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TECHNICAL REPORT

English Speaking and Listening Assessment Project-Baseline

Bangladesh

Technical Report:
English Speaking and Listening Assessment Project-Baseline, Bangladesh

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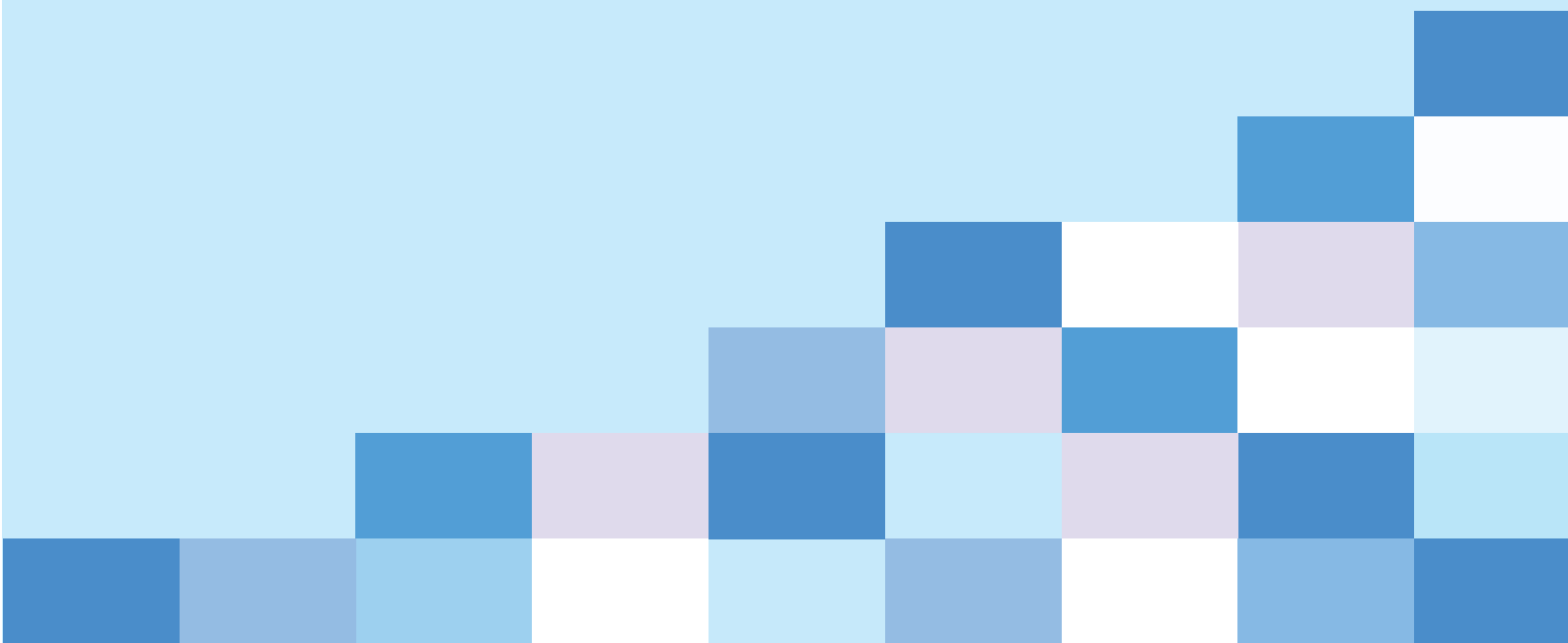
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Acknowledgments

List of Acronyms

APB	Assessment Practice - Bangladesh
ASL	Assessment: speaking and listening
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CCE	Continuous and comprehensive evaluation
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
DSHE	Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education
EfT	English for Today
EIA	English in Action
EL	English language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ETs	Examiner trainers
FGD	Focus group discussion
GESE	Graded Examinations in Spoken English (Trinity College London)
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee (The Open University)
IER	Institute of Education and Research (Dhaka University)
JSC	Junior School Certificate
L1	First language / mother tongue
L2	Second language
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCTB	National Curriculum and Textbook Board
OU	The Open University
Q&A	Question and answer
RQ	Research question
SBA	School based assessment
SESIP	Secondary Education Sector Improvement Programme
SSC	Secondary School Certificate

Definitions of Key Terms

Sometimes different terms relating to assessment are used a little loosely or interchangeably (e.g. continuous assessment and formative assessment). In this report, we use the following definitions:

Assessment criteria will be the specific competency statements of the language that students and teachers will have to address.

Assessment standards are the kinds of speaking and listening that try to meet the assessment criteria by students at different levels, which relate to teacher expectations of what can be achieved.

Assessment for learning is often used interchangeably with 'formative assessment': the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.

Assessment protocol is the way any assessment is conducted, which for listening may be a recording played to students, followed by a written comprehension test, and for speaking may be a series of questions that students answer, that progressively indicate their speaking achievement.

Assessment procedure is a more general approach to the assessment and hence include the protocol, but will additionally include all the elements and timing of the assessment process (e.g. when it takes place or whether it is undertaken by individual or groups of students).

Continuous assessment is assessments which take place over a period of time and are not confined to any one particular occasion and may cover a variety of types of work. Note that this is not identical to periodic assessment, though they may overlap.

Formative assessment is the use of day-to-day, often informal, assessments to explore pupils' understanding so that the teacher can best decide how to help them to develop that understanding. Formative assessment is a central part of pedagogy.

Summative assessment is the more formal summing-up of a pupil's progress that can then be used for purposes ranging from providing information to parents to certification as part of a formal examination course.

(Note that assessments can often be used for both formative and summative purposes. "Formative" and "summative" are not labels for different types or forms of assessment but describe how assessments are used.)

Periodic assessment, as the term implies, takes place at various periods over time, and typically would be end of month or term tests. It is often conflated with 'continuous assessment'.

Reliability is about the extent to which an assessment can be trusted to give consistent information on a pupil's progress.

Validity is about whether the assessment measures all that it might be felt important to measure.

A more general discussion of terms can be found in Mansell & James et al., 2009.

Executive Summary

This study seeks to understand the current practices of English Language Teaching (ELT) and assessment at the secondary school level in Bangladesh, with specific focus on speaking and listening skills. The study draws upon prior research on general ELT practices, English language proficiencies and exploration of assessment practices, in Bangladesh. The study aims to provide some baseline evidence about the way speaking and listening are taught currently, whether these skills are assessed informally, and if so, how this is done. The study addresses two research questions:

1. How ready are English Language Teachers in government-funded secondary schools in Bangladesh to implement continuous assessment of speaking and listening skills?
2. Are there identifiable contextual factors that promote or inhibit the development of effective assessment of listening and speaking in English?

These were assessed with a mixed-methods design, drawing upon prior quantitative research[3] and new qualitative fieldwork in 22 secondary schools across three divisions (Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong). At the suggestion of DSHE, the sample also included 2 of the 'highest performing' schools from Dhaka city.

There are some signs of readiness for effective school-based assessment of speaking and listening skills: teachers, students and community members alike are enthusiastic for a greater emphasis on speaking and listening skills, which are highly valued. Teachers and students are now speaking mostly in English and most teachers also attempt to organise some student talk in pairs or groups, at least briefly. Yet several factors limit students' opportunities to develop skills at the level of CEFR A1 or A2.

Firstly, teachers generally do not yet have sufficient confidence, understanding or competence to introduce effective teaching or assessment practices at CEFR A1-A2. In English lessons, students generally make short, predictable utterances or recite texts. No lessons were observed in which students had an opportunity to develop or demonstrate language functions at CEFR A1-A2. Secondly, teachers acknowledge a washback effect from final examinations, agreeing that inclusion of marks for speaking and listening would ensure teachers and students took these skills more seriously during lesson time. Thirdly, almost two thirds of secondary students achieve no CEFR level, suggesting many enter and some leave secondary education with limited communicative English language skills. One possible contributor to this may be that almost half (43%) of the ELT population are only at the target level for students (CEFR A2) themselves[4], whilst approximately one in ten teachers (12%) do not achieve the student target (being at A1 or below). Fourthly, the Bangladesh curriculum student competency statements are generic and broad, providing little support to the development of teaching or assessment practices.

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[3] Based upon observations of classroom practice and assessments of competence in speaking and listening, involving 113 ELT teachers and over 1,600 students from 57 secondary schools across Bangladesh (EIA, 2015)
[4] Whilst it is clearly desirable for teachers to be significantly more proficient in speaking and listening than their students, this is not necessarily an automatic pre-requisite for students' learning.

The introduction and development of effective teaching and assessment strategies at CEFR A1-A2 requires a profound shift in teachers' understanding and practice. We recommend that:

1. Future sector wide programmes provide sustained support to the develop teachers' competence in teaching and assessment of speaking and listening skills at CEFR A1-A2

2. Options are explored for introducing assessment of these skills in terminal examinations

3. Mechanisms are identified for improving teachers own speaking and listening skills

4. Student competency statements within the Bangladesh curriculum are revised to provide more guidance to teachers and students.

Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

The proposed study aims to understand the current practices of English Language Teaching (ELT) and assessment at the secondary school level in Bangladesh, with a specific focus on the teaching and assessment of speaking and listening skills. The study draws upon prior research on general ELT practices, English language proficiencies and exploration of assessment practices, in Bangladesh. The study aims to provide some baseline evidence about the way speaking and listening is taught currently, whether these skills are assessed informally, and if so, how this is done. As speaking and listening skills cannot be considered in isolation, to some extent the study will have to look at how all four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) are integrated.

Following a pattern now familiar in many countries in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, English language and hence English Language Teaching (ELT), became marginalised in the post-colonial era of the late twentieth century; but then, as 'Global English' has risen as a lingua franca (Graddol, 2006), governments have increasingly sought to encourage the development of communicative competence in English language as a skill for economic development. In Bangladesh, following independence from Pakistan in 1971, English was re-introduced as a compulsory subject for students of all grades in 1986, with an increasing emphasis on communicative approaches to ELT towards the end of the twentieth century (Das et al, 2014). Education policy and the national English for Today textbook series have promoted communicative approaches to ELT since 2000 (Begum & Farouqui, 2008).

However, a series of subsequent studies suggest more traditional classroom practices still predominate (Hasan, 2004; Iman, 2005; Rahman & Afroze, 2006; Hamid & Balduaf, 2008; Kraft et al, 2009; EIA, 2009). For many years English remained the most commonly failed examination subject, at every level (Kraft et al, 2009:25).

It has been noted that several studies in low-to-middle income countries show 'high stakes examinations often compelled teachers to cover the curriculum and so use more teacher directed methods… even while the curriculum they were teaching promoted learner-centred pedagogies' (Westbrook et al, 2013:63). Whilst this washback effect from the examinations was seen in relation to teaching practices, few studies explicitly explored how teachers enact assessment practices (formative or summative) in relation to curriculum reform (Westbrook et al, 2013:6).

The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has been exploring how to minimise negative washback effects for several years. The Secondary Education Sector Improvement Programme (SESIP) recommended introducing School-Based Assessment (SBA) in 2006, to provide ongoing feedback on students' progress through the year, as an aide to learning. SBA was intended to include a focus on students' communicative ability, but early studies suggested teachers did not receive sufficient support to be able to implement SBA effectively, warning that 'If SBA is implemented without providing adequate training to the teachers, a huge gap will be created between ministerial style and classroom reality' (Begum & Farouoqi, 2008:50). A more recent study also suggests some teachers remain sceptical of being able to implement SBA effectively:

"SBA… was introduced with a good purpose. But I came to a decision by talking with some of my colleagues and teachers in other schools that… proper assessment cannot be ensured by SBA because the assigned… test items focus on written performance… We know the system of SBA, but we do not have sufficient scope for organising the system. We are being trained on SBA but atmosphere is not ready" (Teacher; quoted in Das et al, 2014:335).

The 'atmosphere of readiness' for effective school-based assessment of speaking and listening skills might be seen to include issues relating to teachers and schools, for example it has been argued that communicative language assessment demands high levels of both language and assessment skills from teachers (McNamara & Roever, 2006). There is an entire body of work on 'Assessment for Learning', looking at how formative assessment practices can improve classroom pedagogy and student learning, which will contribute to the GoB's aims for SBA. James et al (2007) suggest teachers should be supported to develop competency in:

• Developing classroom talk and questioning
• Giving appropriate feedback
• Sharing assessment criteria with learners
• Enabling peer- and self-assessment
• Developing thoughtful and active Learners

But 'an atmosphere of readiness' might also allude to the wider context beyond school, including widespread use of private tuition, notebooks and guidebooks by almost all students, geared towards re-enforcing

memorisation as the primary means of preparation for written examinations. This cultural context has been described as a 'monolithic pattern of knowledge and education' in Bangladesh (Rahman et al, 2006:4).

The study takes place in the context of education reform currently underway in Bangladesh, as demonstrated through the recent development of the national education policy and revision of curricula and textbooks across all subjects at both primary and secondary levels. The national education policy emphasises the learning of English for communicative purposes, with the secondary curriculum intended to enable all students to acquire communicative competence in all four skills, at pre-intermediate level (e.g. at Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level A2). Although the curriculum emphasises development of all four skills, summative assessment is focused predominantly on reading and writing skills. As part of the education reform process, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has instructed all secondary schools and mainstream Madrasahs to carry out continuous assessment of speaking and listening skills, which are intended to carry a 20% weighting in the final summative assessment, with 80% weighting to written exams. This decision is applicable to all internal summative examinations but not for public exams such as JSC, SSC and Dhakil (Madrasah) in secondary schools.

However, in order to be able to implement this policy effectively, further rigorous planning may be required to establish clear standards for speaking and listening in each grade and to provide skills development and moderation systems, so teachers may administer and make such assessments effectively and consistently.

2.1 Design

The study is a mixed-methods design with quantitative and qualitative research providing distinct and complementary insights, as well as affording a degree of triangulation. The report draws upon data made available from prior, recent, large-scale studies carried out by English In Action, funded through UKAID (EIA, 2015) and extends these with new, smaller-scale qualitative fieldwork in Bangladeshi secondary schools, as well as desk research relating to international frameworks. Different combinations of the various methods and/or data sets are drawn upon for each research question.

Question 1a) Current classroom practices in teaching English language speaking and listening skills was approached through consideration of large-scale quantitative data arising from timed observation of speaking in ELT classrooms (EIA, 2015), which records who is talking (teacher or students) and for what percentage of the lesson time, as well as the language and purpose or organisation of the observed talk. This is extended through a new smaller-scale qualitative observation study to illustrate what kinds of ELT practice underpin the observed proportions of teacher and student talk. As well as these two observational methods, teachers who were observed in the qualitative study also took part in semi-structured interviews, in which they were invited to discuss their own views on how they teach speaking and listening skills.

Question 1b) Current classroom practices in assessment of students' speaking and listening skills was approached through smaller-scale qualitative observation and subsequent semi-structured interviews, in which teachers were invited to discuss their own views on how they assess speaking and listening skills. (The larger-scale quantitative observation data do not identify assessment practices.)

Question 1c) Understanding and attitudes of ELTs, to the teaching and assessment of speaking and listening in English, was approached through discussion in semi-structured interviews as part of those conducted for '1b'.

Question 1d) English Language Proficiency of ELTs, in speaking and listening skills, was approached through consideration of prior large-scale quantitative studies of teachers' performance in diagnostic assessments, providing scores on the internationally recognised 'Graded Examinations in Spoken English' (GESE) scale (EIA, 2015). For the purposes of this present study, secondary school teachers' GESE scores have been mapped against the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

Question 2a) The attitudes of students and community members, to the teaching and assessment of listening and speaking in English, was approached through Focus Group Discussions with students and separately, with community members.

Question 2b) The utility of student curriculum competency statements for speaking and listening, in providing clear standards against which assessments can be made,

was approached through desk-based research, comparing the GoB student competency statements to CEFR level descriptors. These were also considered in relation to available data on students' proficiency (EIA, 2015), mapped against CEFR levels for the purposes of this study.

2.2 Sampling

This section deals with the sampling for the new qualitative study, which focuses upon teachers' classroom practices (RQ1a, 1b) and understanding (RQ1c), as well as the attitudes to teaching and assessment of speaking and listening of students and community (RQ2a).[5] The basis of the sampling is the choice of schools where these investigations will take place. At each school data will be collected on the four elements of the qualitative study indicated above.

The sample of schools to investigate (through classroom observation and interviews/focus discussion groups), was purposively chosen to match general criteria: to give a range of performance[6] in terms of classroom practice of English teaching; to cover rural, semi-urban and urban schools; and to provide some geographical coverage across the country. There was no attempt to be representative of schools as a whole, because this would inevitably mean a much larger sample than was practical within the constraints of the study. Rather it was to establish the range of practice, understandings and attitudes among the respondents, which would give the dimensions of a baseline

understanding of the assessment and the conditions within which any new assessment of speaking and listening would be introduced. In total 22 schools purposively sampled from: Dhaka City (2); Dhaka (8); Sylhet (6) and Chittagong (6), focussing upon classes 6 to 10.

Most schools were single shift and most were co-educational though in several of the co-ed schools girls and boys were being taught separately. Secondary school size ranged from 274 to 2200, though in one or two cases, secondary was a section in a larger overall school. The numbers present in the classes observed ranged from 30 to 82, but in several cases head teachers reported significantly larger class sizes and high numbers of absentees. Examples of all years from Class 6-10 were included in the observations. In total, 22 schools participated in the study (for details see Appendix 5f, School Information).

2.3 Field work/data collection

The data collection took place over 6 days in March 2016 and each pair of researchers worked concurrently so that, for example, data gathering in Chittagong and Sylhet took place simultaneously. Field teams visited two schools per day. At each school the researchers met first with the head teacher and the teacher whose class was to be observed. An English lesson was then observed. Observation was in all cases from the back of the class and observers emphasized to the teacher that they wanted to be as non-intrusive as possible. A small video camera was used as an aide memoire to the main

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[5]   The methodologies of the large-scale observational and assessment studies can be found in the original publication (EIA, 2015).

[6]   Two schools from Dhaka City were included at the suggestion of representatives from the Department of Secondary and Higher Education. These schools were generally regarded as 'high performing' and were included so the study would cover the 'full range' of practices and understandings.

field notes during observation. An audio recorder on the teacher's desk was used in order to better pick up the teacher's voice.

Following the lesson observation, the observed English language teacher was interviewed and 4-8 students chosen[7] from that teacher's class to participate in a focus group discussion (FGD). Following the recommendation of GoB, in the first school each day the other English teachers in the school (i.e. other than the observed teacher) participated in a focus group discussion. At the second school each day, a community group of 4-6 participants was formed by the head teacher and a focus group discussion was held at the end of the school day. This limitation on data from the community groups was because of time constraints and the convenience to parents and the school management committees. (Further details are given in Appendix 5e, Field Protocol.)

2.4 Ethics

Research carried out at the Open University UK is undertaken within a structured framework, which includes assessment by the OU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The research is governed by, and adheres to, Open University policy including documents available on the OU Research Ethics website (http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/). A full ethics proposal for this study was made to HREC and was approved. This involved providing participant information (PIS) in the form most appropriate to the students, parents, community members, teachers and head teachers in the study. This required

students, parents and community members to be presented with information and request for consent aurally in Bangla by a native speaker, who invited discussion and clarification. The research team was mindful of the fact that adult literacy rates in Bangladesh are 56% (World Bank, 2013) and that exposing literacy issues by providing written PIS and seeking written consent would be insensitive and risk social harm. For teachers and head teachers, the participant information was given in writing and written consent obtained; written consent for student participation being provided by the teachers and head teachers, who were legally responsible for the students while in school.

2.5 Bias & Limitations

This section deals with issues that are more usually thought of as validity and reliability, but in the context of a qualitative approach are more appropriately seen as 'bias' in the various stages of the research process. In addition, some of the practical limitations in data collection are noted. At the first stage, the discussion of sampling indicated that the schools were not necessarily representative and thus there was a possibility of bias in their selection (particularly as national and local education area staff were sources for recommendations of where to visit). The choice of lessons to observe was opportunistic (who was teaching English at the time of the visit) and, as they were only single lessons, they may not be representative of the teachers' practice. The choice of community representatives was also a source of bias, with no possibility of it being either

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[7]   Fieldworkers negotiated with teachers to include as diverse a range of students in the FGD as possible.

representative or random choice. The protocol for the observation attempted to record actual behaviour, but the choice of which behaviour to record was subject to the bias of the observer; though the two observers were skilled at ELT and classroom observation. Inevitably the presence of an observer (and video recording) would affect the type of lesson given by the teacher (something that is 'better' than usual, though also producing a more nervous performance particularly with a first-language English speaker as an observer). Subsequent analysis was carried out by each of the two observers for the lessons they observed, but interpretations checked by each other to minimise any bias. The interviews and FDGs followed a standard protocol with open and structured phases (see Appendix 5e), so that participants were given a chance to express their own views (without the interviewers' preconceptions), but also to answer a standard set of questions to provide a consistent set of data. The FDGs of both students and community were conducted by a native Bangla speaker (a Bangladeshi) to try to reduce the impact of an outsider asking questions and

therefore producing 'expected' answers. But this will still be a source of bias.

Field work had some limitations that were sources of bias. Particularly with schools in rural areas, visits to each school were inevitably disruptive and its brevity meant that it was much less likely that the ordinary business of a typical half day in the school would be observed. Although it had been stressed to the schools that the observers were not evaluating individual teachers or teaching, the visits created pressure and it was possible that the school would try to present what they perceived to be their best teaching. Some lessons were of non-standard length; one or two were with non-standard classes (i.e. an amalgamation of more than one class); several were relocated to a multimedia classroom or a classroom in a new building; many started late; e.g. because the school had been waiting for the researchers to arrive. Therefore, as noted with regard to sampling, the observed practices should not be taken as illustrative of 'business as usual', but rather as teachers and schools presenting what they view as their 'best' practices.

3.1 English Language Teachers in government funded secondary schools in Bangladesh

a) Current classroom practices in teaching English language speaking and listening skills

Quantitative data

In May 2015, The DFID-funded English in Action (EIA) programme gathered quantitative data on the classroom practices of 113 secondary school teachers, from 60 schools randomly selected from 30 Upazilas covering all 7 divisions of Bangladesh (EIA, 2015). Data were collected by post-graduate fieldworkers from the Institute of Education and Research (IER), Dhaka University, who used a timed observation schedule, noting when teachers or students were talking, which spoken language was being used, and the purpose or organisation of the use of spoken language (see Table 1 for the aggregate data collected).

Type of Activity (ranked by % lesson time)	Average percentage of lesson time
Teacher Talk	62%
Student Talk	18%
Other (not fitting categories)	11%
Student reading	4%
Student writing	3%
Student listening to audio (not teacher)	2%

Table 1: Categories of Activity in Secondary Classroom Observations

The figures in Table 1 show that 'teacher talk' is the dominant activity in observed lessons, accounting for almost two-thirds (62%) of lesson time. Teachers were observed to talk mostly in English (62%), using Bangla for a little over one-third (38%) of their talk-time.
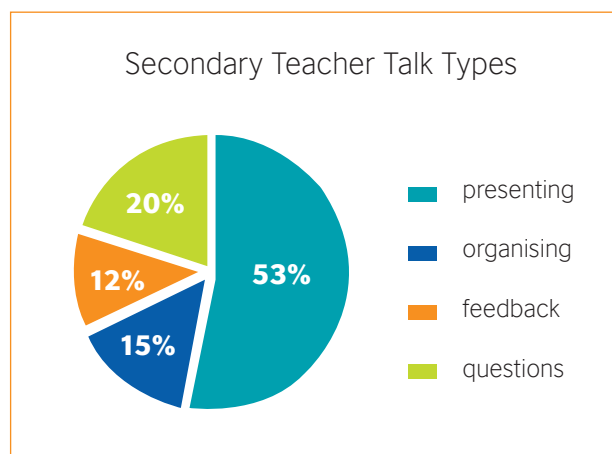
Figure 1: Types of secondary teacher talk

When teachers were talking, over half of that talk (53%) was 'presenting', for example, explaining grammar, making observations or giving illustrations (see Figure 1). The next most frequent type of talk (20%) was asking questions (although these data provide no information about the quality or nature of teachers' questions). Teachers' spent relatively little (15%) of their talk-time organising student activity (e.g. giving instructions for individual or joint student work) or giving feedback (12%).

The proportion of lesson time taken by student talk (18%) was almost a quarter of that taken by teacher talk (62%), but higher than that suggested by earlier baseline studies (EIA, 2009).[8] Students were observed to talk mostly in English (78%), again suggesting a higher level of spoken English language than that observed by earlier studies. As Table 2 indicates, the vast majority of student talk (86%) was individual speech (e.g. one student responds to a Teachers' questions) or choral speech (e.g. choral answers to a teachers' questions, or reading/repeating set texts). Whilst there was some student talk organised in pairs or groups, this study provides no information about the nature of this talk.

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[8]   Because the observational method of the earlier baseline studies was different the data are not directly comparable.

Type of Student talk (ranked by % talk time)	Average percentage student talk-time
Individual student talking	60%
Choral speech	26%
Talk organised in groups	9.5%
Talk organised in pairs.	4.5%

Table 2: Types of student talk

Qualitative Data

In the new qualitative fieldwork that took place in 22 secondary schools for the AP-B study (March 2016), schools ranged from rural to city schools, though they were predominantly rural and outside Dhaka. Overall across the schools visited there were a number of common characteristics which are detailed below.

What was apparent across the 22 English lessons observed was that there were almost no signs of what is defined in the National Curriculum (2012, p10) as a move away from content memorization to a "special emphasis" on the skills of listening and speaking in English. Altogether the data from the qualitative study, albeit a brief snapshot, gives a picture of current teaching and assessment of speaking and listening in English which is very distant from the objectives and learning outcomes of NCTB (2012). Given the criteria of NCTB (2012) for learning participation, learning through understanding, thought-provoking and inspiring questions and communicative language teaching there was only one example of a complete lesson which demonstrated these qualities, though there were a few examples (given below as 'examples of good practice') of particular activities in other lessons which showed that teachers aspire to these practices.

The layout of the majority of the classrooms was with rows of desks or benches facing the front. In most cases, several students were sharing a desk or bench. In large classes, this meant that students sitting at the back were at a significant distance from the teacher. In one or two cases, the layout of the classroom was significantly different, for example, with some students sitting sideways on or at round tables and this did make a perceptible difference in those classes to the interaction with the teacher and to the possibilities for learner participation and effective communication (NCTB 2012). (see Appendix 5f for details of the layout of each of the observed classes).

In every one of the observed lessons, the majority of the lesson was taken up with teacher talk. Taken across the 22 schools, and assuming a 40-minute lesson (though a 40-minute lesson was not always the case), the teacher presented for at least 30 minutes and in some cases for almost the whole lesson. There were almost no examples of student-student interaction. Thus these qualitative data reflect those found in the quantitative study (Table 1).

Examples of good practice

Teacher A has provided PowerPoint slides and realia (wooden fruits), both of which provide visual support for new vocabulary to support a lesson on food and healthy eating. He teaches from the front for the first 20 minutes, speaking in English, then conducts a 2-minute Question and Answer with individual students, checking on their understanding of the vocabulary. He walks up and down the class asking for a succession of volunteers from different lines of desks, thus ensuring wide participation. He uses gesture to indicate the next volunteer to help the students understand who is to speak next.

> He also has a friendly demeanour and uses phrases such as 'don't feel hesitations', 'I'm here to help you'.
>
> He then gives them a short passage to read in preparation for the next part of the lesson. They carry out this reading task in approximately 3 minutes. They read softly to each other in chorus in their pairs/trios, checking each other's pronunciation.

In the observed lessons there were no examples of what in the National Curriculum 2012 (p.10) is defined as teachers "ensuring creativity and innovation through the exercise of analytical and thought-provoking work along with creative questions". Most of the lessons observed were Paper 1 (English for Today), but there were a few Paper 2 (grammar and narration) lessons. The lesson generally consisted of students following the textbook lesson with the teacher providing supplementary materials. In general, all of the students had a textbook, though in some cases they were sharing one between two. There were several examples in the observed lessons of teachers using multimedia, for example PowerPoint slides, and occasional use of animation. There were whiteboards in several of the observed classrooms. In some lessons, the teachers made significant use of the board, and there was in such lessons considerable 'waiting time' as the teacher wrote on the board, though the teacher sometimes spoke aloud what she or he was writing.

In some of the observed classes, the lesson was conducted wholly in English. In other lessons the teacher spoke in a combination of English and Bangla. There were also one or two lessons where almost the entire lesson was

conducted in Bangla apart from reading aloud from the textbook. In several of the observed lessons where a high proportion of the lesson was conducted in English, the English used was complex, markedly above the level indicated by the textbook and difficult for some of the class to follow. In the observed lessons there were only a few, brief examples of what in the National Curriculum 2012 (p.10) is described as a focus on "cooperative learning and learning by doing". For brief periods in some of the lessons observed, the teacher told the students to work in

> **Examples of good practice**
>
> Teacher writes 'Daily Diet' on board and elicits meaning and examples from students, using mainly English but supported by Bangla where necessary. He then puts students in groups of 5 and asks each group to select a leader. They are to read a passage from the book about diet and write 5 questions, with the leader as the scribe. Groups are formed very quickly – obviously a classroom routine – and the teacher moves around monitoring progress. Groups that finish quickly are tasked with helping slower groups. Students then read out some of their questions; the focus is on the structure of the question NOT the answer. Several minutes are then given to correcting questions in their groups following which sets of questions are switched among groups and answered orally with whole class participation re error correction of both response and grammatical structure.

Although the text book English for Today has quite a substantial number of listening exercises with a range of types of questions (True/False, Yes/No, Multiple Choice) there was little sign of these being used in the classrooms observed. In the FGDs with teachers across 11 schools specific reference was made several times that they do not have access to the listening scripts, despite NCTB assurances that the listening passages are all available to teachers online via the multimedia in schools.

> Examples of good practice
>
> In School B the students sit in pairs in desks 8 rows deep and 5 rows across. Each week a particular row has extra practice in speaking; for example, reading aloud from the textbook, modelling pair work and dialogues. This means that all students get extra speaking practice 1 week in 5.

a) Current classroom practices in assessment of students' speaking and listening skills

The assessment of speaking and listening during the observed lessons demonstrated some general characteristics as indicated below. In terms of a class-wide assessment of understanding by the teacher, the time in the lesson taken up with choral chanting suggests that this form of repetition of a word or phrase by the class is being used by the teacher as a proxy indicator of student learning. Another common class-wide technique used by the teacher is to ask the class 'is he right' or 'is she right', following a

response to a question by an individual student. The class typically says 'yes'. This pattern of closed questions, predicting yes/no answers, holds for both a question to an individual student and to the whole class. This has the potential to provide feedback, as the example of good practice (below) indicates.

> Examples of good practice
>
> Teacher C takes a Class 6 with 41 boys, in two rows 6 desks deep. The teacher is reading a paragraph from English for Today on 'Prize-giving Day'. Every now and then he pauses and asks a question to the class referring to their own prize-giving day at the school. When a student gives a response, he asks the class to stand up if they agree. By using the text to extend the context to the students' own school, the teacher is able to personalize the questions and makes the reading activity a much more authentic task. The teacher queries the response with students who remain seated and is able to ascertain whether they simply disagree with the response given, or do not understand the question. In interview he says that this technique lets him see who has problems following the lesson.

Whether or not questions are closed (e.g. Yes/No questions), they were very rarely 'authentic' questions in the observed lessons. Teachers in general were always asking questions to which they already know the answers and where the answer can be predicted from the question[11]. This may be due to teachers' own lack of confidence and limited use of English. In one

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[11]   In contrast to the Bangladesh National Curriculum, that advises against the use of 'yes/no' questions, instead promoting the use of thought provoking questions (how, who, where, what, why) followed up with subsequent probing to explore ideas and understanding (Section 10.3: Questions).

observation, there seemed to be an authentic question: a teacher asked 'If you go to another country what do you need' and the response from the student who volunteered to answer was 'a passport' – perhaps a likely response but not predicted by anything previous in the lesson.

As far as could be seen any assessment of speaking in the observed lessons was both informal and haphazard as there were no explicit indicators that students were being assessed. Given some of the class sizes, it would have been difficult to assess individual students unless it could be carried out systematically for the whole class across a number of lessons.

> ## Examples of good practice
>
> Teacher D takes a class of 58 girls in Class 8. His room is arranged so that 44 of them are sitting in 2 long rows down each side of the room with the rest in 2 small rows at the back. He uses the space to walk up and down the room during his teaching. He focuses in on an oral/aural section of the lesson on participation and fluency 'Who tell me that answer', 'Who can tell us?' 'Anyone who tell us'? 'Which is correct?' 'Is it right?' In interview he tells us that it is important for students not to be discouraged or worried about making mistakes.

Assessment of listening in terms of the observed lesson generally needed to be inferred. From the teacher interviews and FGDs it seemed that teachers assumed that the 'listening' skills were exhibited if students were following the lesson and their instructions. In some of the observed lessons, students struggled with this, though it was hard at times to know whether this was because

they were not listening, not understanding the language, or because of large classes and noisy classrooms. There were no examples in the observed lessons of specific listening tasks being used for assessment; e.g. where the teacher plays a recording of the text or reads aloud with the class listening and answering questions from the book.

In one or two lessons, there were tasks– usually a combination of listening and of reading from the board followed by the students carrying out an individual task – with those who had then finished having their work checked and assessed by the teacher. But it would be quite difficult to isolate the listening component for assessment with such a task. Overall this seems to be indicative of a more general concern: that teachers find it difficult to home in specifically on the assessment of speaking and listening.

b) Understanding and attitudes of ELTs, to the teaching and assessment of speaking and listening in English

In all of the 22 schools visited, the teacher whose lesson had been observed was interviewed straight after the observation. In addition, across the 22 schools, teacher FGDs were also carried out in every second school, with the focus group consisting of the other English teachers in the school.

There were significant concerns expressed by teachers about their English classes. Teachers were concerned about the lack of parental involvement, and often cited the socio-economic status of the community for the difficulty in teaching English. In several schools students said that their families employed private tutors, in others, teachers cited the lack of private tutors among reasons for the limited use of spoken English outside the class.

In general, across the schools visited there was significant variation in terms of the teachers' own perceptions of their expertise in English teaching. There were a significant number teaching English who are not specialists in the subject and a significant number who are teaching English as one subject amid many for which they are responsible. There were general concerns expressed by the teachers about their class sizes, the rooms they were teaching in and their workload. Several cited class size and workload as the reasons for not being able to provide more differentiated or extension activities for the class.

In discussion with teachers themselves through interview and FGDs, there was a widely-held view that it was better to speak in English the whole time during the lesson and, where this did not happen, it was because of the lack of understanding among the students. This continues to be a contentious issue for second language (L2) teaching of any language, and there are obvious concerns that use of L1 decreases the use of the target language in the lesson. On the other hand, some appropriate use of L1 has, for a long time, been seen generally as integral to good L2 teaching (e.g. Atkinson 1987, Cummins 2007), particularly for giving instructions to the class or in explaining difficult concepts where frequently the level of English required is higher than the target language.

Both teachers and students explained the practice of group work, where the groups were set up by the teacher as a means of organising a large class when a particular task was set. As they explained, each group would be formed for an extended period and have a named group leader. When asked about assessment of a group-work task, teachers sometimes gave an equal mark to the whole group but it was a widely held view among teachers in different schools that group leaders or others in the group with specific responsibility should be given a higher mark.

There was strong support for the continuous assessment of speaking and listening skills and general agreement that the inclusion of a final mark would ensure that both teachers and students took both skills more seriously during class time. However, teachers spoke about the difficulty that school-based continuous assessment of speaking and listening brings. It was acknowledged that there were major challenges to surmount in the implementation of this policy, not least of which was the very large class size that is still the norm in most government secondary schools across Bangladesh. Class size and workload generally ensure that formal assessment of speaking and listening is carried out only twice a year, i.e. in line with the twice-yearly school-based 'terminal examinations'.

Teachers generally were of the view that speaking and listening skills would be taken much more seriously if they were part of the system of examinations. For example, several teachers spoke about the increased interest from parents that would ensue from externally assessed speaking and listening; others spoke about this from the point of view of the students. One or two of the teachers suggested that the school would invest more resources in audio equipment if schools were externally accountable for the standards of speaking and listening in English. This is not to favour summative over formative assessment of speaking and listening (see Das et al.,

2014) but perhaps an acknowledgement that continuous assessment is being equated with formative assessment and as such, listening and speaking are not being given equal status to the summative assessment of the skills of reading and writing.

Teachers spoke about the lack of their own training, ranging from general concerns about having no training in how to teach well to their lacking specific training in teaching the skills of speaking and listening in English. Several teachers made clear their views that the students lack knowledge of tenses and of pronunciation in English; fewer specified a need for fluency as well as accuracy. There was also recognition of the necessity for teachers to receive training in how to effectively carry out the assessment of speaking and listening in a systematic and standardised manner. Teachers also expressed concern about their own level of English and on many occasions requested information on how and where they could improve their English skills.

c) English Language Proficiency of ELTs, in speaking and listening skills

The DFID funded English in Action (EIA) programme gathered data on the English Language proficiency of 113 secondary school teachers, from 60 schools randomly selected from 30 Upazilas covering all 7 divisions of Bangladesh, in May 2015 (EIA, 2015). Data were collected by assessors from Trinity College London, using a diagnostic assessment in spoken English. Teachers were scored against the internationally recognised Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE; Trinity College London, 2014). For this study, teachers' GESE grades have been converted to Common European Framework of Reference levels (CEFR;

Europe, 2011) using established mapping (Trinity College London, 2007) and are shown in Table 3.

CEFR Level	Percentage of Secondary ELTs at each level	Percentage Secondary ELTs at or above each level
Not Applicable	4%	-
A1	8%	96%
A2	43%	88%
B1	30%	45%
B2	12%	15%
C1	3%	3%
C2	0%	0%

Table 3: CEFR levels for Secondary School ELTs

It can be seen that almost nine out of ten secondary school ELTs (88%) are at or above CEFR level A2, the higher of two 'basic user' levels (Table 3). This means almost all secondary teachers 'Can understand sentences… (e.g. very basic personal and family information). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks… can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need' (Level A2 descriptor; Europe, 2001:24).

Almost half of the teachers (45%) are classed as 'independent users' (levels B1), who could be expected to: '…understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered… produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest… describe experiences and events… and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.' (Level B1 descriptor, Europe, 2001:24).
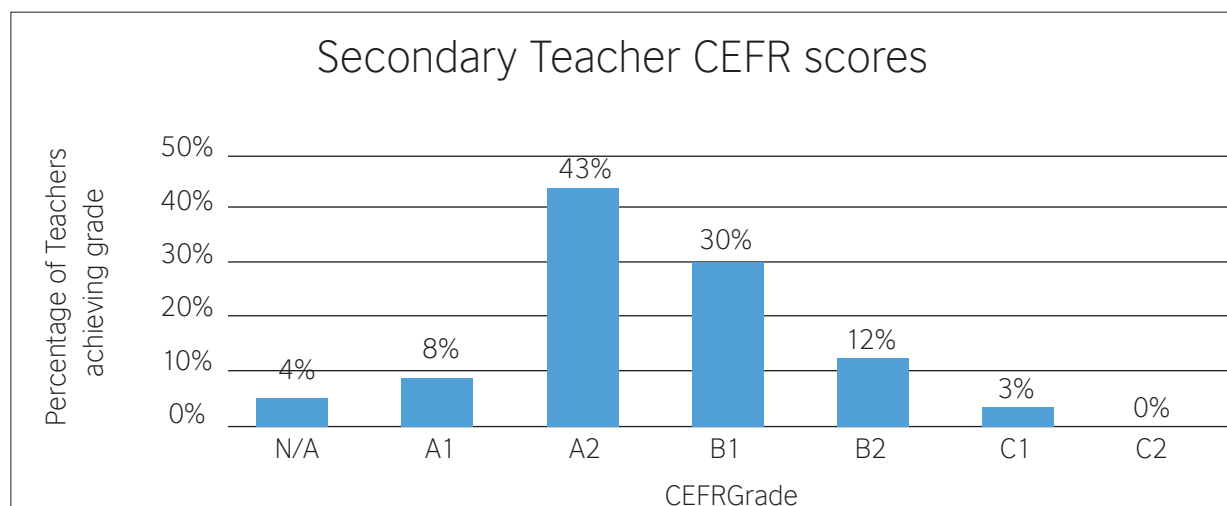
Secondary Teacher CEFR scores

Figure 2: CEFR levels for Secondary School ELTs

At the extremes (see Figure 2), a small proportion of secondary teachers do not even achieve 'basic user' levels (4%); whilst a similar proportion achieve 'proficient user' levels (3%), meaning they 'Can express him/herself fluently...' (Level C1 descriptor, Europe, 2001:24).

3.2 Contextual factors
a)   The attitudes of students and community members, to the teaching and assessment of listening and speaking in English

Students' attitudes
In all the schools visited as part of the qualitative study (March 2016), small FGD took place with students from the observed classes. In each of these groups between 3-8 students were asked a set of questions around their experience of learning and being assessed in speaking and listening skills. Despite the schools and classes ranging quite widely in terms of activity and teacher expertise and experience, the responses of students were surprisingly uniform.

Most students cited speaking as the most difficult of the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening and gave 'lack of opportunity for practicing' as the reason for difficulty. The amount of speaking taking place in classrooms seemed to vary from school to school, based on student responses, but in general students do not get many chances to speak in English in their lessons. When students were speaking they said, much of that time was parroting and chorusing vocabulary. There were very few examples of students producing extended speech in the classroom, although in focus group discussions with students, several of them were able to do so.

With regard to listening, most students said they only hear their teachers reading aloud from the textbook, but outside the classroom (in the FGD) many of them gave examples of listening to cricket commentaries, films, cartoons and songs in English, generally on television but also sometimes on their mobile phones. They also gave examples of practising English with their home tutors, practising English with their brothers, sisters or parents. However, they spoke of the difficulties of enough opportunities to practise and that they would welcome extra resources and more opportunities for speaking English.

They appear to have very little awareness of being assessed on their speaking skills and frequently this did not align with teachers' claims that they

assessed speaking in their classes twice a year; this difference would only be reconciled if students are unaware that this assessment is being done. Listening tasks are sometimes done from the textbook with the teacher reading the text and students responding, but again this seems to be very informal.

There was an overwhelming enthusiasm for more access to speaking practice during their English lessons, with each group giving the same animated response when asked if they would like to have more time practicing speaking in their English lessons.

Community Attitudes

Focus group discussions (FGDs) with School Management Committees, which included parents and teacher representatives, took place in 8 schools. The overriding attitude in all FGDs was that it was extremely important for students to develop strong speaking and listening skills. Reasons given for this encompassed the need to communicate with the wider world: for higher education, for the workplace (both local and global) and for communicating on social networks and accessing information on the internet. Several interviewees felt that speaking and listening were more important than reading and writing now that English is accepted as the global language, and that the assessment system needed to change in order to support students' development.

Alongside participants' conviction of the importance of good speaking and listening skills there was also a feeling that students did not have adequate skills and were not receiving appropriate teaching of speaking. All groups felt that English teachers were themselves lacking in speaking skills and were in need of more focused training to improve their own capabilities. At times there was more explicit criticism of the quality of teaching (sometime linked to the 'kind of school this is').

It was also suggested that children needed more opportunity to practice speaking in school, either through an enhanced curriculum or extra-curricula English Clubs, in order to increase their vocabulary and enhance their confidence in using English. Across all FGDs amongst teachers, community members, school governors and students a common thread was the need for students (and teachers) of English to have more access to English, whether through extra-curricula activities such as English clubs or through more regular use of technology during school lessons, including educational films. As noted earlier, students frequently mentioned practising listening to English via cricket commentaries and films on TV. In some schools, there was regular use of multimedia (i.e. class laptop and projector) to give students practice in hearing English voices. Some teachers also mentioned using their mobile phones as audio devices and school governors often mentioned the use of audio and video materials in the classroom as being beneficial to the students' development of English skills.

b) The utility of student curriculum competency statements for speaking and listening, in providing clear standards against which assessments can be made
The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is a well-established language framework that identifies ways in which learners at various levels of proficiency use language to perform authentic tasks. The descriptors within the CEFR identify observable behaviours that can be structured to support the attainment of curriculum outcomes for English learners.

The complete CEFR Global Scale contains six levels of proficiency, as follows:

Proficient User	C2 C1
Independent User	B2 B1
Basic User	A2 A1

Each of the levels describes language progress in five skill areas: Listening, Spoken Interaction, Spoken Production, Reading, and Writing. However, many users of the CEFR scale provide more detail for skill development and evidence of language progress by sub-dividing the six-level global scale further. By using more explicit and detailed descriptors, learners can see areas of progress, even in the earliest days and weeks of language learning. So for example, the GESE examination used by Trinity, subdivides CEFR into twelve levels with, for example, level A1 having two stages.

Below is the general descriptor for CEFR level A1:

Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

(After Council of Europe, 2011:24)

The equivalent level descriptors equivalent to CEFR A1 from Trinity College (GESE level 2, see Appendix 5G) are much more detailed, providing guidance about language functions (e.g .indicating positions; describing people, animals, objects or places, asking simple questions about personal details), grammar (e.g. question words-who, when; determiners some-any), lexis (e.g. rooms of the home, household objects, family and friends).

Comparing this to the speaking and listening Learning Outcomes from the secondary curriculum for Class 6 demonstrates the generic nature of the current outcomes, many of which are repeated across classes 7 and 8, showing very little evidence of any sense of progression.

In Speaking, students will be able to:	In listening, students will be able to:
i. use English sounds appropriately. ii. use word stress and stress on words in sentences. iii. use intonation in sentences properly. iv. talk about people, places and familiar objects in short and simple sentences. v. ask and answer questions. vi. participate in short dialogues and conversations on familiar topics.	i. follow instructions, commands, requests and act accordingly. ii. recognise English sounds iii. recognise word stress and stress on words in sentences iv. recognise intonation in sentences. v. understand and enjoy stories and poems.

Table 3: comparison of curricula requirements for Class 6 (column 1) and Classes 7 & 8

In order to effectively map the Bangladesh secondary curriculum to the CEFR scale more explicit language competencies would be helpful in enabling teachers to identify language development and learner progress. At the moment, this is not easily evident through use of the curriculum outcomes. The current more generic approach makes it difficult for teachers to identify the progress that their learners are making. This would suggest that, referring to other users of CEFR such as Trinity, a finer graded system needs to be developed, following which specific 'can do' statements can be drafted for the secondary curriculum, based on the language outcomes of each level of the English for Today textbook. This will enable teachers and learners to see clear identifiable progress as they move through the English curriculum.

Although the research question does not directly raise questions about students' actual competency in speaking and listening, it may be helpful to consider the competency statements in light of available evidence.[12] The study discussed in section 3.1d (EIA, 2015) also gathered English language proficiency assessments of 1,715 secondary school students. For this present study, the findings have been translated to CEFR levels, using established mapping (Trinity College London, 2007). These results of these assessments are shown graphically in Figure 3.
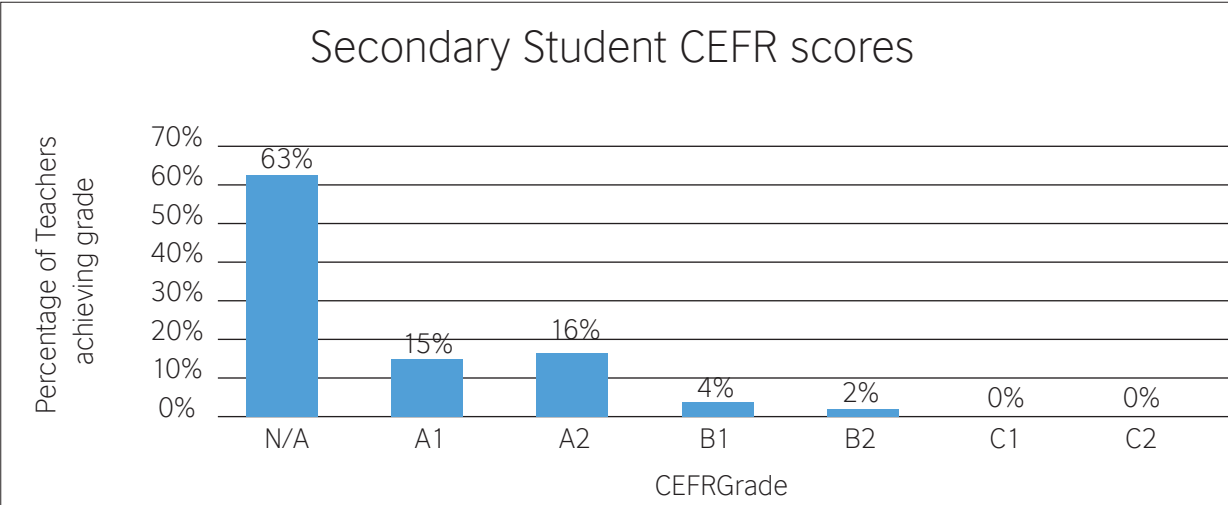
Figure 3: Secondary Students' CEFR levels

Almost two thirds of secondary students do not achieve any level and almost a third achieve 'basic user' levels (A1-A2). Only approximately one in twenty (6%) of secondary students achieve 'independent user' levels (B1-B2). This suggests that for the medium-term future, the government policy of enabling most students to achieve 'basic user' levels (up to A2) is appropriate.

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[12]   This is a pre-requisite for statements of requirements in the curriculum, which must be based on what is achievable (even if with improved teaching and learning).

Discussion, Conclusions & Recommendations

4.1 Discussion

How ready are ELTs to implement continuous assessment of speaking and listening skills?

Teaching

In 2016 there appears to be a quite extensive use of spoken English in Bangladesh secondary English language classrooms, with quantitative data showing 62% of all teacher talk and 78% of all student talk in the target language. Compared to earlier baseline studies (EIA, 2009), it appears that students may be being invited to speak and to speak in English more often, whilst teachers appear to have switched from speaking predominantly in Bangla, to speaking predominantly in English[13]. There are several examples of good practice where teachers were attempting to encourage equitable participation from all students, often with a friendly and encouraging demeanour (e.g. Teacher A; box, p. 11). In many classes, teachers seemed to understand that it could be beneficial to organise students into pairs and groups. Even though this did not often translate into meaningful pair or group activity, none-the-less, it provided opportunity for greater speaking practice for all students (e.g. school B; box, p. 13) and for teacher feedback.

Both quantitative and qualitative data sets show that lessons were dominated by teacher talk. Quantitative studies show almost two-thirds (62%) of lesson time being given to teacher talk, whilst the qualitative studies show that teachers were typically seen to talk for 30 minutes or more (75% and sometimes almost all) of the 40 minute lessons. By far the most frequent purpose of teacher talk is to 'present' to the students (53%), with relatively little teacher talk-time given to organising student activity (15%). The qualitative studies show this reflected in classroom organisation, with most though not all classrooms being organised for students to watch and listen to the teacher (rows of desks facing the front), rather than talk or work with other students (students face each other and desks arranged for groups). In many classrooms, students were 'ranked', with high-ranking students being close to the teacher and low-ranking students sitting far away. High-ranked students were seen to have greater opportunity to participate in speaking and listening.

Students talked for an average of seven minutes per forty-minute lesson (18% of lesson time). Both quantitative and qualitative studies indicate teachers mostly invite student talk from individuals (62%) or from the whole class in chorus (20%), with student talk being organised in groups (10%) or pairs (5%) less often. On average, only 1 minute[14] is given to student talking in pairs or groups. The qualitative observations suggest that regardless of whether student talk is invited from individuals, pairs, groups, or the whole class, the nature of student talk often remains largely uniform. Forms of rote learning predominate with students giving answers or repeating phrases that were entirely predictable before they began to speak. This most often took the form of students carrying out oral 'cloze' (e.g. calling out the missing word at the end of a teachers'

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[13] As noted earlier differences in methodology prevent direct statistical comparison.
[14] On average, students talk for 7 minutes (18%) of 40 minutes of lesson time, of which 1 minute (15%) is in pairs (5%) or groups (10%).

sentence) or reciting a text that is in the textbook. There were very few observations where students had the opportunity to make unpredictable utterances or to develop basic language functions such as those in CEFR A1 (e.g. to '...indicate the position of people and objects; describe [things]... state simple facts; ask simple questions about personal details').

Assessment

Generally, teachers' assessment of listening appears to have been at the level of whether or not students as a whole were able to follow the lesson and the teachers' instructions. Teachers typically infer that if students 'keep up' with the lesson, they must have understood the oral instructions in English. This is somewhat problematic. Often the levels of English used by the teacher were significantly higher than those being studied in the lesson; when students struggled with this, it was hard at times to know whether this was because they were not listening, not understanding the language, or because of large classes and noisy classrooms. There were no examples observed of students being given specific listening tasks, such as listening to a reading or recording and answering questions (spoken or written) on what they heard. The most common practice for assessment of speaking was for teachers to listen to the rote speech of individual students or the choral speech of the entire class (or occasionally rote speech from groups or pairs of students). No specific assessment activities were observed in relation to such practice. Assessment appeared to be informal and haphazard. However, such practices did enable opportunity for teachers to

provide feedback. Occasionally feedback involved peers, for example, Teacher D (p. 14) focussed on participation and fluency in the oral/aural section of the lesson, involving students in peer-assessment of student responses (T: 'which is correct?' 'Is it right?').

As students rarely had the opportunity to practice the kind of language functions described in CEFR A1 or above, teachers had little-or-no opportunity to assess such language functions. In the lessons observed, no teachers were seen to use explicit criteria against which to judge students' competence in speaking and listening, nor to make any formal assessment or recording of individual or group/class performance or progress.

Understanding & Attitudes

There was strong support for the continuous assessment of speaking and listening skills and general agreement that the inclusion of a summative mark would ensure that both teachers and students took both skills more seriously during class time. Teachers generally were of the view that speaking and listening skills would be taken much more seriously if they were part of the system of examinations.[15] However, teachers spoke about the difficulty that school-based continuous assessment of speaking and listening brings. It was acknowledged that there were major challenges to surmount in the implementation of this policy, not least of which was the very large class size that is still the norm in most government secondary schools across Bangladesh. Nevertheless, some teachers did claim to assess speaking twice a year, but no details of how this were done were provided.

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[15] This reflects experiences in the Indian context, where assessment of speaking and listening (ASL) was not implemented effectively until it was included in both formative and summative assessments.

Both in the observed classroom practices and in interviews, there is a general concern that teachers find it difficult to home in specifically on the the assessment of speaking and listening. Beyond the informal practices observed, no teachers demonstrated or volunteered ideas about explicit strategies for the formal assessment of speaking or listening skills. Teachers spoke about the lack of their own training, ranging from general concerns about having no training in how to teach well, to their lacking specific training in teaching the skills of speaking and listening in English. There was also a recognition of the necessity for teachers to receive training in how to effectively carry out the assessment of speaking and listening in a systematic and standardised manner.

EL proficiency

It is understood that the policy intent is for all students to be able to achieve CEFR A2 (pre-intermediate) proficiency in speaking and listening. Presently CEFR A2 is the most commonly achieved grade for secondary school teachers of English (43% of teachers are in A2). Only around one-in-ten teachers (12%) do not yet achieve A2 themselves.

In introducing ASL in India, the view was taken that teachers should be one CEFR grade above the grade they were being asked to assess. If the Government of Bangladesh came to a similar view, then for teachers to assess A2, the teachers would be expected to be at B1 or above. Currently almost half (45%) of the secondary teachers of English are at B1 or above, whereas a little over half (55%) would need further support and development to reach this level.

b) Are there contextual factors that promote or inhibit the development of effective assessment?

Student & Community Attitudes

Students consistently reported that speaking was the most difficult of the four English language skills for them to master, explaining that lack of opportunity to practice was the main obstacle. (Observations of practice concur that students did not have much time to practice speaking. When students were speaking, much of that time was parroting and chorusing vocabulary. There were very few examples of students producing extended speech in the classroom, although in interview several of them were able to do so). Students were overwhelmingly enthusiastic for greater opportunity to practice speaking in English lessons. Students had little awareness of being assessed on speaking and listening, their views contrasting with some teachers' claims to assess speaking twice a year.

Community members were also very vocal about the importance of speaking and listening skills, which they generally perceived to be more important in the role of a lingua franca, than reading and writing skills. Many community members felt this was an area where they wanted to see substantial improvements in students' proficiency. Many also felt English teachers themselves lacked the necessary proficiency and needed more training or support in speaking and listening.

Thus there are no contextual factors that inhibit the effective development of effective assessment outside those found in the classroom, except that teachers, parents and students would prefer that the examinations also contained the assessment of speaking and listening.

Curriculum Competency Statements

The curriculum competency statements are quite broad and generic, for example in comparison to CEFR level descriptors. No teachers were observed referring to competency statements, either in their classroom practices or in interview. It is not clear if this is because they are unaware of the statements, or because they don't know how descriptors could be use to underpin assessment, or because they don't find utility in the statements in their current form. It was not possible to map competency statements against CEFR levels, as the statements were too broad and generic. More detailed specifications (in line with CEFR levels or perhaps better, Trinity GESE levels which are even more specific than CEFR) with clearer progression between levels, might provide a stronger framework both for assessment and monitoring and supporting progression.

Assessment for Learning?

The report started with a recognition of the importance of an 'atmosphere of readiness' and for the importance therefore of an 'assessment for learning' approach, for example: developing classroom talk and questioning; giving appropriate feedback; sharing assessment criteria with learners; enabling peer- and self-assessment; developing thoughtful and active Learners (James et al., 2007). Although there are examples of some of these elements beginning to occur (e.g. of elements of peer-assessment), there is a lot of fundamental work to be carried out for this approach to be successful. There is strong evidence that an assessment for learning approach is indeed effective and worthwhile (James et al., 2007; Hattie, 2009). If the Government wishes to both address the assessment of speaking and listening and see assessment as an aide to learning, then the simple introduction of the assessment tasks to be carried out by teachers (as in the Indian example) will not suffice. However, this may be more than can be realistically achieved at present. It may be that 'assessment for learning' should be seen as a longer term goal.

4.2 Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

This study took place in the context of educational reform currently underway in Bangladesh. The national education policy emphasises the learning of English for communicative purposes, with the secondary curriculum intended to enable all students to achieve communicative competence in all four English language skills at pre-intermediate level.[16] The English language curriculum is embodied in secondary textbooks (English for Today, EfT) and supported by Teachers Editions of the textbook containing lesson plans and guidance designed to promote communicative classroom practices. However, concerns remained about backwash effects from external examinations. Terminal examinations assess only the skills of reading and writing, not speaking and listening, with an emphasis on recall and grammar translation skills, rather than communicative competence. Although the government has instructed secondary schools to carry out continuous assessment of speaking and listening skills[17] it was unknown how 'ready' the system was to implement this. The purpose of this study was to

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[16]   E.g. at Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level A2
[17]   intended to carry a 20% weighting in the final assessment

in ten teachers (12%) do not achieve the student target (being at A1 or below). In interview, many teachers expressed concern about their own level of English and requested information on how and where they could improve their English skills. However, almost half of the teaching population (45%) do have communicative competence higher than the target level for students (i.e.45% of teachers achieved CEFR B1 or above).

Fourthly, Bangladesh curriculum student competency statements for speaking and listening are generic and broad, with little progression in the descriptors for successive grades (school-years). In current form, the statements provide little by way of guidance that could support the development of teaching or assessment practices. Teachers did not refer to the competency statements either in their classroom activities or in interview. Experience from India suggests that explicit, detailed criteria[20], with clear progression between levels, can act as both a support to the teaching of speaking and listening skills and as a framework for assessment (see Appendix 5: Case Study).

These four factors severely constrain the present readiness of the secondary school system to introduce school-based assessment (continuous or summative) of speaking and listening skills at CEFR A1-A2. The findings of this study indicate the system is not yet in a sufficient state of readiness to effectively implement such reform, without significant and sustained development activity. The introduction of effective assessment of language functions at CEFR A1 and above is likely to require a profound (even a paradigm) shift for many teachers, both in terms of their understanding of and practices in the teaching and assessment of speaking and listening skills.

Contextual factors suggest starting points upon which the necessary development activity may be built:

- There is widespread support for increasing the emphasis on speaking and listening skills amongst teachers, students and community members.
- The textbooks and teacher editions (and supporting audio and video resources) are already designed to promote communicative practices
- There is broad agreement with the policy analysis that assessment reform will be necessary, although terminal exams are emphasised by participants.
- Almost half of the ELT population have communicative skills above the student target
- School Based Teacher Development initiatives in Bangladesh demonstrate teachers can begin to introduce more communicative classroom practices over brief periods of a year or so, bringing associated gains in student communicative competency[21]
- Widespread teacher ownership of multi-media feature-phones (and smartphones) and GoB initiatives for multi-media classrooms, may provide mobile-learning support for teacher development and student assessment activities, as well as opportunities for moderation.

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[20]   In the ASL case study, the Trinity GESE grade descriptors provided the foundations for student competency statements. These map onto CEFR levels, but give a greater level of clarity and insight than the CEFR descriptors. GESE levels are also finer grained (covering twelve levels rather than six) making it easier to identify and encourage smaller achievements within CEFR levels, or even below CEFR A1. See Appendix 5g.

[21]   See EIA research evidence summaries.

Recommendations

1. Future sector-wide programmes should provide significant and sustained support to ELTs, helping them develop appropriate understanding, confidence and competence to effectively teach and assess speaking and listening skills at CEFR A1-A2.

    a. Training and Development should specifically target:
        i. competence in teaching speaking and listening skills to students
        ii. access to and use of audio listening passages,[22] for teaching and assessment
        iii. effective questioning techniques to ascertain student comprehension
        iv. the use of level descriptors or competency statements in teaching and assessment
        v. techniques for formal assessment of listening and speaking skills
        vi. moderation and verification protocols for assessment

    b. The potential of School Based Teacher Development (SBTD) approaches and mobile learning should be full explored.[23] In particular, lessons should be learned from:
        i. SBTD programmes enabling teachers to teach speaking and listening skills effectively in Bangladesh
        ii. Large-scale Assessment of Speaking and Listening programmes in India

    iii. International research evidence[24]

2. Options for introducing school-based assessment of speaking and listening skills within the terminal examinations, as well as continuous assessment, should be explored.

    a. The inclusion of marks for speaking and listening in final assessments will require development of clear assessment protocols (e.g. a standard set of procedures by which assessments are carried out).
    b. Robust procedures for moderation and verification of assessments will need to be developed and implemented, possibly drawing upon the examples of ASL in India.

3. Mechanisms should be identified for improving the teachers' own competence in speaking and listening skills, where needed.

    a. Existing self-study courses should be explored (including the English Language for Teachers course, specifically developed to support teachers delivering the secondary school curriculum in Bangladesh, as well as other resources).
    b. Where possible, advantage should be taken of the large numbers of teachers who do have good communicative skills in English, to help less proficient peers, either within schools or between schools. This might involve informal English language clubs or more formal programmes.

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[22] Audio listening passages have already been developed to accompany the textbook and are available online.
[23] For example, to understand why different approaches to teacher development in Bangladesh have had varying degrees of impact on classroom practices or learning outcomes.
[23] See Appendix 5.h International Evidence on Effective Teacher Development

4. Student competency statements within the Bangladesh secondary curriculum should be revised to provide explicit guidance about the language functions, lexis and communicative skills expected, with clear progression between levels and student-year-grades.

   a. The CEFR and GESE level descriptors should be drawn upon as guiding documents

   b. Teachers and students alike will need to be made familiar with revised competency statements, including their content, purpose and use to inform teaching and learning

5. More in-depth or larger scale research may be required to inform the development of a strategic road-map

Appendix 5.a References

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