would have been very serious and practiced the skills along with reading and writing. There are many other subjects in the S.S.C. and H.S.C. exams that have separate marks on practical exams for the students to be skilled in those areas whereas two of the most important skills of a language are not assessed at all. In my study, 38% of students agreed they used English in the classroom ‘a little bit’ may be they used some chunks like ‘yes madam’, ‘thank you’ etc. while 25% said they ‘never’ used English in the class. This response indicates that students are just rote learning and they are unaware of how to use the language in reality.

Students also felt the necessity of having an English language test which will ensure their competence in all four skills. For example, 85% of the students affirmed that they felt the need for an English language test just like IELTS or TOEFL.

So, overall, it is seen that the lack of resources and materials, a large number of students, conventional teaching methods, and a lack of qualified teachers at the secondary level is causing

problems in teaching listening and speaking skills. Thus, the students having great potential are lagging behind losing confidence to communicate in English for not emphasizing the four skills equally.

Recommendations

The teachers mention large classes, administrative setup or lack of equipment (CD, players, speakers, listening laboratories), and limitation of time as some of the causes behind the unfeasibility of emphasizing and assessing listening and speaking skills of English. But it can be logically argued that if the teachers are skilled enough, they can overcome these problems. For example-

- If there is a lack of equipment, teachers can rely on online listening resources. They can take the help of mobile, Bluetooth, etc. for the practice of listening skills.
- If there is a large number of students in a class, the teacher can provide the students with some online listening activities and exercises and they will be able to give listening exams with better confidence. In terms of speaking, the evaluation can be done on a weekly basis by making groups of a limited number of students. The teacher can also divide the students into several groups and assign those groups some presentation tasks.
- Listening and speaking practices should be made part of the lesson plan and an interactive session can be made fixed for a short period of time of the whole class period which is very much possible. Limitation of time is not an issue if the classes are planned systematically.
- The evaluation can be carried out the way in which International English Language Testing System (IELTS) evaluates. It takes tests of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills separately and gives separate feedback and at last, gives the mark by making an average of the marks of different skills thus presenting an overall proficiency level of a student. To evaluate listening and speaking, IELTS can work as a sample for Bangladesh.

- There should be at least 20 marks allotted for listening and speaking individually in both the academic and public examinations. The inclusion of these marks on the total marks will help in necessitating the practice of both skills.
- The English teachers should make themselves well trained. Some very effective trainings are held in the capital city and some teachers of Chittagong may find it difficult to avail them. In this regard, the institution should provide them with all the facilities to make them well-trained and also equip them with proper resources and materials in the classroom.
- The biggest problem mentioned by most of the teachers of Bengali medium institutions to create a communicative classroom environment by giving the students the opportunity to speak is the lack of resources. But I think if there is determination, there are always ways that lead to success. There is one projector that is present in every institution. The teacher can use the projector for presenting slides and make the class interactive. For the first 20 minutes, he can teach from the front and then for 2 minutes, he can have question-and-answer sessions with the students in English. He can walk up and down the class, and use some gestures to make them comfortable to speak.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations of the study. Firstly, because of a rainy weather, some students were absent. I could not take response from all the students. Secondly, I have selected two secondary schools of Chittagong which may be different from other schools. If the study was to be held on a large number of schools in the city, then the results might have varied and I would have got a more generic view of my study but it would be very difficult for me since I live in Dhaka and that needed a lot of time and effort.

Conclusion

English is a foreign language to the people of Bangladesh. We are not always surrounded by this language and it is very normal that we have to give effort to learn the language. As a compulsory subject in our education system, we can be skilled in this language in our institutions. To start something new or to bring a change is always challenging but it is not impossible. The teachers are used to the traditional way of teaching and reluctant to include listening and speaking in the learning process. The more listening and speaking skills of English will be emphasized in the classrooms, the more the students will be able to overcome their anxiety to communicate and become confident English speakers. It is the need of Bangladesh now to produce competent English language users as Bangladesh is a developing country and it needs skilled manpower who will be able to compete in the fast-paced world. The curriculum, syllabus, and textbook have brought significant changes and emphasized on listening and speaking but the matter is only in the failure to implement this on SSC and HSC level. If the importance of listening and speaking is taken into consideration then it must be understood that emphasis and evaluation of listening and speaking in the secondary and higher secondary levels can bring a change in the proficiency of the students which will ultimately bring development to the country.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Questionnaire for the students

Dear Respondents, I am a student of MA in English, majoring in Applied Linguistics and TESOL at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh. As part of my curriculum, I am required to do a survey for my project “***Inclusion and assessment of listening and speaking skills of English at secondary schools of Chittagong***”. Confidentiality of all your responses will be strictly maintained and will be used only for academic purpose.

Name of the School: _____ ☐ Public ☐ Private

Class/Grade: _____ **Gender:** ☐ Male ☐ Female

1. How often do you use English in your English class?
☐ Always ☐ Most of the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ A little bit ☐ Never
2. What is the attitude of your peers towards your mistakes in speaking English?
☐ Inspire ☐ Correct the mistakes ☐ Laugh at me ☐ Others
3. How often does your teacher use English in the English class?
☐ Always ☐ Most of the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ A little bit ☐ Never
4. How often do you practice the listening skill?
☐ Always ☐ Most of the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ A little bit ☐ Never
5. How often do teachers use the textbook for the practice of listening and speaking?
☐ Always ☐ Most of the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ A little bit ☐ Never
6. Is there any formative assessment regarding listening skills?
☐ Yes ☐ No

7. Is there any formative assessment regarding speaking skills?

☐ Yes ☐ No

8. How often can you comprehend a text spoken in English?

☐ Always ☐ Most of the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ A little bit ☐ Never

9. How much do your teachers inspire you in practicing spoken English?

☐ Always ☐ Most of the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ A little bit ☐ Never

10. The seating arrangement of the classroom

☐ Chair ☐ Bench ☐ Round table and chair

11. Does your institution arrange any English language tests?

☐ Yes ☐ No

12. Is it necessary to take taking English language test?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Appendix B:

Questionnaire for teachers' interview

Teacher's demographic Information:

a. Gender: _____ b. Designation: _____

c. Institution's name: _____

d. Number of years at your institution: _____ e. Educational qualifications: _____

13. Is English listening and speaking skills necessary for Bangladeshi students? Why or why not?

14. Do your learners understand your instructions and respond appropriately if you use English in the class?
15. Do you think some interactive activities provoking speaking can be effective?
16. How does the Bangladeshi education system help students to learn English listening and speaking?
17. What supportive materials does your institution have to teach listening and speaking skills?
18. How much time do you spend in class to teach speaking skills?
19. What strategies do you follow to teach listening skills to your learners?
20. What strategies do you follow to teach listening skills to your learners?
21. How much willingness do your learners' have in learning English listening and speaking?
22. What are some of the mistakes they usually make in speaking English?
23. What do you think the reasons are behind students' mistakes in speaking English?
24. How do you correct/ or give feedback when students make mistakes?
25. What is the assessment strategy that you use to assess your learners' English listening skills?
26. What is the assessment strategy that you use to assess your learners' English-speaking skills?
27. Do you think that including the marks of listening and speaking in the written SSC exam will be effective?
28. What is your stand on this statement: "Learners can learn speaking by speaking".
29. Do you think EMI will be effective here?

