



**English Listening and Speaking Assessment
in Bangladesh Higher Secondary Schools:
A Baseline Study**

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Literature Review.....	3
2.1	English in Bangladesh.....	3
2.2	Bangladesh Higher Secondary English curriculum.....	4
2.3	Previous baseline studies on English language learning, teaching and assessment in Bangladesh.....	6
2.3.1	English in Action (2009) baseline study	6
2.3.2	Open University (2015) baseline study.....	9
2.4	Implications for the present study.....	9
3	Considering the English Language Learning Outcomes for Bangladesh Higher Secondary School through a CEFR Lens.....	11
3.1	Introduction	11
3.2	Methodology.....	11
3.2.1	Participants	11
3.2.2	Procedure.....	12
3.3	Findings	13
3.4	Conclusions of the expert review of the learning outcomes.....	26
4	Higher Secondary Schools Visited.....	28
5	Classroom Observations	29
5.1	Methodology.....	29
5.1.1	Participants	29
5.1.2	Procedure.....	29
5.2	Findings	31
5.2.1	School environment and classroom facilities	31
5.2.2	Type of classroom activities observed	31
5.2.3	Language and nature of classroom interaction	33
5.2.4	Type of assessments observed	35
5.3	Conclusions of the classroom observations.....	36
6	Teacher Interviews.....	37
6.1	Methodology.....	37
6.1.1	Participants	37
6.1.2	Procedure.....	37
6.2	Findings	38
6.2.1	Reflections on the observed lesson	38
6.2.2	Listening.....	40
6.2.3	Speaking.....	42
6.2.4	Assessment issues.....	44
6.2.5	Teacher’s English proficiency.....	49
6.3	Conclusions of the teacher interviews.....	51
7	Student Focus Groups.....	51
7.1	Methodology.....	52
7.1.1	Participants	52
7.1.2	Procedure.....	52

7.2	Findings	53
7.2.1	Listening	53
7.2.2	Speaking	56
7.2.3	General.....	59
7.3	Conclusions of the student focus groups.....	60
8	Community Focus Groups.....	61
8.1	Methodology.....	61
8.1.1	Participants	61
8.1.2	Procedure.....	62
8.2	Findings	63
8.2.1	Listening	63
8.2.2	Speaking.....	68
8.3	Conclusions of the community member focus groups	72
9	Overall Conclusions and Recommendations	73
10	References	77
11	Appendices.....	79
11.1	Participant information sheet: Language testing experts	79
11.2	Consent form: Language testing experts.....	81
11.3	Participant information sheet: Teachers	82
11.4	Consent form: Teachers.....	84
11.5	Participant information sheet: Students	85
11.6	Consent form: Students.....	87
11.7	Participant information sheet: Community members.....	88
11.8	Consent form: Community members	90
11.9	Personal background questionnaire: Language testing experts.....	91
11.10	Personal background questionnaire: School principals.....	92
11.11	Personal background questionnaire: Teachers	94
11.12	Personal background questionnaire: Students.....	95
11.13	Personal background questionnaire: Community members.....	96
11.14	Learning Outcome – CEFR sheet.....	97
11.15	Classroom observation schedule	102
11.16	Teacher interview guide	104
11.17	Student focus group guide.....	106
11.18	Community focus group guide.....	107

Tables

Table 1: English listening and speaking learning outcomes for Bangladesh Higher Secondary Education	5
Table 2: CEFR scales relevant to listening and speaking (Council of Europe, n.d.).....	12
Table 3: Teachers' English listening ability (CEFR)	50
Table 4: Teachers' English speaking ability (CEFR).....	51

Figures

Figure 1: Proportion of listening activities as reported by English teachers	40
Figure 2: Proportion of speaking activities as reported by English teachers.....	42
Figure 3: Proportion of teachers assessing listening	45
Figure 4: Proportion of teachers trained in assessing listening.....	45
Figure 5: Proportion of teachers assessing speaking.....	46
Figure 6: Proportion of teachers trained in assessing speaking	46
Figure 7: Students' views on understanding spoken English.....	54
Figure 8: Students' views on speaking English.....	57

1 Introduction

In recent years, a number of studies have been conducted to explore the state of play of the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking skills in Primary and Lower Secondary Schools in Bangladesh, i.e. Grades 1 to 10 (see e.g., English in Action, 2015; Power et al., 2016). To our knowledge, however, no studies so far have focused on the teaching and assessment of these skills in the upper two years of secondary school, i.e. Grades 11 and 12 of Higher Secondary School in Bangladesh. Therefore, in light of proposals by the Bangladesh Ministry of Education for changes to the assessment of English listening and speaking skills, and in order to gain more comprehensive insights into the teaching and assessment of English in the education system as a whole, a baseline study specifically focusing on the Higher Secondary level was called for. More concretely, as part of an institutional partnership in the area of assessment research with the British Council in Bangladesh, the Department of Linguistics and English Language at Lancaster University (UK) was tasked to investigate **current practices and perceptions on English listening and speaking assessment in Bangladesh Higher Secondary Schools** – locally also called ‘colleges’.

To this end, a study was designed aiming to gain insights, through a wide range of data sources, into classroom practices and perceptions on English listening and speaking in Higher Secondary Schools. Since one of the aims of the Ministry of Education was to establish an overview of the practices and perceptions for the education system as a whole, the present study’s research design was largely kept similar to that of a recently conducted baseline study by Power et al. (2016) which focused on the Lower Secondary Level (Grades 6 to 10). This shared research design will enable comparison of findings across levels of education.

More specifically, the present study aimed to explore the following two research questions, adapted from the Power et al. study (2016, p.5):

- RQ1. How ready are English language teachers in Higher Secondary schools in Bangladesh to implement continuous assessment of their students’ English listening and speaking skills?
- RQ2. Are there identifiable contextual factors that promote or inhibit the development of effective assessment of listening and speaking in English?

Answers to these research questions were sought in the following manners. First, a number of existing sources relevant to the topic of English language learning, teaching, and assessment in Bangladesh were consulted. This helped the researchers to gain more insights into the research context and finalise the study’s methodological design (i.e. development of research instruments and data analysis procedures). Importantly, this desk research included a review of the present curriculum for the learning, teaching, and assessment of English in Bangladesh Higher Secondary Schools, thereby specifically focusing on those parts of the curriculum aims, objectives and assessments that relate to the skills of listening and speaking. This **review of existing research** is presented in Section 2 of this report.

Secondly, as part of the institutional partnership with the British Council in Bangladesh, the Lancaster University researchers were asked to explore any potential relationship between the learning outcomes stipulated in the curriculum and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001). To this end, a group of language testing experts familiar with the CEFR provided their views on potential relationships between relevant curriculum Learning Outcome statements and CEFR descriptors and levels. The methodology followed for obtaining the experts' views, as well as findings and conclusions on this **exploration of potential relationships between the Higher Secondary School listening and speaking Learning Outcomes and the CEFR** are reported in Section 3.

Next, the study moved into the main empirical phase. Namely, in order to gain insights into how English listening and speaking skills are currently taught and assessed at Higher Secondary Schools, and what stakeholder's views are on this, fieldwork was conducted in Bangladesh. More specifically, 22 Higher Secondary Schools in four different regions of the country were visited by one of the researchers, together with Bangladeshi British Council employees. More detailed information on these schools can be found in Section 4 of this report.

At each school, an English lesson was observed, thereby specifically focusing on any classroom activities relevant to the teaching and assessment of students' English listening and speaking skills. The methodology used to conduct the observations, and findings and conclusions from these **classroom observations** are provided in Section 5.

In addition, as part of the research, important stakeholders were consulted to gather further information on current practices and views on the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking skills at Higher Secondary School level. Namely, at each of the 22 schools visited, the teacher (locally also referred to as 'lecturer') whose lesson had been observed was interviewed. This helped collect additional insights into the listening and speaking activities teachers conduct in their English classes and also insights into teachers' practices and views on the assessment of their learners' English listening and speaking skills. The classroom observations and teacher interviews were furthermore used to obtain a rough estimate of the teachers' proficiency in speaking English and understanding spoken English. In addition, at each school, students were also consulted. More specifically, focus groups were held with students to explore this key stakeholder group's views on the English listening and speaking activities they do in class and on learning English more generally. Finally, at each school, relevant views on the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking skills were sought from a wider group of stakeholders. Namely, focus groups were held with community members, i.e. members of the schools' Governing Bodies (principals, vice-principals, teachers' and parents' representatives, and founding members of the Governing Bodies/School). The methodology, findings and conclusions from the **interviews with English teachers** can be found in Section 6, of the **focus group discussions with students** currently enrolled in Higher Secondary School in Section 7, and of the **focus group discussions with community members** in Section 8.

Finally, this report concludes by summarising the findings from the various phases of the study, thereby highlighting key issues and considerations (see Section 9). As part of this final section, a number of recommendations are also formulated to help a successful implementation of

continuous assessment of the English listening and speaking skills of Higher Secondary School students in Bangladesh.

Ethical approval for the study was gained from Lancaster University's *FASS-LUMS Research Ethics Committee*. All schools and research participants involved in the study were orally briefed in Bangla on the nature of the study and their involvement, as well as on data management and withdrawal procedures. This followed the oral consent which had first been gained from each school's principal, who had also been provided with a letter from the Ministry of Education confirming the Ministry's approval of the research. In addition, all participants were provided written information sheets and consent forms in Bangla (see Appendices 11.1 to 11.8 for English versions). Participation was voluntary, and written consent was gained from all teachers, students, and community members who took part in the study.

2 Literature Review

To gain more insights into the research context, and, more importantly, to inform the development of the research instruments and enable an effective interpretation of the data collected, a review of a number of previous research and reports was undertaken. The documents, relevant to the role of English language learning, teaching, and assessment in Bangladesh were made available to the Lancaster University researchers by the British Council. This desk research enriched the research design, and helped ensure valid data analyses as well as providing contextualisation to the conclusions and recommendations.

Below, we provide a summary of the key pieces of information gained through our desk research, which constitute the background against which the present Higher Secondary School study was conducted and with which the collected data is compared and contrasted. First, in Section 2.1, the role of English in Bangladesh society is briefly presented. Next, in Section 2.2, key aspects of the present curriculum statement for the learning, teaching, and assessment of English in Bangladesh Higher Secondary Schools are described, in particular objectives that are directly related to English listening and speaking. This is followed, in Section 2.3, by a summary of the main findings of previous empirical studies on English language learning, teaching and assessment in Bangladesh, which have so far primarily concentrated on the Primary and Lower Secondary School levels, with hardly any information available on the practices and stakeholder perceptions at Higher Secondary School level. Finally, Section 2.4 describes some of the implications of the insights gained through the desk research for the design, data collection and data interpretations of the present study.

2.1 English in Bangladesh

Although Bangla is the official and most commonly-used language of Bangladesh, proficiency in English has been argued to be vital for the country's future. According to a Euromonitor International report (Pinon & Haydon, 2010), English proficiency plays a critical role in the international manufacturing and services markets (e.g. the telecom industry, banking, retailing, mining), and thus the country's economy. English is also reported to be widely used by government bodies and in urban areas. Furthermore, English proficiency is considered important for individuals,

since “a solid grasp of English” (Pinon & Haydon, 2010, p.86) is associated with higher employment opportunities and pay, with salaries gaps of up to 15% between those who can and cannot communicate in English (Pinon & Haydon, 2010). The Euromonitor International report states that “English speakers in the business environment are expected to speak English to at least intermediate level” (Pinon & Haydon, 2010, p.110), with employees in sectors such as foreign trade and telecommunications needing higher levels of English communicative ability. At the same time, Pinon and Haydon (2010) report that, in 2009, only 18% of the Bangladesh population spoke English (p.87).

A number of government initiatives have been taken to help develop the population’s English proficiency, including making English a compulsory subject from the start of Primary School (Grade 1) until the end of Secondary School (Grade 12). Nevertheless, students’ performance in English is still reported as low, and its status “is still widely an area-specific language confined to academia” influenced by historical-political factors (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014, p.1).

2.2 Bangladesh Higher Secondary English curriculum

Following the adoption of a National Education Policy in 2010, a new English curriculum was set out for Grades 11 & 12 (i.e., Bangladesh Higher Secondary School), building on the English curriculum developed for Grades 1-10 in terms of content focus and pedagogic approach. More specifically, the new curriculum set out to implement a communicative language teaching approach in order to equip learners with the necessary English language skills for a globalized world (English Curriculum For Eleven & Twelve, 2012, p. 24). Key aims of this approach, as specified in the curriculum document, are to develop students’ English language proficiency in all four language skills in an integrated, interactive, and contextualised manner, while at the same time “reinforcing learners’ accurate use of language” through the teaching of communicative English grammar (English Curriculum For Eleven & Twelve, 2012, p.25). These aims have been translated into a set of 20 learning outcomes (English Curriculum For Eleven & Twelve, 2012, p.26), 18 of which target more than one language skill.

Since this research project specifically focuses on the assessment of learners’ English listening and speaking skills, the Learning Outcome statements which were of particular relevance to these two language skills were extracted from the curriculum document. This led to the identification of 16 main Learning Outcomes that relate to listening and/or speaking, with 11 of these involving listening (L) and 13 involving speaking (S) (English Curriculum For Eleven & Twelve, 2012, p.26-27) (see Table 1). It should be noted that most outcomes, in fact, do not target one skill in isolation, but often involve the combination of several language skills. An overview of the listening and speaking outcomes is presented in Table 1. Some of these statements, however, contain multiple function verbs (e.g. describe, understand, critically analyse) as part of one individual Learning Outcome. Where this was the case, the Learning Outcome was divided into two or more sub-statements in order to explore it more specifically.

Table 1: English listening and speaking learning outcomes for Bangladesh Higher Secondary Education

No.	Skill(s)	Learning outcome
1	L S L&S	a. Follow instructions, directions, requests, announcements b. Give instructions, directions, requests, announcements c. Respond accordingly in social situations
2	L	Follow lectures
3	S (&L)	Describe people, places, and different cultures
4	S	Narrate incidents and events in a logical sequence
5	S S & L	a. Ask for suggestions/opinions b. Give suggestions/opinions
6	S & L	Participate in conversations, discussions, and debates
7	S S & L	a. Tell stories b. Analyse stories
8	L S	a. Recognize English sounds, stress and intonation appropriately while listening and speaking b. Use English sounds, stress and intonation appropriately while listening and speaking
9	L	Listen for specific information on radio, television, and other announcements
10	L L L & S L & S	If orally delivered: a. Understand stories, short plays, poems, and other literary pieces b. Enjoy stories, short plays, poems, and other literary pieces c. Interpret stories, short plays, poems, and other literary pieces d. Critically appreciate stories, short plays, poems, and other literary pieces
11	S	Critically appreciate nonfiction works
12	L L	If orally delivered: a. Understand authentic texts and signs i.e. instructions, directions, notices b. Follow authentic texts and signs i.e. instructions, directions, notices
14	S	Describe a process
17	S L L	a. Describe maps, charts, graphs, etc. If orally presented: b. Understand maps, charts, graphs, etc. c. Interpret maps, charts, graphs, etc.
18	S & L	Carry out study/survey/project
20	S	Speak English accurately in all aspects of communication

Another important part of the curriculum document concerns the stipulation of two compulsory exam papers, including a description of their content focus and section weightings. An analysis of this information indicates the following:

- a) Limited weight is currently allocated to the assessment of listening and speaking skills, namely 10% each of the first exam paper (vs. 40% for reading and writing) and no assessment in the second exam paper (vs. 45% grammar and 55% composition).
- b) Listening and speaking skills need to be assessed through continuous assessment, developed by the teachers themselves (vs. the testing of reading, language in use, and writing through centrally commissioned examinations).
- c) Listening should be assessed using the item formats of multiple-choice, gap filling, and matching.

- d) Speaking assessments need to elicit short descriptive/narrative performances and question answers on familiar topics. The performances need to be assessed in terms of length (5-10 sentences), coherence, acceptable English, and pronunciation.

From the perspective of the qualities of test usefulness (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) – *reliability, construct validity, authenticity, interactiveness, impact, and practicality* – a number of risks and issues can be identified with the current assessment approach as stipulated in the English Curriculum For Eleven & Twelve (2012):

- a) The current assessment approach risks negative washback in terms of more limited attention to English listening and speaking development in the classroom.
- b) The approach places full assessment responsibility for these skills on the English teacher, risking negative washback and assessment validity issues if teachers are not extensively trained in all aspects of the assessment of listening and speaking skills.
- c) Although the specified listening test formats can be useful, they carry with them the risk of also testing reading as each of these formats is typically associated with considerably written information on the item/question side (vs. the oral input side), unless they are for example picture-response items. In addition, although these item formats can be useful with respect to those learning outcomes that focus more narrowly on listening skills, they may not lend themselves to measuring comprehension as formulated in the more interactive learning outcomes (which combine various skills). Thus, they may not encourage the more interactive and integrated teaching approaches as aimed for by the curriculum.
- d) Although it is good to see some hints on the speaking assessment criteria which should be applied in the speaking section of the exam, there is a risk of scoring reliability and validity issues, since not all of these are clear (e.g., How is 'acceptable English' defined?). There is also scope for additional/alternative criteria to measure communicative aspects of spoken language performance (e.g., task achievement, fluency). Strong emphasis on linguistic accuracy and pronunciation risk negative washback.

2.3 Previous baseline studies on English language learning, teaching and assessment in Bangladesh

2.3.1 English in Action (2009) baseline study

In 2008, a large-scale project, called *English in Action (EiA)*, was funded by the UK Department for International Development, aiming “to equip 25 million Bangladeshis with English language skills that will enable them to participate more effectively in economic and social activities” (Research & Learning Group Bangladesh, October 2009, p.3). In the first phase, the project involved a total of six baseline studies on (1) the English proficiency of learners and teachers, (2) people’s motivations to learn and experiences with the English language, (3) the learning and teaching of English in Primary and Lower Secondary Schools, (4) English teaching materials used, (5) the training of English language teachers, and (6) use and availability of technology in Bangladesh.

Although the EiA baseline focused on English teaching and learning, and teachers and learners in Primary and Lower Secondary Schools, no data were collected for Higher Secondary Schools. Nevertheless, the findings of the EiA project provide important contextual information for the present study, which focuses on Higher Secondary Schools, by describing English language

learning and teaching at the levels preceding Grades 11 & 12. Thus, the EiA baseline provides insights into the situation at the entry point into Higher Secondary as well as into the broader societal context. Furthermore, although the EiA baseline conclusions represent the status quo at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, when the EiA baseline was conducted, it is expected that, even though developments and changes may have taken place over the last 5-7 years, it is unlikely that these will have been drastic (apart from, potentially, the advances in spread of technology).

Key findings from the six baseline studies, that may be particularly relevant to the present study, can be summarised as follows:

Baseline study 1: English language proficiency (English in Action, 2009a)

Most English language teachers in Bangladesh Primary and Lower Secondary Schools are (developing towards becoming) *Basic Users* of English, as measured on the Trinity College London GESE grades and expressed in Common European Framework of Reference levels (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001). Of the 137 teachers assessed in the study, the English proficiency of 11% of the English teachers was below A1, 16% was at A1, and 34% was at A2. Close to 40% of the teachers were *Independent Users* of English, with 26% being at B1 and 13% at B2 level. No teachers in the baseline were categorised as *Proficient Users*.

More than half the English language learners in Bangladesh Primary and Lower Secondary Schools (53%) operate below the A1 level of the CEFR, as measured through Trinity College London's GESE grades. Most other learners are *Basic Users* of English: 20% and 22% of the nearly 2000 students assessed in the EiA baseline are at the A1 and A2 level, respectively. As little as 5% of the students are *Independent Users* of English (3% B1, 2% B2), and none are *Proficient Users*.

By the time they have reached Grade 10, the year preceding Higher Secondary School, a quarter of the students' English proficiency is still below the A1 level of the CEFR and another quarter is only at A1 level. Almost 40% are at the A2 level, and only 12% of the Grade 10 students are *Independent Users* of English, operating at the B1 level (as measured in the EiA baseline study).

Baseline study 2: English language learning motivation and experience (English in Action, 2009b)

A minority of students, teachers, and community members listen to songs, stories, or radio programmes in English, read magazines or newspapers in English, use the internet in English, write letters, e-mails, stories or poems in English, or speak to foreigners in English. The majority, however, watch TV programmes in English.

More than half of the students, teachers, and community members surveyed in the EiA baseline thought that a knowledge of English was very much necessary for Bangladesh and for them personally. The overall majority of students also thought that learning English was needed to be able to pursue higher studies in colleges and universities, which they would like to do. At the same time, most students, teachers, and community members considered that English was difficult to learn, and many students (in particular in NGO schools) estimated their own English ability as average. They particularly thought speaking in English was the most challenging of the four skills, even though the majority of students, teachers, and community members indicated that spoken English was vital for their future.

Baseline study 3: English classroom observations (English in Action, 2009c)

On the basis of 252 observations of English language lessons in Primary and Secondary Schools, it was concluded that classroom facilities are limited to the bare essentials (tidy, clean rooms; natural light; blackboard and chalk; student desks). Additional learning and teaching materials are scarce, with textbooks, exercise books and something to write with often being the only teaching aids and being available to many but often not always all learners.

The pedagogic approach taken in the English lessons can typically be characterised as traditional forms of lecturing, with few activities reflecting more communicative approaches to language learning. Although teachers were observed to interact positively with students, few task-based activities or activities that stimulate oral communication were employed by teachers. Instead, many teachers adopt a textbook-oriented approach, teach from the front of the class, ask closed questions, and do not seem to follow a lesson plan. As a consequence, a minority of students speaks during English lessons, with most being described as ‘passive learners’. Furthermore, extensive use of Bangla, rather than English, was observed in many English lessons.

Baseline study 4: English teaching materials (English in Action, 2009d)

Only limited print materials are available for the teaching of English at the Primary and Lower Secondary School levels, with the quality of materials being described as poor, variable, and outdated in terms of content focus, learning activities, and language use. This observation is particularly associated with government textbooks, with Primary level NGO materials being more age- and context-appropriate and reflective of more communicative approaches to language learning and teaching.

Baseline study 5: English language teacher training (English in Action, 2009e)

In Primary Schools, English is taught by the regular primary school teachers for whom English is one of the entire range of subjects they teach. At the time of conducting the EiA baseline, no specific training in English language teaching was offered to primary school teachers by the government.

Secondary school teachers of English, who tend to specialise more in this particular subject area, have seen the range of English language teacher training opportunities increase over recent years. One concern, however, is the low level of communicative English skills reported for both teacher trainers as well as teacher participants in such training initiatives, which restricts the effectiveness of the teacher training as well as capacity to instil communicative fluency in English language learners.

Baseline study 6: Technology (English in Action, 2009f)

Only a very small proportion of the population owns computers or has access to the Internet, with slightly higher figures for urban areas and male users. Similarly, although approximately a quarter of households have a TV, this is more so in urban areas, where there is also considerably more supply of electricity (even though not always stable). Approximately one quarter of the population in rural areas, on the other hand, have access to radios. The most widely spread technological device, with

reported nearly complete network coverages in both urban and rural areas, are mobile phones, with subscription numbers close to 1/3 of the population size.

2.3.2 Open University (2015) baseline study

In 2015, a new baseline study was conducted by the Open University (Power et al., 2016), in partnership with the British Council in Bangladesh, this time specifically focusing on a) assessment, and b) the skills of listening and speaking. The study aimed to gain insights into the current assessment practices at the Lower Secondary levels in Bangladesh, i.e. Grades 6-10, and contextual factors that may have an impact on these. Through a combination of desk research, classroom observations, teacher interviews, and focus groups with students and community members, a number of developments since the 2009 EiA baseline were observed as well as some continuing challenging areas.

The Power et al. (2016) technical report concluded that there is currently a receptive climate for further shifts towards communicative approaches to English language learning, especially favourable views are held among students, teachers and community members with a heightened emphasis on listening and speaking skills. It was also found that English is now mostly used as the medium in English lessons, and teachers have started introducing, albeit still in limited form, more interactive activities in their classes, which involve the employment of listening and speaking skills. Overall, however, a mismatch was found between the communicative language learning objectives outlined in the national curriculum and the prevalence of teacher talk, choral chanting, traditional classroom seating arrangements, limited resource materials (primarily the textbook), and a lack of focus on listening and speaking skills development. Some of the factors that may play a role in the current gap between the curriculum and classroom practice were identified as a) English language teachers' lack of confidence, competence, and training to teach and assess listening and speaking in accordance with the approaches implied in the curriculum objectives, b) the lack of testing listening and speaking skills in the examinations, and, importantly, c) the level of English proficiency of the teachers. With respect to the latter, a new EiA study in 2015 revealed that more than half of the English language teachers in secondary schools (55%) are only at or even below the students' target CEFR level of CEFR A2, as measured through the Trinity College London GESE grades. Only 42% of the teachers are *Independent Users* (the majority of these being at B1 level), and 3% *Proficient Users* (C1).

Similar to the EiA (2009a-f) baseline studies, the Power et al. (2016) findings provide important information on the learning, teaching, and assessment of English in the Bangladesh school system, and particularly give insights into the circumstances at the point of entry into Higher Secondary Education.

2.4 Implications for the present study

Overall, the above summaries of the findings of the English in Action (2009a-f, 2015) and Power et al. (2016) publications, which focused on Primary and Lower Secondary School, formed the backdrop against which the present study's findings on Higher Secondary Schools have been interpreted. On the one hand, these previous studies shed light on the situation at the point of entry into Higher

Secondary School. On the other hand, the present study extends previous research to the final stage of the school system and enables a comprehensive baseline for the entire school system.

The review of available research and reports relevant to the role of English language learning, teaching, and assessment in Bangladesh also led to a number of concrete implications for the present study:

- On the basis of our analysis of the learning outcomes stipulated in the English Curriculum For Eleven & Twelve (2012), we developed a **booklet** to be used by language testing experts as part of an exploration of any potential relationship between the learning outcomes and the CEFR. More specifically, the booklet **contained a table with those learning outcomes from the curriculum that involve listening and speaking skills, as well as space for the experts to note down relevant CEFR levels, CEFR scale(s), and justifications for their level suggestions** (see Appendix 11.14).
- On the basis of the English in Action baseline studies (2009a-f, 2015) of English teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools, and on the basis of the Power et al. (2016) baseline of English listening and speaking assessment in Lower Secondary School, we developed several instruments for data collection:
 - a) **four personal background questionnaires** – for school principals, for English teachers, for students, and for community members (see Appendices 11.10 to 11.13);
 - b) **a classroom observation schedule**, designed to specifically record observations and activities relevant to the learning, teaching, and assessment of listening and speaking skills, as well as to form an initial impression of the teacher’s English proficiency in CEFR levels, if they used English in their lesson (see Appendix 11.15);
 - c) **a semi-structured interview guide** to elicit further information from English teachers on their current practices and views relevant to the learning, teaching, and assessment of English listening and speaking. The guide consisted of an introductory phase following up on their observed class, a more structured phase on the listening and speaking activities they conduct in class (what? why? how? challenges?), a phase explicitly focusing on the assessment of listening and speaking (current practices, challenges, training, importance, views), and a space to note down an evaluation of the teacher’s English proficiency level in CEFR terms (see Appendix 11.16);
 - d) **a focus group discussion guide** to gain insights into Grade 11 & 12 students’ views of their English listening and speaking ability, and on activities inside and outside the classroom that may enhance their listening and speaking proficiency (see Appendix 11.17);
 - e) **a focus group discussion guide** to collect data on community members’ views on the role and importance of the use, development, and assessment of English listening and speaking skills of Higher Secondary students, and the role of the English teacher in this (see Appendix 11.18).

The personal background questionnaires, completed by the participants at the time of data collection (in English by the teachers and school principal, and in Bangla by the students and community members), provided us with information on stakeholder characteristics that may play a role in the assessment of English listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh Higher Secondary Schools. The classroom observation checklist, completed by the field researcher during the observations, provided us with more detailed information on current classroom practices relevant to the assessment of listening and speaking. The interview and focus group guide templates, completed by the field researcher during the interviews and focus groups, formed a direct way to record the views of three key stakeholder groups (teachers, students, community members) on listening and speaking assessment in Bangladesh Higher Secondary Schools.

3 Considering the English Language Learning Outcomes for Bangladesh Higher Secondary School through a CEFR Lens

3.1 Introduction

As part of the research, we were tasked to explore any potential relationship between the Learning Outcomes for English language learning in Bangladesh Higher Secondary Schools as described in the English Curriculum For Eleven & Twelve document (2012) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001).

Below, we detail the methodology that was adopted to consider any potential relationship (similarities, differences) between the Learning Outcomes and the CEFR (Section 3.2). In Section 3.3, we present the results of this exploration, and in Section 3.4 we comment on the experiences from the exploration and formulate suggestions based on these.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Participants

Five language testing experts considered the relationship between the English Learning Outcomes (English Curriculum For Eleven & Twelve, 2012) and the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). Each expert filled out a personal background questionnaire (see Appendix 11.1), providing the bio-data described in this section.

All experts were based at a UK institution. Three were female and two male. Three held doctoral degrees in language testing and two were studying towards a doctoral degree in language testing. Two were from a European background, and three were from non-European backgrounds. One was a native speaker of English, and the other four were highly proficient second language speakers of English. Four had an English language teaching background with 7-19 years' teaching experience (M=13.25 years), and all were English language testers with 10-15 years' testing experience (M=11.8

years). All five had considerable experience with the CEFR (3-15 years; M=9.8 years), having used it for test development, standard setting, test validation, language teaching, curriculum and syllabus design, teacher training, and research purposes.

3.2.2 Procedure

After having provided the experts with an oral introduction to the research project, they were provided with a written information sheet detailing the nature of their participation, withdrawal procedures, and data handling procedures (see Appendix 11.1). If they agreed to take part (participation was voluntary), they then signed a consent form (see Appendix 11.2).

Since the overall research project specifically focuses on the assessment of learners' English listening and speaking skills, the Learning Outcome statements and CEFR scales which were of particular relevance to these two language skills were selected. The 16 relevant Learning Outcomes (and their sub-statements) are those listed in Table 1 in Section 2.2 above. From the Council of Europe (n.d.) document consisting of an overview of all CEFR scales, a total of 43 scales that potentially bear relevance to listening and speaking skills were selected. More specifically, the compilation consisted of the scales listed in Table 2.

Table 2: CEFR scales relevant to listening and speaking (Council of Europe, n.d.)

- The global scale (p.8)
- Illustrative scales on communicative activities:
 - Six scales on receptive comprehension of spoken and audio-visual input (p.8-11),
 - Nine scales on spoken interaction (p.12-19),
 - Five scales on spoken production (p.20-22);
- Illustrative scales on communication strategies:
 - One scale on receptive strategies (p.24)
 - Six scales on interactive strategies (p.25-26)
- Illustrative scales on working with text:
 - Two scales relevant to oral texts (p.26)
- Illustrative scales on communicative language competence:
 - Six scales on linguistic range and control (p.27-29)
 - One scale on sociolinguistic competence (p.29)
 - Six scales on pragmatic competence (p.30-31)

Each of the language testing experts involved in this part of the study was provided with a booklet containing the relevant CEFR scales (see Table 2), and a second booklet listing the English listening and speaking learning outcomes from the Bangladesh English Curriculum for Years 11 and 12 (see Table 1). For each of the learning outcomes, the experts were asked for their views on the potential relationships with the CEFR by noting down relevant CEFR levels, the name of the CEFR scale(s) on which they based their level suggestions, and any other justifications (e.g. quotes from CEFR descriptors). They were also asked to add any comments they felt were important in exploring the relationship between a specific learning outcome statement and the CEFR. The experts entered all this information in a table that was provided for them (see Appendix 11.14).

Each expert started completing the activity individually. After completing the table for the first learning outcome, each expert shared with the group what they had noted down in order to check that everyone had understood the task correctly. The experts then continued to individually complete the table for all learning outcomes. When everyone had finished, the experts were invited to share their general experiences and comments on the activity.

3.3 Findings

Below, the experts' views are presented on potential relationships between the Bangladesh Higher Secondary Learning Outcomes (English Curriculum For Eleven & Twelve, 2012) and the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). For each Learning Outcome (LO), the following results are presented:

- one or more relevant CEFR levels, as suggested by the experts (note that in several cases individual experts noted down more than one level; they explained the reasons for this in their comments);
- the CEFR scales which the experts reported to have informed their level suggestions;
- justifications and/or comments provided by the experts, including copies of CEFR descriptors quoted by the experts. The acronym of the relevant CEFR scale has been added to each descriptor statement for future reference.

LO1a. Follow instructions, directions, requests, announcements (LISTENING)

CEFR level(s): A2 – B1 – B2

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Listening to announcements & instructions (p.9) LAI
- Overall listening comprehension (p.8) OLC

Justification/comments: The focus of LO1a links well with the above-mentioned CEFR scale. However, the issue is that the learning outcome statement contains no qualifiers. There is no indication of the extent to which, or the way in which, learners need to be able to follow instructions etc. The CEFR, however, makes such distinctions for the different levels. As a consequence, this learning outcome can be argued to relate to several different CEFR levels, depending on how one fills in the missing quantifying information.

It can be seen to relate to the B2 level if generally comfortable comprehension is aimed for in a good range of 'standard' situations, to the B1 level if the focus of LO1a is considered to be more general and related to everyday contexts, and to the A2 level if only basic messages need to be understood. The experts, however, did not feel C1 level applied, since this specifically refers to poor quality input and highly complex technical info, so very specialised and this is not mentioned in the LO.

B2: Can understand announcements and messages on concrete and abstract topics spoken in standard dialect at normal speed. (LAI)

B1: Can understand simple technical information, such as operating instructions for everyday equipment. Can follow detailed directions. (LAI) Can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc. (OLC)

A2: Can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements. Can understand simple directions relating to how to get from X to Y, by foot or public transport. Can understand enough to be able to meet needs of a concrete type provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated. (LAI)

LO1b. Give instructions, directions, requests, announcements (SPEAKING)

CEFR level(s): A2⁺ – B1 – B1⁺

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Information exchange (p.18) IE
- Goal-oriented co-operation (p.16) GOC
- Overall spoken interaction (p.12) OSI

Justification/comments: As pointed out for LO1a, the lack of qualifiers leaves a lot of room for interpretation as to the intended level. If the focus of LO1b is more general, then B1/B1⁺ seems to be the point at which these tasks could be accomplished more reliably.

B1⁺: Can describe how to do something, giving detailed instructions. (IE)

B1: Can find out and pass on straightforward factual information. (IE) Can ask for and follow detailed directions. (IE)

A2⁺: Can discuss what to do next, making and responding to suggestions, asking for and giving directions. (GOC)

LO1c. Respond accordingly in social situations (LISTENING & SPEAKING)

CEFR level(s): A2⁺ – B1 – B2 – B2⁺

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Sociolinguistic appropriateness (p.29) SA
- Pragmatic flexibility (p.30) PF
- Conversation (p.13) C

Justification/comments: Due to the use of the qualifier “accordingly” in LO1c, the learning outcome suggests balance. The ability to respond in an active and effective way seems to be a B2/B2⁺ level skill. If, however, “accordingly” is interpreted more generally at a basic level, it may relate to the A2⁺ level.

B2⁺: Can express him- or herself confidently, clearly and politely in a formal or informal register, appropriate to the situation and person(s) concerned. (SA) Can adjust what he/she says and the means of expressing it to the situation and the recipient and adopt a level of formality appropriate to the circumstances. (PF)

B2: Can express him or herself appropriately in situations. (SA)

B1: Is aware of the salient politeness conventions and acts appropriately. (SA)

A2⁺: Can establish social contact. Can use simple everyday polite forms of greeting and address. (SA)

LO2. Follow lectures (LISTENING)

CEFR level(s): B1⁺ – B2 – C1 – C2

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Listening as a member of a live audience (p.9) (LMLA)

Justification/comments: Due to the bareness of this learning outcome, many different levels can apply. This is because it depends on the type of lecture (specialised or not), its content (familiar or not), its nature (linguistic and structural complexity), and the level of understanding (essentials, details). Without any qualifiers in the learning outcome, even the comprehensiveness of the C2 level applies.

C2: Can follow specialised lectures and presentations employing a high degree of colloquialism, regional usage or unfamiliar terminology. (LMLA)

C1: Can follow most lectures, discussions and debates with relative ease. (LMLA)

B2: Can follow the essentials of lectures, talks and reports and other forms of academic/professional presentation which are propositionally and linguistically complex. (LMLA)

B1⁺: Can follow a lecture or talk within his/her own field, provided the subject matter is familiar and the presentation straightforward and clearly structured. (LMLA)

LO3. Describe people, places, and different cultures (SPEAKING (& LISTENING))

CEFR level(s): A2 – B1

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Overall spoken production (p.20) OSP
- Sustained monologue: Describing experience (p.21) SM-DE

Justification/comments: In its basic form, the ability to describe people and places corresponds to the A2 level. The ability to describe different cultures, however, may rather require B1 level proficiency.

B1: Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest. (OSP) Can give straightforward descriptions on a variety of familiar subjects within his field of interest. (SM-DE)

A2: Can describe people, places and possessions in simple terms. (SM-DE) Can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions. (OSP)

LO4. Narrate incidents and events in a logical sequence (SPEAKING)

CEFR level(s): B1 – B2 – B2⁺ – C1

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Global scale (p.5) GS

- Overall spoken production (p.20) OSP
- Sustained monologue: Describing experience (p.21) SM-DE
- Thematic development (p.30) TD

Justification/comments: At a basic level, the ability to narrate and present events in a linear sequence is associated with the B1 level. More complex forms of narration, in particular when events themselves may not have a strict linear sequence, however, are associated with C1 level proficiency.

C1: Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices. (GS) Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on complex subjects, integrating sub themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion. (OSP) Can give elaborate descriptions and narratives, integrating sub themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion. (TD)

B2⁺: Can give clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations, with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail. (OSP)

B2: Can develop a clear description or narrative, expanding and supporting his/her main points with relevant supporting detail and examples. (TD)

B1: Can reasonably fluently relate a straightforward narrative or description as a linear sequence of points. (TD & SM-DE) Can narrate a story. (SM-DE)

LO5a. Ask for suggestions/opinions (SPEAKING)

CEFR level(s): B1

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Informal discussion (with friends) (p.14) ID(WF)
- Goal-oriented cooperation (p.16) GOC

Justification/comments:

B1: Can give or seek personal views and opinions in discussing topics of interest. (ID(WF)) Can invite others to give their views on how to proceed. (GOC)

LO5b. Give suggestions/opinions (SPEAKING & LISTENING)

CEFR level(s): B1 – B1⁺

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Overall spoken interaction (p.12) OSI
- Conversation (p.13) C
- Informal discussion (with friends) (p.14) ID(WF)
- Information exchange (p.18) IE

Justification/comments:

B1⁺: *Can express his/her thoughts about abstract or cultural topics such as music, films. (ID(WF)) Can summarise and give his or her opinion about a short story, article, talk, discussion interview, or documentary and answer further questions of detail. (IE)*

B1: *Can enter unprepared into conversation of familiar topics, express personal opinions and exchange information on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events). (OSI) Can express and respond to feelings such as surprise, happiness, sadness, interest and indifference. (C) Can express belief, opinion, agreement and disagreement politely. (ID(WF))*

LO6. Participate in conversations, discussions, and debates (SPEAKING & LISTENING)

CEFR level(s): B1 – B2

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Informal discussion (with friends) (p.14) ID(WF)
- Formal discussion (meetings) (p.15) FD(M)
- Conversation (p.13) C

Justification/comments: The focus of LO6 links well with the above-mentioned CEFR scales. However, once again, this learning outcome statement does not contain any qualifiers. Nevertheless, the ability to participate typically suggests an active involvement, which is most closely reflected in B2 descriptors. If it is interpreted in a more narrow and basic form, it may be possible at B1 level, but it would then be restricted to familiar topics, clearly articulated and standard speech.

B2: *Can take an active part in informal discussion in familiar contexts, commenting, putting point of view clearly, evaluating alternative proposals and making and responding to hypotheses. (ID(WF)) Can participate actively in routine and non routine formal discussion. (FDM) Can engage in extended conversation on most general topics in a clearly participatory fashion, even in a noisy environment. (C)*

B1: *Can take part in routine formal discussion of familiar subjects which is conducted in clearly articulated speech in the standard dialect and which involves the exchange of factual information, receiving instructions or the discussion of solutions to practical problems. (FDM) Can enter unprepared into conversations on familiar topics. (C)*

LO7a. Tell stories (SPEAKING)

CEFR level(s): A2 – B1

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Sustained monologue: Describing experience (p.21) SM-DE
- Thematic development (p.30) TD

Justification/comments: The focus of LO7a links well with the above-mentioned CEFR scales. However, once again this learning outcome statement does not contain any qualifiers. In its basic form, this learning outcome reflects A2 level proficiency, when restricted to “a simple list of points”.

If the focus of LO7a is more general, then B1 seems to be the point at which this task can be accomplished more reliably.

B1: *Can narrate a story*. (SM-DE)

A2: *Can tell a story or describe something in a simple list of points*. (SM-DE, TD)

LO7b. Analyse stories (SPEAKING & LISTENING)

CEFR level(s): B1 – B2 – C1

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Information exchange (p.18) IE
- Sustained monologue: Describing experience (p.21) SM-DE
- Processing text (p.26) PT

Justification/comments: In terms of listening, this learning outcome can possibly be achieved at the B1 level. In terms of communicating analytic insights (speaking), B2 seems to be the point at which this can be accomplished more reliably and analytically.

B2: *Can summarise the plot and sequence of events in a film or play*. (PT) *Can summarise a wide range of factual and imaginative texts, commenting on and discussing contrasting points of view and the main themes*. (PT) *Can synthesise and report information and arguments from a number of sources*. (IE)

B1: *Can relate the plot of a book or film and describe his/her reactions*. (SM-DE) *Can summarise and give his or her opinion about a short story, article, talk, discussion interview, or documentary and answer further questions of detail*. (IE)

LO8a. Recognize English sounds, stress and intonation appropriately while listening and speaking (LISTENING)

CEFR level(s): B1 – B1⁺ – B2 – B2⁺ – C1 – C2

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Overall listening comprehension (p.8) OLC

Justification/comments: There is no easy match between this learning outcome and the CEFR, because there is little focus on decoding in listening in the CEFR ('recognize' versus 'comprehension'). B1/ B1⁺ seems to be the level at which speech does not need to be slowed down, although clearly articulated and standard input is needed. It is unclear, however, what "appropriately" means (as used in LO8a) with reference to the ability to "recognize", i.e. decode, oral input. If this means being able to decode all forms of oral input, then this learning outcome is situated even at C1-C2 level.

C2: Has no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, delivered at fast native speed. (OLC)

C1: Can understand enough to follow extended speech on abstract and complex topics beyond his/her own field, though he/she may need to confirm occasional details, especially if the accent is unfamiliar. (OLC)

B2⁺: Can understand standard spoken language, live or broadcast, on both familiar and unfamiliar topics normally encountered in personal, social, academic or vocational life. Only extreme background noise, inadequate discourse structure and/or idiomatic usage influence the ability to understand. (OLC)

B2: Can understand the main ideas of propositionally and linguistically complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in a standard dialect, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. (OLC)

B1⁺: Can understand straightforward factual information about common everyday or job related topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided speech is clearly articulated in a generally familiar accent. (OLC)

B1: Can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc., including short narratives. (OLC)

LO8b. Use English sounds, stress and intonation appropriately while listening and speaking (SPEAKING)

CEFR level(s): B2 – C1

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Phonological control (p.28) PC

Justification/comments: Given the specification in LO8b that the use of English sounds needs to be “appropriate”, the CEFR suggests that this can be done more reliably at the C1 level. It may also be evident at the B2 level if “clear” and “natural” pronunciation and intonation are interpreted as indications of some extent of ‘appropriateness’. At lower levels, however, for example B1, the CEFR stipulates the occurrence of mispronunciations, so these do not seem to match well with being able to use English sounds/stress/intonation “appropriately”.

C1: Can vary intonation and place sentence stress correctly in order to express finer shades of meaning. (PC)

B2: Has a clear, natural, pronunciation and intonation. (PC)

LO9. Listen for specific information on radio, television, and other announcements (LISTENING)

CEFR level(s): / or B1⁺

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- /

or

- Listening to radio audio & recordings (p.9) LRAR
- Watching TV and film (p.10) WTF

Justification/comments: Due to the succinctness of LO9, different interpretations are possible of the ability to “listen for specific information”. If this is intended to mean “being able to listen selectively for specific information such as names, places, numbers, dates, times, acronyms, etc.”, no corresponding CEFR descriptors and scales were identified. However, if “listening for specific information” is intended to mean “understanding detailed information in aural text”, then the CEFR B1⁺ descriptors seem to capture LO9, if “specific information” is understood to fall under “the majority of content”. At lower CEFR levels, comprehension is restricted to main points and essential information (vs specific info in LO9), and the oral input needs to be delivered slowly, so these restrictions suggest that LO9 is less likely to be achievable at lower CEFR levels. Since there is no further qualification of the nature of the oral input in LO9, and if learners also need to be able to cope with more varied speech rates and accents, then B2 and C1 descriptors will apply (at least, if LO9 means “understanding detailed information”).

B1⁺: Can understand the information content of the majority of recorded or broadcast audio material on topics of personal interest delivered in clear standard speech. Can understand a large part of many TV programmes on topics of personal interest such as interviews, short lectures, and news reports when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.

LO10a. (If orally delivered) Understand stories, short plays, poems, and other literary pieces (LISTENING)

CEFR level(s): C1

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Overall listening comprehension (p.8) OLC

Justification/comments: Since LO10a concerns text types such as poems and other literary pieces, and does not include any qualifiers, it seems a C1 level ability is needed, if “understand” is understood to mean that this happens in a comprehensive manner. For example, at this level, learners can process metaphors, idiomatic usage, implied relationships, abstract topics, etc.

If the oral input texts are more restricted in topics, delivery, figurative speech, etc., however, B2 level might apply (*Can understand standard spoken language, live or broadcast, on both familiar and unfamiliar topics normally encountered in personal, social, academic or vocational life. Only extreme background noise, inadequate discourse structure and/or idiomatic usage influence the ability to understand.* (OLC)). LO10a, however, does not specify any such restrictions.

C1: Can understand enough to follow extended speech on abstract and complex topics beyond his/her own field, though he/she may need to confirm occasional details, especially if the accent is unfamiliar. (OLC) Can recognise a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, appreciating register shifts. (OLC) Can follow extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. (OLC)

LO10b. (If orally delivered) Enjoy stories, short plays, poems, and other literary pieces (LISTENING)

CEFR level(s): /

Relevant CEFR scale(s): /

Justification/comments: All experts struggled to identify a CEFR scale and descriptors that express the function verb 'to enjoy'. Therefore, rather than over-interpreting the CEFR, no reference could be made to the CEFR and no relevant levels were suggested by the experts.

LO10c. (If orally delivered) Interpret stories, short plays, poems, and other literary pieces (LISTENING & SPEAKING)

CEFR level(s): B1 – B1⁺ – B2⁺ – C1

Relevant CEFR scale(s): Since this learning outcome includes text types such as poems and other literary pieces and does not include any qualifiers, it seems a C1 level ability is needed. At this level, learners can process metaphors, idiomatic usage, implied relationships, abstract topics, etc. However, if the oral input is more restricted in complexity, topics, genre, etc., learners at B1 level may be able to demonstrate some level of interpretation. The learning outcome statement, however, does not currently specify any such restrictions.

- Overall listening comprehension (p.8) OLC
- Overall spoken interaction (p.12) OSI
- Overall spoken production (p.20) OSP
- Sustained monologue: Describing experience (p.21) SM-DE
- Information exchange (p.18) IE

Justification/comments:

C1: Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on complex subjects, integrating sub themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion. (OSP) Can give elaborate descriptions and narratives, integrating sub themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion (SM-DE) Can recognise a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, appreciating register shifts. (OLC)

B2⁺: Can give clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations, with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail. (OSP)

B1⁺: Can express thoughts on more abstract, cultural topics such as films, books, music etc. (OSI)

B1: Can relate the plot of a book or film and describe his/her reactions. (SM-DE) Can summarise and give his or her opinion about a short story, article, talk, discussion interview, or documentary and answer further questions of detail. (IE)

LO10d. (If orally delivered) Critically appreciate stories, short plays, poems, and other literary pieces (LISTENING & SPEAKING)

CEFR level(s): B2 – C1 – C2

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Sustained monologue: Putting a case (p.21) SM-PC
- Information exchange (p.18) IE
- Processing text (p.26) PT
- Overall spoken interaction (p.20) OSI
- Overall spoken production (p.20) OSP

Justification/comments: This learning outcome statement seems to require at least B2 level proficiency, moving into C1, due to the range of text types, their potential sophistication, and the academic nature of the ability to “critically appreciate”. In its most analytical form, it will need C2 level spoken ability.

C2: Can convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices. (OSI)

C1: Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on complex subjects, integrating sub themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion. (OSP)

B2: Can develop a clear argument, expanding and supporting his/her points of view at some length with subsidiary points and relevant examples. (SM-PC) Can construct a chain of reasoned argument. (SM-PC) Can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. (SM-PC) Can synthesise and report information and arguments from a number of sources. (IE) Can summarise a wide range of factual and imaginative texts, commenting on and discussing contrasting points of view and the main themes. (PT)

LO11. Critically appreciate nonfiction works (SPEAKING)**CEFR level(s):** B2**Relevant CEFR scale(s):**

- Processing text (p.26) PT
- Sustained monologue: Putting a case (p.21) SM-PC

Justification/comments: LO11 seems to require at least B2 level proficiency, where functions related to more critical appreciation are found in the descriptors. B2 level is also the level at which learners can process a variety of non-fiction texts; at lower levels, the text ranges are more limited and restricted to main idea comprehension, which is not sufficient for critical appreciation.

B2: Can summarise a wide range of factual and imaginative texts, commenting on and discussing contrasting points of view and the main themes. (PT) Can develop a clear argument, expanding and supporting his/her points of view at some length with subsidiary points and relevant examples. (SM-PC) Can construct a chain of reasoned argument. (SM-PC)

LO 12a. (If orally delivered) Understand authentic texts and signs i.e. instructions, directions, notices (LISTENING)

and

LO 12b. (If orally delivered) Follow authentic texts and signs i.e. instructions, directions, notices (LISTENING)

CEFR level(s): A2 – B1 – B2 – C1

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Listening to announcements & instructions (p.9) LAI

Justification/comments: Since it was unclear to the experts what the difference is between the function words ‘understand’ and ‘follow’, LO12a and LO12b have been taken together.

Although there is a clear link between LO12 and the CEFR scale ‘Listening to announcements & instructions’, the lack of qualifiers in LO12 means that several levels can be applied. Authentic oral input can range from that which is of poor quality as well as being highly complex – which corresponds with C1 level competency – to simple directions, which corresponds with A2 level competency. The B2 level seems to cover a solid range of standard instructions/directions/notices, so this level may apply if more a reliable picture of this particular type of listening ability is intended with this learning outcome.

C1: Can extract specific information from poor quality, audibly distorted public announcements e.g. in a station, sports stadium etc. (LAI) Can understand complex technical information, such as operating instructions, specifications for familiar products and services. (LAI)

B2: Can understand announcements and messages on concrete and abstract topics spoken in standard dialect at normal speed. (LAI)

B1: Can understand simple technical information, such as operating instructions for everyday equipment. Can follow detailed directions. (LAI)

A2: Can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcement. (LAI) Can understand simple directions relating to how to get from X to Y, by foot or public transport. (LAI)

14. Describe a process (SPEAKING)

CEFR level(s): B1

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Overall spoken production (p.20) OSP

Justification/comments: B1 level proficiency seems to correspond well with LO14. Lower CEFR levels are characterised by isolated/disconnected points, whereas a process is by definition a logical sequence.

B1: *Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points.* (OSP)

17a. Describe maps, charts, graphs, etc. (SPEAKING)

CEFR level(s): B1 – B2 – C1

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Overall spoken production (p.20) OSP
- Sustained monologue: Describing experience (p.21) SM-DE
- Processing text (p.26) PT

Justification/comments: Although the CEFR does not specifically refer to maps, charts, and graphs, the ability to describe more factual information seems to be developing particularly from the B1 level onwards, initially with reference to familiar topics within one's interest (B1) and at higher levels with reference to complex subjects (C1). Thus, due to the lack of qualifiers in LO17, several CEFR levels can be applied.

C1: *Can give clear, detailed descriptions (...) on complex subjects.* (OSP)

B2: *Can give clear, detailed descriptions (...) on a wide range of subjects related to his field of interest.* (OSP)

B1: *Can collate short pieces of information from several sources and summarise them for somebody else. (PT) Can give straightforward descriptions on a variety of familiar subjects within his field of interest.* (SM-DE)

17b. (If orally presented) Understand maps, charts, graphs, etc. (LISTENING)

and

17c. (If orally presented) Interpret maps, charts, graphs, etc. (LISTENING)

CEFR level(s): B2

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Overall listening comprehension (p.8) OLC
- Listening to announcements & instructions (p.9) LAI

Justification/comments: Since it was unclear to the experts what the difference is between the function words 'understand' and 'interpret' with reference to maps/charts/graphs, LO17b and LO17c have been taken together.

If 'understand' is taken to mean in a general sense (simply understanding something at the descriptive level, e.g. how many / what type of people favoured x, y or z in a particular survey on TV programs, displayed in a pie chart), the learning outcome seems to match with the B2 level; although the CEFR makes no explicit reference to maps/charts/graphs, they tend to occur typically in public, professional and academic life (B2 level descriptors), and can vary greatly in specificity and

focus. If highly specialised, however, at least C1 proficiency is required (*Can understand complex technical information, such as operating instructions, specifications for familiar products and services (LAI)*).

B2: Can understand standard spoken language, live or broadcast, on both familiar and unfamiliar topics normally encountered in personal, social, academic or vocational life. (OLC)

18. Carry out study/survey/project (SPEAKING & LISTENING)

CEFR level(s): B2 – B2⁺

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Goal-oriented co-operation (p.16) GOC
- Transactions to obtain goods & services (p.17) TOGS
- Sustained monologue: Putting a case (p.21) SM-PC
- Formal discussion (meetings) (p.15) FD(M)

Justification/comments: B2/B2⁺ level proficiency seems to be required to be able to carry out a study/survey/project, or meaningfully and significantly contribute to it.

B2⁺: Can keep up with an animated discussion, identifying accurately arguments supporting and opposing points of view. (FDM) Can express his/her ideas and opinions with precision, present and respond to complex lines of argument convincingly. (FDM)

B2: Can help along the progress of the work by inviting others to join in, say what they think etc. (GOC) Can outline an issue or a problem clearly, speculating about causes or consequences, and weighing advantages and disadvantages of different approaches. (GOC) Can cope linguistically to negotiate a solution to a dispute like an undeserved traffic ticket, financial responsibility for damage in a flat, for blame regarding an accident. (TOGS) Can develop a clear argument, expanding and supporting his/her points of view at some length with subsidiary points and relevant examples. (SM-PC) Can construct a chain of reasoned argument. (SM-PC) Can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. (SM-PC) Can participate actively in routine and non routine formal discussion. (FD) Can follow the discussion on matters related to his/her field, understand in detail the points given prominence by the speaker. (FDM) Can contribute, account for and sustain his/her opinion, evaluate alternative proposals and make and respond to hypotheses. (FDM)

20. Speak English accurately in all aspects of communication (SPEAKING)

CEFR level(s): C2

Relevant CEFR scale(s):

- Global scale (p.5) GS
- Grammatical accuracy (p.28) GA

Justification/comments: Since there are no qualifiers in LO20, and the learning outcome states that accuracy needs to be obtained in “all” aspects of communication, this has to be the highest CEFR level, C2. Even if this outcome were to be slightly relaxed, a C1 level would still be necessary to ensure some reliability in being able to do this (*Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare and difficult to spot (GA)*).

C2: *Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. (GS) Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations. (GS) Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions). (GA)*

3.4 Conclusions of the expert review of the learning outcomes

An expert review of the English Learning Outcomes for Bangladesh Higher Secondary School from the perspective of the CEFR indicates that the listening and speaking learning outcomes may span an ability range as broad as CEFR A2 level (*Basic User*) to C2 level (*Proficient User*). At the same time, the findings show that in most cases there is no 'natural' relationship between the learning outcome statements and the CEFR. Some plausible reasons for this are listed below.

Based on the experts' feedback and comments, three particular factors made the exploration of the relationship between the English learning outcomes for Higher Secondary Schools in Bangladesh and the CEFR a challenging task:

- 1) *The fact that the Learning Outcomes were not developed with the CEFR in mind (or vice versa)*: The experts pointed out that the construct underlying the learning outcome statements and the CEFR is not necessarily similar. In fact, although there are some learning outcomes which link quite reasonably to one or more CEFR scales, there are many others which are rather or very different in focus from that of the CEFR scales.
- 2) *The combination of language and academic skills in some of the learning outcomes*: For example, learning outcomes that clearly involve broader academic skills and/or content knowledge are LO10d and LO11 which require learners to "critically appreciate" literary and non-literary input, since this may require, for instance, literary knowledge and critical thinking skills. Another example is LO18, which requires learners to be able to "carry out a study/survey/project". Although language skills are needed to conduct a project, more academic knowledge and skills such as subject knowledge, methodological knowledge, time management, and analytic skills will also be needed. Although these observations are by no means meant to be a criticism of the learning outcomes (and these may indeed be very useful academic skills to develop), as highlighted in point 1 above, they suggest that there are important differences between the construct underlying the learning outcomes and the construct defined in the CEFR.
- 3) *The lack of qualifiers in the learning outcomes*: The experts commented that almost all learning outcome statements seem to be "stripped down to the essence" and only capture the "bare bones" of listening or speaking skills. In their present form, the learning outcomes do not specify, for example, the extent to which a learner needs to be able to do something, the types of oral input a learner needs to be able to process, the linguistic characteristics of the oral input a learners needs to be able to process (e.g. phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic, discourse features), the level of complexity and sophistication expected in terms of listening and spoken ability, the contexts and topics a learner needs to process or to produce spoken language for, etc. In the CEFR, however, the differences between the proficiency levels (A1 to C2) described in the

various CEFR scales fundamentally hinge on such nuances, contexts, and the use of qualifiers.

As a result, the experts felt that in those cases where there seemed to be potential for linking a learning outcome to the CEFR, most of these could not be related to just one specific level, but instead to several different levels. Moreover, it was felt that a number of level descriptors could be applied depending on how the learning outcome was interpreted. Furthermore, with regards to some learning outcomes the experts did not feel there were any straightforward similarities or commonalities between the CEFR and the outcomes as currently formulated in the curriculum document; indeed for one learning outcome they felt it was not possible to establish any links with the CEFR at all.

Based on the findings presented in Section 3.3, the following recommendations are made:

1. If it is considered important to establish a link between the Bangladesh Higher Secondary School curriculum and the CEFR, it is vital that the construct underlying the curriculum is similar to that of the CEFR. In practice, this may require significant revisions to, and rethinking of, the curriculum, its aims and intended learning outcomes. At the same time, before any such exercise is undertaken, it will be important to carefully consider – from a range of perspectives and by consulting various stakeholders – the advantages and disadvantages, the potential positive and negative impact, and the suitability and meaningfulness of a direct link between the curriculum and the CEFR in the Bangladesh context. Furthermore, any learning outcome amendments for the teaching and assessment of English at the level of Higher Secondary Schools will need to be considered and undertaken in light of the learning outcomes at lower levels of the educational system (Lower Secondary and Primary).
2. Independent of whether links are desirable between the Bangladesh Higher Secondary School curriculum and the CEFR, the absence of qualifiers and contextualising information in the present learning outcome statements leaves room for a vast range of interpretations of the curriculum outcomes, in particular in terms of the intended level(s) of English language proficiency which Higher Secondary School students should meet. In order to be able to distinguish between learners' achievements, diagnose their strengths and weaknesses, and assess their proficiency in English, additional specification work is needed on the learning outcome statements. Without clear definitions of the expected ability level, any national assessment initiative is at risk of significant reliability and validity issues.

4 Higher Secondary Schools Visited

After having gained important insights into the research context through a review of previous studies, including familiarisation with the Higher Secondary School curriculum (see Sections 2 and 3), the project moved into an intensive fieldwork phase conducted in Bangladesh. This was done to gain more specific insights into how English listening and speaking skills are currently taught and assessed in practice at Higher Secondary Schools, and what stakeholder's views are on this.

To this end, 22 Higher Secondary Schools were visited by one of the researchers, together with Bangladeshi British Council employees. To enable the research, the Ministry of Education had compiled a list of schools, which had been recommended by the Ministry's regional offices on the basis of an anticipated willingness to help with the study. Furthermore, to ensure at least some level of representativeness and generalisability, schools from four different geographical regions were visited: six schools were located in the Sylhet region, six in the Dhaka-Savar region, five in Chittagong, and five in Dhaka-Narayangonj. All schools were situated in rural areas.

Prior to the research visit, each school's principal was contacted and oral consent was sought from the principal to conduct the research at their school. On the day of the visit, the school principal was also provided with a letter from the Bangladesh Ministry of Education which confirmed the Ministry's approval of the study and kindly invited the school to facilitate the research. In addition, to gain more information on each school visited, the principal was asked to complete a background questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 11.10.

Based on the information provided by the principals, the schools ranged in size from 150 to 6,400 students (M=1,558). Of these students, between 80 and 2000 were female (M=770), and between 0 (some were girls' only schools) to 4400 were male (M=788). The number of Grade 11 classes in these schools ranged from 1 to 13 (M= 5.1), and the number of Grade 12 classes ranged from 1 to 12 (M=4.9). Apart from these two Higher Secondary grades, some schools also had between 0 to 27 classes at other levels of education (M=5.6), including Degree Pass and Honours classes, and other grades from nursery to Grade 10. The lowest number of students in a class ranged from 15 to 350 between the schools (M=91.5), whereas the highest number of students in a class ranged from 36 to 700 (M=186). The average number of students in a class ranged from 38 to 525 (M=137).

At each school, from 14 to 113 teachers were employed (M=33.3), with between 3 and 41 of these being female (M=10.4), and between 7 and 72 being male (M=22.9). Between 1 and 13 of these teachers teach English at the school (M=4.1). Between 0 and 7 of the English teachers were female (M=1.1), and between 1 and 7 were male (M=3). In addition, at five of the schools there were also assistant teachers, with the number of these teaching English being 1, 4, 5 or 8 teachers (one respondent did not complete this part of the question).

The principals themselves were all male and ranged in age from 33 to 61 years' old (M=51.4). They were all of Bangladeshi nationality and spoke Bangla at home. All of them reported that they had studied English, with the number of years of English study ranging from 5 to 25 (M=14.2). One of the principals also indicated that he had lived in an English-speaking country. 41%

of the principals said they could speak a bit of English, 55% indicated they could speak it well, and the remaining respondent stated he could speak it very well. 23% of the principals said they could understand a bit of English, 68% said they could understand it well, and 9 indicated they could understand English very well. 82% of the principals said they use English in their daily lives, for example for communication (41%) or for work purposes (36%). 18% of the principals said they do not use English in their daily lives. In terms of their educational background, 95% of the principals indicated that they had post-graduate degrees, while the remaining principal indicated he had another type of degree. 95% of the principals were also teachers, with the range of subjects they taught including: Bangla (1), Economics (4), English (1), Geography (1), Management Science (1), Maths (3), Philosophy (1), Statistics (1), and Zoology (1) – with four principals not having indicated their subject area. Their role at the school was: principal (86%), acting principal (9%), or vice-principal (5%).

5 Classroom Observations

To gain insights into how English listening and speaking skills are currently taught and assessed at Higher Secondary Schools in Bangladesh, live English lessons were observed at a range of Higher Secondary Schools. In Section 5.1, the methodology used to conduct the classroom observations is described. The findings of the observations are presented in Section 5.2. Section 5.3 draws conclusions on the current practices in teaching and assessing English listening and speaking skills, based on the classroom observations.

5.1 Methodology

5.1.1 Participants

A total of 22 English lessons was observed, i.e. one lesson at each of the Higher Secondary Schools visited. Thus, six lessons were observed at schools in the Sylhet region, six in the Dhaka-Savar region, five in Chittagong, and five in Dhaka-Narayangonj.

The number of students in each class on the day of the observation varied from 32-116 in Sylhet (M=60.8); 28-165 in Dhaka-Savar (M=90.3); 32-129 in Chittagong (M=91.8); and 26-218 in Dhaka-Narayangonj (M=83.6). The number of students officially enrolled for the class was invariably much higher. The 22 teachers teaching these lessons, i.e. students' regular English teachers, were those who were also interviewed later on the day – see Section 6.1.1 for their bio-data.

5.1.2 Procedure

Each school was contacted several weeks before the visit (see Section 4) in order to facilitate the identification of an appropriate Grade 11 or Grade 12 class which could be observed. Emphasis was placed on the class being taught in the usual way in terms of materials and language used. Due to the fact that, in addition to the classroom observations, the researcher needed to hold an interview and two focus group discussions within the same school on the same day (see Sections 6 to 8), and that some of the schools were located in distant rural areas, most of the observed classes were the

first of the day starting at around 10:00 to 10:30. Only in those schools which were holding examinations during the day of the visit, was the class observed later in the day.

Prior to the classroom observation, the teacher was given an oral introduction to the research and provided with an information sheet (see Appendix 11.3). Each teacher confirmed their agreement to the observation of their lesson and gave their consent in writing (see Appendix 11.4). Before the lesson began, the researcher also checked which materials the teacher was planning to use in the class.

Once the students had arrived in the classroom, a Bangladeshi British Council staff member explained in Bangla what the research was about, why their class was being observed and provided further details on voluntary participation, data handling and withdrawal options. He also explained that the procedure would entail both audio and video recordings. The students were also given a written information sheet in Bangla (see Appendix 11.5 for an English version), confirming the information provided orally. All students who agreed to participate in the observed class then completed a consent form provided in Bangla.

The classroom observations were carried out using an observation schedule developed by the researchers (see Appendix 11.15). The schedule focused on the following activities:

- 1) the type of classroom activities observed for listening (q1), speaking (q2), and other skills (q3)
- 2) the language and nature of classroom interaction (q4-q11)
- 3) the type of assessments observed (q12-q14).

Although it had been intended that the researcher would draw on the teachers' interaction in class to gauge the teacher's English listening and speaking proficiency levels (or at least form an initial impression of these), this proved largely impossible due to the extensive amount of Bangla used during the class and/or the only English spoken being a recital of the text (see the findings in Section 5.2.3 below). In the few cases where it was possible to obtain some idea of the teacher's English proficiency levels, these estimates were subsequently consolidated during the subsequent interviews with the individual teachers (see Section 6.2.5 below).

During the classroom observation, the researcher took notes (using the observation schedule) on the teachers' and students' interactions as well as on the different activities undertaken during the lesson. In addition, all classes were audio and video-recorded to support the data analyses where necessary. Due to the large number of students, the acoustics of the rooms and the proximity of other classes, the (male) teachers were requested to place the audio recording device in their breast pocket. Where this was not possible, two devices were used – one being placed on the teacher's desk at the front of the room and the other approximately halfway down the room on a student's desk. A British Council Bangladeshi contracted researcher videoed the class from various angles and also took shots of any board work that the lesson generated. In addition, and with the school principal's permission, outside photos of the school and its environment were taken together with some photos of the classroom in which the observed lesson took place. On average, each class lasted approximately 40 minutes.

5.2 Findings

5.2.1 School environment and classroom facilities

At the start of each school visit, and with the permission of the principal, the researcher took photos of the school, its immediate environment and the teaching room in which the class was observed. All 22 schools were situated in rural locations, many of them surrounded by fields with large ponds nearby. Several could only be reached by long winding country roads while unmade roads in some rural villages would make access difficult in the rainy seasons. A number of schools also had on-going building work of new classrooms / resource centres financed by the local educational council.

Each principal had his/her own office with sufficient room for a number of visiting guests to sit. (Practically all focus group discussions with community members were held in this office.) On the walls of many of these offices a list of the school's local sponsors and how much money they had donated could be seen. A few (2-3) schools also had electronic sign-in (thumbprint) devices which were located in this office. The teachers had their own staffroom and on three occasions the field researcher was invited to meet the other subject teachers in this room to inform them about the rationale behind the visit.

The classrooms in general consisted of rows of desks which could seat five or six students each – usually two or three desks across the width of the room and as many as 15 rows deep in order to accommodate all the students in the larger classes (see Section 5.1.1). Most classrooms had windows which usually had bars on them and in many cases wooden shutters. The floors were cement and there were usually ceiling fans and some form of lighting, although electricity was not always available especially in some rural areas. There was little room for the students to keep their bags and they were frequently placed either on their desk with their textbook balanced on top or kept on their knees for the duration of the class (45 minutes). The rooms were quite dusty.

With regards to teaching tools and materials, most classrooms contained a black board and occasionally there was a white board. Only two of the classrooms visited had data projectors, and in the first of these, the teacher was unable to use it for his prepared lesson, as there was no electricity that day. Four or five classrooms also had microphones which were used to help with the acoustics and the size of the classes. In many classrooms the absence of such microphones meant that it was impossible for those students seated in the middle to the back of the room, to hear what either the teacher or the students who answered the questions at the front of the class were saying. Several of the rooms had raised platforms for the teacher to stand on so that the students could see him/her. Very few rooms had posters on the walls.

5.2.2 Type of classroom activities observed

In order to systematically record the types of activities carried out in the observed class, and thus gain more insights into current practices on the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking skills, the observation schedule contained three questions of which the purpose was to collate information relating to: listening (q1), speaking (q2) and other activities (q3). The researcher added notes on these in the observation schedule as the lesson progressed.

1. Listening activities

In the majority of observed classes (16; 73%) the students were engaged in listening to the teacher reading a text from the textbook 'English for Today' (Islam & Kabir, 2015); explaining the text or specific items of vocabulary (7; 32%); providing instructions and posing questions related to the text (6; 27%); and delivering greetings at the start of the class (2; 9%). In addition, students listened to fellow students reading out the text (3; 14%), to the teacher reviewing test paper questions (2; 9%) and checking on their comprehension of a previous lesson (1; 5%).

2. Speaking activities

In a number of observed classes (9; 41%), the students responded to questions posed by the teacher though the questions were often in Bangla and only rarely answered in English. In addition, students read out parts of the text (6; 27%); responded chorally in order to complete the teacher's sentences (12; 55%); gave short 1-2 word answers (3; 14%); and responded to the teacher's greetings (2; 9%). In only one class (5%) were the pictures in the 'English for Today' textbook used as the basis for questions; and in one other class (5%) students were encouraged to ask questions about any new words in the text. In three classes (14%), the students had no opportunity to speak.

3. Nature of other activities

As mentioned above, many of the classes (16; 73%) involved teachers reading out the text and those students who had the book simultaneously followed the text (3; 14%). It was observed that in half of the schools (11; 50%) many of the students did not have a copy of the 'English for Today' textbook with them. Whether this was because they did not own a copy or because it was not usually needed is unknown. In some classes (4; 18%), other books were in evidence.¹ As part of some lessons, the teacher also checked the students' grammatical and lexical knowledge (4; 18%), used the black/whiteboard for new words or homework (2; 9%); and drew flow-charts (4; 18%). In one class (5%), the teacher checked the students' knowledge of certain sayings in English and Bangla, and in one other (5%) went over the grammatical points of a recent test paper. One teacher (5%) also used a projector to illustrate the text (*Haraluki Haor*) through a set of pictures and then asked the students to write several sentences about them. One teacher (5%) asked the students to summarise the text in writing and then asked them to read out their summaries, but observation showed that many students simply copied the text out of the book.

To summarise, most of the lessons involved the students' listening to the teacher reading out a printed English text and speaking in Bangla. Most of the students' speaking activities comprised of rote completion of the teacher's sentences which were in turn based on the English text. The students had little opportunity to speak freely either in Bangla or in English, and on the rare occasions they did, were usually unable to complete their sentences due to a lack of vocabulary. In sum, the number of different classroom activities which were observed in the 22 classes was extremely restricted.

¹ I.e., Chowdhury & Hossain's (2016) 'Advanced Learners' HSC Communicative English' and 'Solution to Advanced Learners' HSC Communicative English', Advanced Publications.

5.2.3 Language and nature of classroom interaction

In order to take a closer look at the level and extent of students' exposure to English as part of their English classes, the researcher took notes on: how much English was used in the classroom by the teacher and the students (q4-5), how much teacher vs. student talk time occurred (q6), and how much and what nature of interaction took place during the lesson (q7-q11).

4. Percent conducted in English

In terms of the amount of English used in the classroom, the findings showed that in 12 (55%) classes this could be classified as '*partly but little*' and this was mainly accounted for by the text being read out in English. Four classes (18%) were carried out '*wholly*' in English though feedback from the students of those classes indicated this was not typical but was due to the presence of the English native speaker researcher (see the student focus group findings in Section 7.2). Four other classes (18%) were carried out '*partly but mostly*' in English though again feedback from students indicated that in one case this was not typical. One class (5%) was conducted half in English, and half in Bangla, while one other (5%) was carried out completely in Bangla.

5. Level of English

Many of the texts used in the class are above the students' English language ability and in some cases it was suspected also above their level of conceptual awareness. This was evidenced by the teachers (18; 82%) having to translate the text either sentence by sentence, or at a minimum, translating those parts which were seminal to understanding the text. Only those texts which focused on subjects which were very familiar to the students such as those in Chapter 2 of 'English for Today' (*Unforgettable History*) appeared to be more easily understood.

6. Percent and nature of teacher talk vs. student talk

Teacher talk in the observed classes ranged from 90% of classroom talk (2 classes; 9%) to 100% (3; 14%) with a mean of 97% for the 22 classes. The nature of this talk included reading out the text in English (13; 59%); asking (and often answering their own) questions (6; 27%), translating parts of the text into Bangla (5; 23%); explaining the text and checking the students' comprehension (usually in Bangla) (7; 32%); grammatical issues (2; 9%) and how to pass the Higher Secondary Certificate examination (1; 5%).

The percent of student talk varied from 0% (3 classes; 14%) to 10% (2; 9%) with a mean of 3%. The nature of this talk included choral work – both individual words and/or short phrases (15 classes; 68%); individual reading of the text (2 classes; 9%) and providing individual answers (10 classes; 45%).

7. Students producing extended utterances

There was no evidence of extended utterances in 18 (82%) of the observed classes. In one class (5%), two students carried out a mini-dialogue (though only those in the nearby rows could hear them), and in another class (5%) there were 1 or 2 attempts at extended speech by individual students but a lack of vocabulary resulted in the utterance being finished in

Bangla. A summary of a text did take place in one class but again this had to be completed in Bangla due to the student's lack of sufficient English.

8. Individual students producing meaningful (i.e. unpredictable) utterances

In 17 classes (77%), there was no evidence of meaningful / unpredictable utterances. In the remaining classes (5; 23%), there was one attempt to compare the situation of a character in the text being studied (*Amerigo* text) with the student's own life; three attempts by individual students to produce something meaningful but a lack of vocabulary resulted in a switch to Bangla; and two attempts at summarising the text being studied.

9. Sustained teacher-student interactions

In 21 (95%) of the observed classes, there was no evidence of sustained teacher-student interaction. The only exception was where the class was carried out mainly in Bangla.

10. Sustained student-student interactions

In 21 (95%) of the observed classes, there was no evidence of sustained student-student interaction. The only exception was where a pair of students (who had answered most of the questions in class) carried out a mini-dialogue, but most of the students would have found it impossible to hear them due to the large size of the class and the room's acoustics.

11. Use of activities / materials

In most classes (19; 86%), the textbook '*English for Today: Classes XI-XII*' was used as the main source of activities/materials. Lessons included texts taken from: Path to Higher Education (p.68); Traffic Police (p.24); The Haraluki Haor (p.96); *Amerigo*, A Street Child (p.87); Human Rights (p.79); The Unforgettable History (p.6); Human Relationships (p.38); Folk Music (p.183); Out, Out – Robert Frost (p.90); Food Adulteration (p.28); Etiquette & Manners (p.38); Eating Habits & Hazards: The Luncheon – W. S. Maugham (p.32); The story of Shilpi (p.59); Dreams (p.121); and Love and Friendship (p.42).

In addition to the use of the above materials, in some classes (6, 27%), teachers, and on two occasions students, used the board for diagrams (1), notes / questions (3); flow-charts (4) and for explaining answers to grammar questions. Also, as already mentioned in 2.3 above, one teacher used a data projector to illustrate one of the texts from the book.

In sum, a large percent of the observed lessons were carried out in Bangla; where English was used it was mainly linked to reading out a text in the textbook. Although on some occasions teachers were observed trying to ask questions in English, most students could not manage to answer in English and resorted to Bangla. A large part of the texts used were above the students' proficiency level thus requiring the teacher to translate large sections. Teacher talk took up nearly all the class time (M=97%) leaving very little time for student talk. There were very few instances of students being able to produce extended utterances in the 22 observed classes, few occasions when they made meaningful (i.e. unpredictable) utterances and even less evidence of teacher-student or student-student interactions. Most of the materials used in the class came from the textbook '*English for Today*' which many students seemed to struggle with on both linguistic and occasionally on conceptual levels. These materials were occasionally supplemented with board work which many

students would have struggled to see given the size of the classes and the rooms. Similarly, given the very large rooms and the nature of the classroom environment and facilities, students would have had difficulties in hearing the teacher and other students talking, which made it practically impossible for all students to actively participate in the class.

5.2.4 Type of assessments observed

As part of the research was intended to document the degree to which teachers assessed their students' listening and speaking abilities, the observation schedule included three questions specifically focussing on assessment (q12-14).

12. Type of judgements

In at least 10 classes (45%), no judgements appeared to have been made, although they could have been delivered in Bangla. Those judgements which were made in English in the other classes included the following: "Yes, you are right" (1 teacher); "Good answer" (1); "Louder please" (1); "Thank you" (4); "Exactly" (1); "OK – practice at home" (1); "OK" (2); "Is she right?" (1); "Can you answer the question? Why not? I have already explained it." (1); "Repeat the answer. Louder so we can hear" (1); "Very good, thank you" (1). In one class the student was required to write on the board and then the teacher instructed the other students to correct what had been written. The teacher then picked up on a few more errors adding: "If you want to get full marks, you must make no mistakes."

13. Way teacher gives feedback on errors

In 12 (55%) of the classes, no feedback was given on errors in English. In other classes, the teacher gave the following responses to the students: "wrong" (1); "OK – that's all" (i.e. that's enough); "I don't think so" (in response to a wrong answer); told the student where to find the answer (1) and asked another student "Is she right?" (1). In one other case, the teacher corrected the grammar used by a student.

14. Evidence of individual student assessment by teacher

In 19 (86%) of the classes, there was no overt evidence of individual student assessment by the teacher. In other classes, the teacher checked the students' understanding of what had just been said by asking students to complete his/her (i.e., the teachers') sentences chorally, but whether the teacher simultaneously assessed the students' ability is unknown.

In sum, as a large percent of the observed classes took place in Bangla, it was difficult to determine the extent to which the teachers made any judgements. In addition, given that a very small amount of the student talk was in English, any such judgements would have pertained to the students' level of comprehension as expressed in Bangla and not the target language. There was only occasional evidence of qualitative responses to the students' efforts (e.g., "Good", "Thank you" and so on), although other comments may have been made in Bangla. There was little or no overt evidence of the assessment of the students' English language ability.

5.3 Conclusions of the classroom observations

The observations of 22 classes in four different regions of Bangladesh suggest that, at the present time, most of the English classes are carried out in Bangla and focus primarily on the teaching of reading and grammar. Many of the students appear to struggle both with the English used in the texts (as well as some of the abstract and complex concepts discussed within them) and that of the teacher on the occasions when it is used. Very little time (less than 10% and in most cases less than half this) is given over to student talking time, confirming that speaking and listening are not presently a priority in Higher Secondary Schools. The ever-present Higher Secondary Certificate examination, taken at the end of the 12th Grade, seems to act as a large deterrent to time being spent on any other skills than those which currently make up that exam.

The size of some of the observed classes (as large as 218 in one school and with an average mean of 82 across the four regions) is another contributing factor to the teachers' uphill struggle to encourage their students' to speak in English and to engage in English listening activities. The teaching methodology observed in the classrooms revealed a very limited repertoire of activities which are unlikely to inspire the communicative use of listening and speaking. Most classes involved the students simply listening to the teacher reading a text followed by choral sentence completion or rote repetition. These findings strongly suggest that the teachers will need further training in how to teach listening and speaking before they can begin to understand how to assess these skills.

Another issue which will need to be confronted before the proposed directive of allocating 10% to the listening and speaking skills can be introduced in the English classroom is the availability of appropriate aids and suitable facilities. Apart from two schools where data projectors were in evidence, no other audio or visual aids were visible. Furthermore, given the size and acoustics of most classrooms, many of the interactions are simply not audible to all in the room without some form of amplifier.

6 Teacher Interviews

Since teachers form one of the key stakeholder groups in the education system, interviews were held with English teachers, locally referred to as ‘lecturers’, employed at Higher Secondary Schools in Bangladesh. These interviews aimed to gain insights into teachers’ current practices in and views on the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking skills.

Section 6.1 describes the methodology used to interview the English teachers. Results of the interviews are presented in Section 6.2, which also includes intermediate summaries of the findings. Conclusions based on teachers’ reported practices and views on the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking skills are drawn in Section 6.3.

6.1 Methodology

6.1.1 Participants

A total of 22 English teachers were interviewed. They represented a range of geographical regions: six teachers were from schools in the Sylhet region, six from the Dhaka-Savar region, five from Chittagong, and five from Dhaka-Narayanganj. Prior to the interview, teachers provided information on their personal background through a questionnaire (see Appendix 11.10). Teachers’ bio-data are summarised below.

Most interviewed teachers (86%) were male; 14% were female. Their age ranged from 25 to 66 years’ old ($M=35.8$). All of them were of Bangladeshi nationality and spoke Bangla at home. Only two of the teachers had spent time in an English speaking country (i.e., the UK) – one of them for one year, the other for three years.

With the exception of one teacher with an undergraduate degree as highest level of education, all teachers had completed postgraduate studies – mainly MA degrees (86%) in English (Phonetics/Phonology/Literature/Language). 59% of the teachers held a B.Ed., whereas 36% reported that they did not have a degree specifically in teaching. The teachers had between 1 and 34 years of experience in teaching English ($M=10.6$) and taught between 2 and 16 classes ($M=4.2$), typically both at Grade 11 and Grade 12. Of the interviewed teachers, 36% also indicated teaching Degree classes either at Pass or Honours level.

6.1.2 Procedure

Prior to each interview, each teacher was provided with an information sheet (see Appendix 11.3) and oral introduction to the research. Each teacher gave their consent in writing (see Appendix 11.4) and filled out a personal background questionnaire (see Section 6.1.1).

The interviews were conducted following the observation of an English lesson given by the teacher. The interviews took place on the school grounds, usually in the same or an adjoining classroom. They were led by one of the researchers and conducted in English, with a British Council Bangladeshi researcher assisting where necessary, for example, to act as interpreter. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, making use of an interview guide developed by the researchers and

consisting of 23 questions. The interview guide can be found in Appendix 11.16. The questions focused on:

- 4) the teachers' reflections on the lesson they had just taught (q1-q5);
- 5) the English listening activities the teachers do in their classes (q6-q9);
- 6) the English speaking activities they do in their classes (q10-q13); and
- 7) the teachers' practices and views on the assessment of students' English listening and speaking skills (q14-q23).

In addition, the researcher drew on the interview interactions to gauge the teachers' English listening and speaking proficiency level.

During the interview, the researcher noted down salient points from the teacher's replies to each question. In addition, all interviews were audio-recorded to support the data analyses where necessary. On average, an interview lasted approximately half an hour.

6.2 Findings

6.2.1 Reflections on the observed lesson

As a way into the interviews, and also to gather information on teacher insights and reflections on the English lesson they had just taught (and which the researcher had observed), a set of five questions was asked. These questions probed the teachers' overall reaction to and views on their lesson (q1, q3, q4), and explored how they felt the students had reacted to the lesson (q5), and how representative the observed lesson was of their regular classes (q2).

1. How do you feel the lesson went?

Almost all teachers (21; 95%) were positive about the lesson they had just taught, saying that it went (very) well (9), fine (1), nice (1), OK (3), that it was (very) interesting (3), and that they were happy about it (3). One teacher explained that this was because s/he thought the students understood the topic of the lesson, and another teacher commented that the students had listened attentively. Nevertheless, one teacher said that s/he had hoped for more answers from the students, and another teacher commented that it had been more challenging with a very large class. Only one teacher felt the lesson did not go well, describing it as "awful" because s/he had planned to use the projector, but there was no electricity on the day.

2. Was this lesson quite typical of usual lessons?

The majority of teachers (16; 73%) felt that the lesson had been as usual. Despite the fact that the teachers had been asked not to do anything special for the purposes of the observation and just teach their normal lesson, six teachers thought their lesson may not have been entirely representative. Four teachers stated that they had used a lot more English than usual, when in general they use Bangla for 50%-100% of the time. Two teachers said that they normally ask the students more questions, and one said the rainy weather conditions had impacted on the lesson (e.g., the impact of the rain on the school's metal

roof meant that it was impossible to hear what the teacher and students said, and loss of electricity meant that the microphone stopped working in the very large room).

3. Was there anything you were particularly pleased with?

Twelve teachers considered the topic they had covered in their lesson as a particularly positive aspect of the lesson, as they had dealt with, for example, nature, music, society, friendship, jobs, behaviour and etiquette, which the teachers felt are important topics. One teacher specifically mentioned being pleased about having provided information on the school-leaving exam (HSC).

Seven teachers were particularly happy about the level of student engagement/interaction, reporting, for example, that it had been great to see some students being confident to give answers, to try and respond in English, to come up with their own answers, or to see some female students participate. One teacher was pleased to have expressed him/herself more in English than in a regular class, because of the presence of the researcher who did not understand Bangla. Two teachers didn't identify anything particular they were pleased with.

4. Was there anything you would do differently another time?

Six teachers didn't feel the need to change anything about their lesson. Seven teachers, however, felt that they could introduce more variety in the activities they did, and these teachers particularly expressed the need for more teaching materials such as flash cards, pictures, a laptop, or a projector to help them achieve this goal. Four teachers also felt that it would be good to engage the students more in their lessons, by asking more questions, eliciting more responses, and planning pair work tasks. One teacher would like to prepare more for the lesson in future, and two teachers said that they would like to use more of a mixture of Bangla and English in a future lesson.

5. How would you describe the students' reaction to the lesson?

Almost all teachers (20) assumed that the students were positive about the lesson. They described students' reactions as: happy about it (6), pleased with it (2), satisfied (2), relaxed and friendly (1), interested and engaged (1), responding well (2), trying to understand it well (1), thinking it went very well (1), it was suitable (1), or thinking that the students liked (1) and enjoyed (1) it. One teacher also thought students would have found it easy. Two teachers, however, thought that their students might have been confused and found it challenging to follow because they had used more English than normal.

In sum, teachers' reflections on the lesson they had taught, and which the researcher had observed, indicated that it had been a fairly typical lesson and that they were satisfied with how it had gone. A couple of teachers commented, however, that they had used more English in the lesson than they would normally do. Also, although almost all teachers assumed that their students were content with the lesson, some teachers said that, in future lessons, they would like to adopt a more communicative approach and offer more varied activities. To this end, however, they said that they would need more teaching materials that could support such pedagogic approaches.

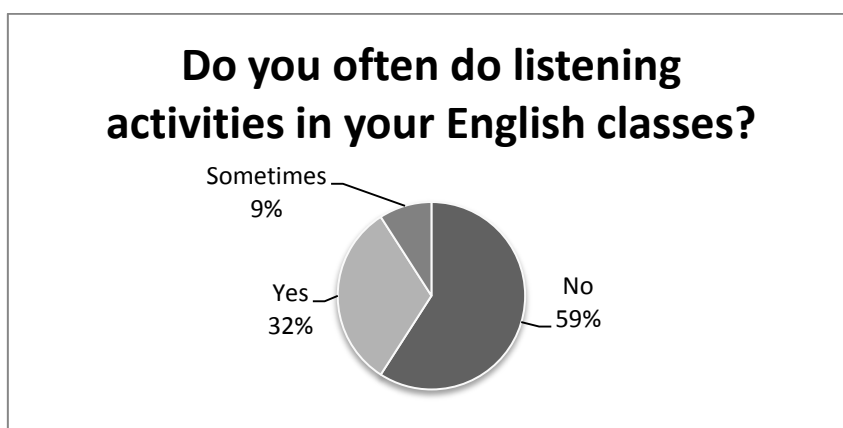
6.2.2 Listening

After having reflected on the lesson they taught prior to the interview, the teachers were asked more general questions about their teaching of English listening and speaking skills. First, the interview specifically focused on listening: the type and frequency of listening activities the teachers use with their students (q6), how well these activities work (q7 & q8), and whether teachers face any challenges in conducting listening activities (q9).

6. Do you often do listening activities in your English classes? What are some of the typical ways you teach listening?

Almost 60% of the teachers (13) stated that they don't often do listening activities in their classes. Remarkably, three of these teachers said that this was because listening is not included in the syllabus and one pointed out that the handbooks for Grades 11 & 12 do not include listening tasks. Two teachers also referred to the prevalence of skills other than listening in the final exam for English. Seven teachers, on the other hand, reported often doing listening activities, and two said they sometimes do. These findings can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Proportion of listening activities as reported by English teachers



The main examples of listening activities given by the teachers were: a) students listening to the teacher reading a text out loud (6 teachers), and b) students listening to questions asked by the teacher (8 teachers). Other examples teachers shared were listening to audio from the internet or a recording (4), listening to each other during pair work activities (2), songs/nursery rhymes (1), watching a documentary on a topic related to the textbook (1), and doing rote repetition of words/phrases/sentences spoken out loud by the teacher.

7. Which listening activities were most successful so far? Why do you think so?

Three teachers felt their most successful listening activities had been when they were able to use audio or video files. Two teachers thought question-answer activities worked well. Two teachers referred to a debating club at their respective schools which some students attended as an extra-curricular activity. Another teacher especially liked the pronunciation practice s/he had done in class.

In general, the teachers were not able to think of any reasons why that particular activity worked so well in their view, apart from one teacher who said that the use of authentic recordings helped students to “focus on the grammar that the native speakers have produced [in the recording]”.

8. How do these activities help develop students’ listening ability?

Five teachers felt that because students could get general practice in English listening by listening to the teacher and each other, their listening ability and attention was expected to improve in turn. One teacher also thought that hearing the teacher speak English gives the students an opportunity to “listen to correct pronunciation”, and another teacher thought that this allows students to gain insights into how English is used while being able to see the teacher and thus having the supporting role of the teacher’s body language. One teacher thought that using authentic recordings would particularly give students “practice listening to standard English”. One teacher emphasized, however, that the topics need to be interesting to engage students in the listening activities.

9. How easy is it to set up listening activities? What difficulties (if any) do you face?

Overall, the teachers held a positive attitude towards doing listening activities, in principle. Close to half thought it would be relatively easy and doable. However, the teachers identified two key challenges: a) the lack of equipment (e.g. audio, video) and materials for the teaching of listening (8 teachers), and b) the need for training in how to develop their learners’ English listening skills (8 teachers). Related to this second main difficulty, one teacher doubted his/her own English pronunciation abilities, and one pointed out teachers’ lack of practice in using English themselves – suggesting that the challenges may be a combination of teachers’ pedagogical *and* language skills. In addition, three teachers expected it would be a struggle to fit listening activities into their lessons because of a lack of time, and a further three teachers were particularly concerned about the practicality of organising listening activities given the size of their classes. One teacher also expected that the varied proficiency levels within a class group would pose challenges to the teaching of listening. Finally, two teachers suspected that students would not be eager to practise English listening skills “because it is not part of the final exam”.²

Despite these challenges, however, a few teachers explicitly indicated that they see teaching listening as “a new challenge” for their professional development and are “willing to do this and learn”, provided support and materials are supplied by the Government.

To summarise, a significant number of teachers (60%) admitted never doing listening activities in their English classes. A couple of these were convinced that listening skills are not included in the English syllabus of the Higher Secondary level, despite being listed in the learning outcomes. Those who do offer listening activities gave as main examples: listening to written texts being read out loud, and question-answer exchanges. A couple of teachers reported using multimedia for the teaching of listening, which they felt worked really well, but the majority of teachers discussed not

² Listening currently counts for 10% of the first exam paper of the final exam (English Curriculum For Eleven & Twelve, 2012).

having access to such equipment and that this was a major drawback for the teaching of listening. Other key challenges to developing students' listening skills, as identified by the teachers, are the lack of pedagogic materials for teaching listening and the fact that teachers have not been (sufficiently) trained in this area. A couple of teachers also doubted their own English language skills or foresaw practical challenges due to limited class time and large numbers of students per class. Nevertheless, especially if support is provided to teachers, the teachers seemed willing to develop the teaching of listening skills.

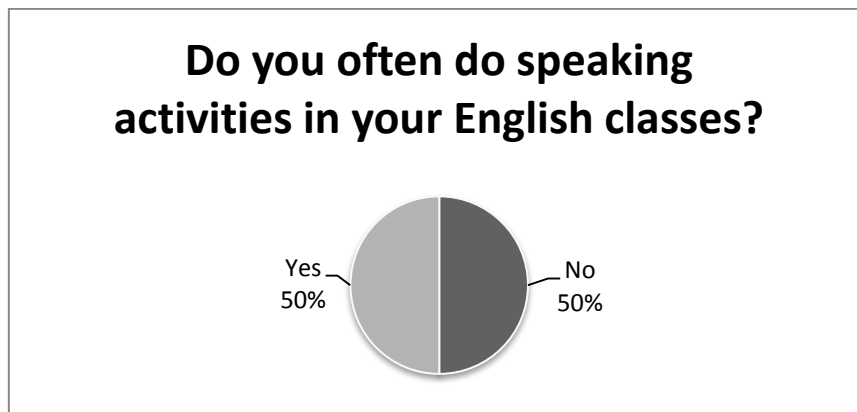
6.2.3 Speaking

After having focused on the teaching of listening, the same set of questions was repeated, but this time focusing on speaking: the type and frequency of speaking activities the teachers use with their students (q10), how well these activities work (q11 & q12), and whether teachers face any challenges conducting speaking activities (q13).

10. Do you often do speaking activities in your English classes? What are some of the typical ways you teach speaking?

Half of the teachers reported that they don't often do speaking activities. One of these teachers explained that the students' low level of English proficiency made speaking activities difficult to conduct, while another teacher claimed that speaking is not part of the curriculum.³ The other half of the teachers, on the other hand, stated they often conducted speaking activities with their students. Two of these teachers, however, admitted that the activities were a mixture of English and Bangla, and one teacher felt it was often a challenge to get students to actually respond. One teacher stated that s/he conducted speaking activities on a daily basis. These findings are summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Proportion of speaking activities as reported by English teachers



In terms of the types of speaking activities done, nearly half of the teachers (10) ask students "simple" questions, e.g. talking about yourself, greetings, etc. Four teachers reported using group or pair work activities. In addition, four teachers combine speaking with other skills in their context, e.g. asking students questions about the text or requesting them to produce an oral summary of the text they had read (2), or letting students

³ But note that 13 out of the 20 curriculum learning outcomes involve speaking (English Curriculum For Eleven & Twelve, 2012).

brainstorm in preparation for a writing activity (2). One teacher also stated carrying out speaking activities in relation to word learning, and two teachers referred to an extra-curricular debate group.

11. Which speaking activities were most successful so far? Why do you think so?

Eight teachers felt that pair or group activities worked well for speaking. Three of these thought this was particularly the case if they focused on a topic that was familiar, although one teacher preferred to challenge students with an unseen topic in such tasks, to make it “more interesting”. Another activity a few teachers (5) thought was helpful for speaking development were routine question-and-answer exchanges. One teacher especially thought choral speaking worked well, while another teacher preferred text summary or discussion activities (reading-speaking tasks), and a further teacher referred to extra-curricular speaking club debates, although the latter are open to a select group of students only.

12. How do these activities help develop students’ speaking ability?

Several teachers use speaking activities ‘simply’ so that students can get general practice in speaking and thus develop their English speaking abilities (5) or vocabulary (1). One teacher called these activities “a starting point”. Pair or group activities were thought to encourage students to help one another (1 teacher) or learn from mistakes (1 teacher). One teacher also felt speaking activities give the teacher an opportunity to provide corrective feedback on, for example, content, grammar, and diction. Furthermore, two teachers emphasized the role of speaking activities for the development of more affective and general academic skills by encouraging students to exchange opinions and speak “freely and frankly”.

13. How easy is it to set up speaking activities? What difficulties (if any) do you face?

Although almost all teachers considered the implementation of speaking activities difficult, some also offered advice on how to do it. For example, one teacher suggested a) allocating a mark to speaking activities, and 2) writing topics on small pieces of paper, letting students pick a paper and then giving them five minutes to talk about the topic. In the teacher’s experience, some students then manage to speak for two minutes and some even for seven minutes. Another teacher first gets the students to talk about anything, while telling them not to worry about making mistakes, and only then moves onto a specific topic. Two further teachers suggested setting up a Language Club in which students listen to each other talking about a given topic. One teacher also thought that his/her personal interest in doing speaking activities would make things easier.

At the same time, the teachers pointed out several challenges to setting up speaking activities in their English classes. A big obstacle identified by more than a third of the teachers (8) was the large class sizes, which would likely result in classroom management issues. One teacher also identified the issues involved in having a vast range of proficiency levels within one class. As documented during the classroom observations (see Section 5.1.1), classes ranged from 26 to 218 students. Furthermore, three teachers mentioned a lack of materials, tools, and infrastructure necessary to conducting speaking activities.

Another significant challenge, according to the teachers, is the students’ lack of willingness or interest to respond in English (5) or their shyness (3), which makes it difficult

to motivate students to take part in speaking activities (1). One teacher also felt that the students' generally low level of proficiency makes it difficult to do speaking activities.

Apart from logistical and student-related factors, a number of teachers furthermore pointed out their own lack of or outdated teacher training in this area (3) and their own limited English speaking and phonetics (sic) abilities (2). In addition, two teachers thought speaking is not included in the syllabus and one teacher pointed to the lack of testing of speaking in the final exam⁴, and thus they felt there was little motivation from the students to encourage the development of speaking skills.

To summarise, only half of the interviewed teachers conduct speaking activities in their English classes. Popular types of activities are question-answer routines, or oral exchanges in the context of reading and writing activities – sometimes in the form of pair or group work. At a couple of schools, extra-curricular debating clubs provide an additional opportunity to practise oral skills, although the sessions are typically open to a select few only. Some teachers admitted, however, often using Bangla in their English classes, even during activities that would lend themselves to developing students' oral English skills.

The overall view of the teachers was that implementing speaking activities is difficult. For example, the teachers identified practical challenges such as the large number of students per class and lack of suitable materials and infrastructure, but they also felt that there are challenges associated with students' motivation and anxiety levels. Additionally, a few teachers felt underprepared to teach English speaking skills or doubted whether their own English speaking skills are adequate. Furthermore, as was the case for listening, a couple of teachers claimed that the skill of speaking is not included in the Higher Secondary School curriculum.

6.2.4 Assessment issues

Having gained a number of insights from the teachers into the teaching of listening and speaking, the focus of the interview next shifted to the assessment of these skills. First, the teachers were asked whether and how they assess their students' listening and speaking skills (q14 and q16, respectively), and whether they had been trained to do this (q15 and q17, respectively). The next set of questions aimed to find out whether teachers were aware of the planned introduction of a continuous assessment system for listening and speaking (q18 and q19, respectively), what their views were on this (q20), and what they felt would help ensure that it worked well (q21 and q22). The interview closed with an open question inviting the teachers to share anything else relevant to the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking (q23).

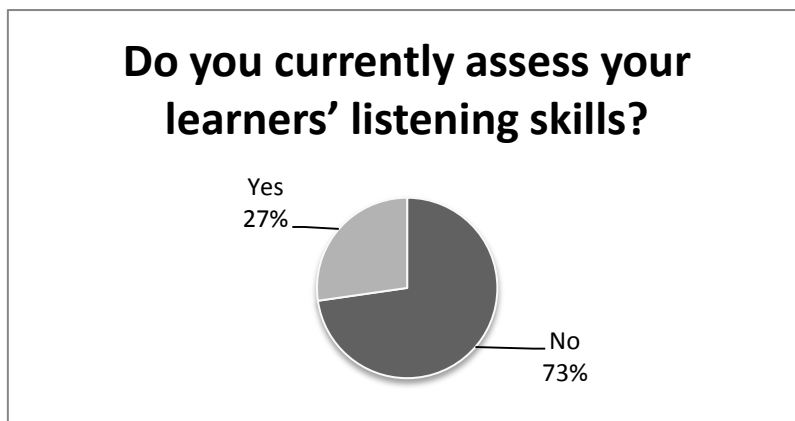
14. Do you currently assess your learners' listening skills? If so how do you do this? How often?

Nearly three-quarters of the teachers (16) reported not assessing their students' listening skills at all. Three teachers explicitly stated that this was because listening is not part of the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exam, with one of these teachers saying that s/he was "not allowed" to assess listening because it is not part of the exam. Other teachers said they did not systematically (2) or not formally (2) assess their students' listening skills, and one

⁴ Note that 13 out of the 20 curriculum learning outcomes involve speaking, and speaking currently counts for 10% of the first exam paper of the final exam (English Curriculum For Eleven & Twelve, 2012).

teacher said s/he only did it “a little bit”. None of these teachers, however, was able to elaborate on how they assessed listening. Only one teacher firmly stated that they assessed listening – doing so by reading from the textbook, then asking questions with the book closed and requiring students to write down the answers, which the teacher then marks. These findings are visualised in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Proportion of teachers assessing listening

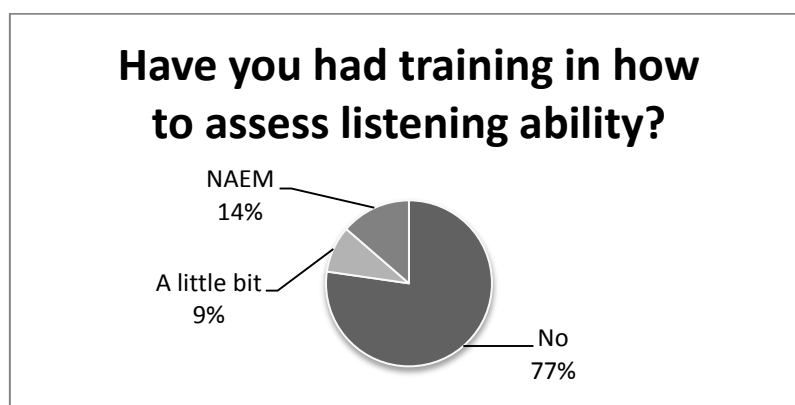


15. Have you had training in how to assess listening ability?

Just over three-quarters of the teachers (17) said they had not had training on assessing listening. One of these teachers mentioned that the BA in Education programmes focused primarily on English reading, writing, and grammar.

Two teachers said they had a little bit of training in assessing listening, and three teachers referred to courses with the National Academy for Educational Management (NAEM) in Dhaka. The latter teachers disagreed, however, on the extent to which the training had developed their skills in assessing listening, with more recent courses (2016) emphasising communicative English (and thus beneficial to the assessment of listening) than courses offered longer ago. A summary of these findings can be seen in Figure 4.

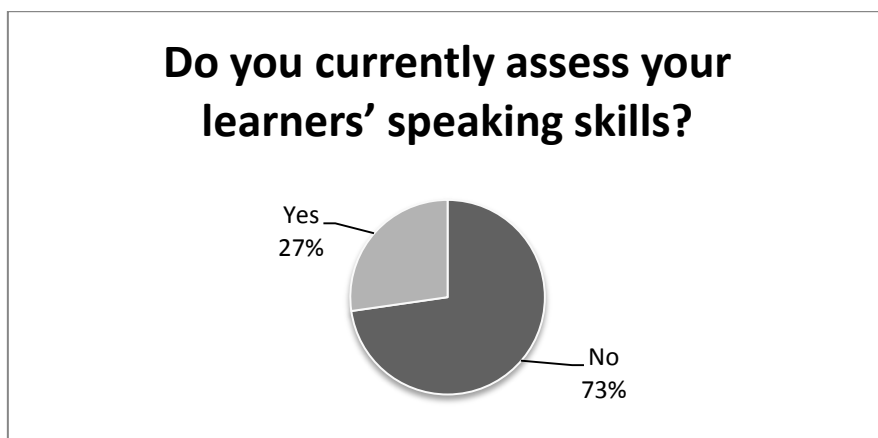
Figure 4: Proportion of teachers trained in assessing listening



16. Do you currently assess your learners' speaking skills? If so how do you do this? How often?

Similar to the assessment of listening, nearly three-quarters of the teachers (16) said that they do not assess their students' English speaking skills. One of these teachers gave as a reason that it is not included in the syllabus, and another teacher stated that the priority is the development of reading and writing skills. Six teachers, on the other hand, reported assessing speaking skills, with one of these saying that s/he did not do this systematically and one saying only sometimes. They indicated that they focused on word adequacy (sic) in these assessments (1), to only conduct informal assessments (1), or to assess speaking through tutorials (1), topic discussion activities (1), or question-answer activities and immediately noting down a 'score' of A-D (1). These findings are summarised in Figure 5.

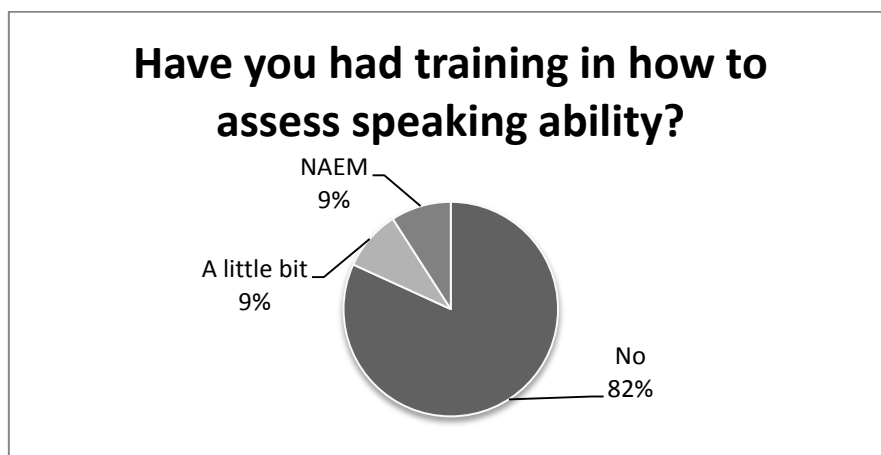
Figure 5: Proportion of teachers assessing speaking



17. Have you had training in how to assess speaking ability?

As can be seen in Figure 6, 82% of the teachers (18) had not received training on assessing speaking. Two teachers said they had a little bit of training, and two teachers reported training through NAEM (course on communicative English).

Figure 6: Proportion of teachers trained in assessing speaking



18. Do you know about the planned introduction of the continuous assessment of listening? (The need to evaluate your learners' progress in listening skills throughout the course, not (just) through an exam.) How do you think that will work?

19. Do you know about the planned introduction of the continuous assessment of speaking? (The need to evaluate your learners' progress in listening skills throughout the course, not (just) through an exam.) How do you think that will work?

Since the interviewees gave similar answers to both questions 18 and 19, the results are reported together here.

59% of the teachers (13) did not know about the plans for the continuous assessment of listening and speaking. Nevertheless, five of these teachers thought it was a great idea. One of these teachers did think that it might be difficult to implement at first, but that it would get easier. Four others were less convinced, however, and saw particular challenges due to the lack of resources, number of teachers, large class sizes, student attendance issues, limited (lesson) time, and the fact that daily activities take place in Bangla rather than English. One of these teachers said: "It cannot work".

The nine teachers who were aware of the plans (although one of these said only having found out "two days ago") made comments such as "it's the right decision", "it will be good because it will cover all four skills", "we will manage", and that it is being done already at the Lower Secondary level (Grades 6-10). Some of these teachers, however, also said that it would be complex and a challenge for teacher training in this area (not just for assessing but also for the teaching of listening and speaking). One teacher said s/he would "need to think of how it can be done efficiently and reliably" and would require doing some "groundwork" first. Another teacher, although being supportive of the idea, also commented that "the government has said this before now and it hasn't happened."

20. What are your views on this introduction (advantages / challenges)?

Overall, however, all teachers thought that continuous assessment of English listening and speaking was a good idea. They saw many advantages for the students: they will develop their English communication skills more (8), they will understand English better (1), they will want to listen (1); listening and speaking are important skills in education (1); it will help the students in life after school or in higher education (4), they will get higher salaries later (1); English language is important for students in a global world (3). In addition, continuous assessment will help teachers track their students' progress (1 teacher). Four teachers also saw advantages for themselves in that it would help them further improve their English as well.

At the same time, a number of teachers emphasized again – as several had done in their answers to questions 18 and 19 – that they would need support and training to be able to implement continuous assessment (4). One teacher again mentioned the practical challenges such as large class sizes, and one teacher said that "the system needs to be changed first".

21. What is important in a new assessment system for listening to work efficiently?

22. What is important in a new assessment system for speaking to work efficiently?

Since the interviewees gave similar answers to both questions 21 and 22, the results are reported together here.

The two key things the teachers identified as important for the success of a new assessment system for listening and speaking were:

- a) materials, resources, and equipment for the teaching and assessment of listening and speaking (13 teachers; 59%), e.g. headphones, audio-visual media, projectors, sound boxes/speakers, and paper to keep records, as well as textbooks that include several listening and speaking activities;
- b) teacher training on the teaching and assessment of listening and speaking (11 teachers, 50%), as well as the development of teachers' own English skills (2 teachers).

In addition, the teachers recommended that: listening and speaking play a (more) significant role in the HSC exam (2); class sizes are reduced (2) as well as practical advice on how to conduct listening and speaking activities with large groups (1); there are more English lessons (2); speaking Bangla is no longer allowed in English lessons (1); changes are also made to the Lower Secondary level English teaching methodology (1); and there are more teachers who are preferably experts (1).

Furthermore, some of the teachers talked about 'creating the right environment', with "help and cooperation from all sides" (1), and including raising parents' awareness (1) as well as that of the local authorities and schools' governing bodies so that they are "more educated participants" and "that they can help implement this directive" (1). One teacher also emphasized that the government should "look at quality not quantity", and another teacher stressed that research needs to be conducted across the whole country so that comprehensive insights are gained into the full range of challenges involved in implementing a new assessment system.

23. Is there anything else regarding the teaching and assessing of listening and speaking you would like to share with me?

Several teachers repeated the need for more materials and equipment (3), and also the need for training in the teaching and assessing of listening and speaking (5). One teacher thereby recommended that training be also conducted locally, not 'just' in Dhaka. One teacher also highlighted again the need to use more English in the lessons (instead of Bangla), and another teacher would like non-attendance issues to be addressed.

Some teachers argued that the introduction of a continuous assessment system for listening and speaking would not be sufficient, but that the HSC exam should also be revised accordingly (2), as well as the curriculum, syllabus and teaching methodology (3). These teachers recommended a move away from the current exam "based on memorisation" (1) and instead advocated that a "more practical approach" be implemented (1), with one teacher suggesting selecting a few students to work as peer teachers. Despite the challenges, two teachers expected that introducing the assessment of listening and speaking would help to motivate students to develop their English skills.

A few teachers emphasized the importance of good communication when introducing changes: two teachers talked about language awareness raising initiatives, one teacher mentioned the need for cooperation from authorities, and one teacher talked about making the “required standard (for listening and speaking) clear within the country”.

Finally, one teacher underlined that a dose of realism would be needed: “It cannot work overnight”; “Things should be in place first before it can be implemented”. Another teacher advised that the changes should not be limited to the English courses, but “a good assessment system should be ensured everywhere in all subjects”.

In sum, the majority of teachers (around 75-80%) currently do not assess their students’ English listening or speaking abilities, but they also pointed out that they have never been trained to do so. Some of these teachers put this down to the absence of listening and speaking in the Higher Secondary Certificate exam (HSC) and curriculum. Those teachers who do assess learners’ English listening or speaking skills were often unable to provide clear examples of how they do this.

A significant proportion of the interviewed teachers (almost 60%) were not aware of the plans to introduce a formal assessment system for listening and speaking in English. Overall, however, the teachers welcomed the plans and thought that these would be helpful for the development of students’ communicative skills and their confidence in English, and also for their life beyond the classroom (e.g., tertiary education, jobs, international access). A few teachers even expected that their own English proficiency would also benefit from it. Some concerns the teachers expressed, however, were their lack of training to implement and execute such forms of assessment, and practical challenges such as large class sizes and lack of suitable materials and equipment. They therefore stipulated that the pedagogic and linguistic training of teachers should be given priority, as well the provision of teaching aids.

Throughout the interviews, several teachers also stressed the need for a coherent and holistic approach to any change in assessment at the Higher Secondary level. Namely, they emphasized that this should go hand-in-hand with changes to the curriculum, teaching methodology and materials, exams, and teacher education, and form a whole with the approaches to English language teaching and assessment at lower levels of the education system.

6.2.5 Teacher’s English proficiency

Previous research (English in Action, 2009a) has shed light on the English proficiency of teachers teaching English in Primary and Secondary Schools in Bangladesh. However, the sample targeted in that research only involved teachers in Lower Secondary Schools, and, to date, no comprehensive data is available on Higher Secondary School English teachers’ proficiency in English. Although it was not possible to conduct formal assessment through a standardised English language proficiency test within the context of the present study, a rough estimate of the teachers’ proficiency in English listening and speaking was obtained through the classroom observations and also through the interviews. Namely, based on the researcher’s extensive, in-depth, and lengthy expertise of working with the CEFR in language test development and validation projects, the researcher made an on-site evaluation of each teacher’s proficiency. Although this provides some indication of the teachers’ English proficiency, it should be noted that these judgements have to be treated with great care, given the method by which they were established.

24. Teachers' English language ability (CEFR) – listening

Based on the researcher's impressions of the teachers' English listening ability, and expressed in CEFR levels, half of the Higher Secondary School English teachers involved in the study (11 teachers) are *Basic Users* of English in terms of listening ability. Of these 11 teachers, one teacher's listening proficiency was judged to be borderline A1+/A2, close to a quarter of the teachers' listening proficiency was judged to be at the A2 level of the CEFR, and another quarter's was judged to be borderline A2+/B1.

The other half of the interviewed teachers (11) are *Independent Users* as far as their English listening proficiency is concerned, with just over a third of the teachers' listening proficiency at the B1 level of the CEFR, two teachers' listening proficiency being borderline B1+/B2, and only one teacher with B2 level English listening proficiency. None of the teachers were evaluated to be *Proficient* listeners (the C-levels of the CEFR). Table 3 provides an overview of the estimates of teachers' English listening ability as expressed in CEFR levels.

Table 3: Teachers' English listening ability (CEFR)

CEFR level	Number of teachers (proportion)
C2	0 (0%)
C1	0 (0%)
B2	1 (5%)
Borderline B1+/B2	2 (9%)
B1	8 (36%)
Borderline A2+ /B1	5 (23%)
A2	5 (23%)
Borderline A1+/A2	1 (5%)
A1	0 (0%)

25. Teachers' English language ability (CEFR) – speaking

Based on the researcher's impressions of the teachers' English speaking ability, and expressed in CEFR levels, 41% of the Higher Secondary English teachers involved in the study (9 teachers) are *Basic Users* of English in terms of speaking ability, with close to a fifth of the teachers having demonstrated speaking proficiency at the A2 level of the CEFR, and close to a quarter's speaking proficiency being borderline A2+/B1.

59% of the teachers (13) are *Independent Users* as far as speaking English is concerned, with just over a third of the teachers' speaking ability evaluated as being at the B1 level of the CEFR, close to a quarter of the teachers' speaking proficiency being borderline B1+/B2, and only one teacher with B2 level English speaking proficiency. None of the teachers were evaluated to be *Proficient* speakers of English (the C-levels of the CEFR). Table 4 provides an overview of the teachers' English speaking ability as expressed in CEFR levels.

Table 4: Teachers' English speaking ability (CEFR)

CEFR level	Number of teachers (proportion)
C2	0 (0%)
C1	0 (0%)
B2	1 (5%)
Borderline B1+/B2	4 (18%)
B1	8 (36%)
Borderline A2+ /B1	5 (23%)
A2	4 (18%)
A1	0 (0%)

6.3 Conclusions of the teacher interviews

Interviews with teachers from 22 Higher Secondary schools from four different regions in Bangladesh indicate that, both in terms of the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking skills, the majority of teachers have limited or no experience or training in this area at present. Relatively few teachers purposefully work on the development and evaluation of their students' listening and speaking skills, and often do so through a restricted range of activities. At the same time, however, teachers are open to the idea of introducing or increasing the teaching and assessment of listening and speaking skills in their English classes, provided a number of challenges are addressed. These would include the provision of teacher training, materials and equipment that can support the teaching and assessment of listening and speaking skills. It would also require, according to the teachers, a reduction of the class sizes to make the teaching and assessment of listening and speaking skills feasible at the level of the individual learner, as well as require an increase of contact hours to ensure sufficient practice in listening and speaking. Furthermore, as suggested by some teachers' comments, as well as by a rough estimate of teachers' English listening and speaking proficiency by the researcher, attention may also be needed to increase the teachers' communicative skills in English, as well as their awareness of the nature of the curriculum.

As became clear through the interviews, any initiatives taken with respect to the *assessment* of Higher Secondary students' English listening and speaking skills will need to be considered within a) the wider context of the *teaching* and *learning* of these skills, and b) the context of other levels of the education system (Primary and Lower Secondary).

7 Student Focus Groups

Learners are unmistakably the central stakeholders in any education system. Therefore, in the present study, the views of English language learners who are studying at Higher Secondary Schools in Bangladesh were sought with respect to the learning of English listening and speaking skills. This was done by means of focus groups.

The methodology employed to conduct the focus groups with the students is described in Section 7.1. The findings of these focus group discussions are provided in Section 7.2, which also

includes intermediate summaries of the findings. Section 7.3 draws conclusions relevant to the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking skills, based on students' views.

7.1 Methodology

7.1.1 Participants

Focus groups with students attending Higher Secondary School in Bangladesh were held at each school visited during the study. Thus, in total, 22 focus groups were held with students – one focus group at each school. Students from the observed classes at the schools were invited to participate in the focus group discussion. Participation was voluntary, but the class teacher was asked to help identify and encourage participation from a group of students exhibiting good to weak levels of English. In each focus group, eight students took part, i.e. a total of 176 students (48 from six schools the Sylhet region, 48 from six schools Dhaka-Savar, 40 from five schools in Chittagong, 40 from five schools in Dhaka-Narayangonj). 82% of these students were from the 11th grade and 18% from the 12th grade.⁵ At the beginning of the focus group discussions, each student was asked to complete a personal background questionnaire provided to them in Bangla (see Appendix 11.12 for an English version). The bio-data provided by the students through this personal background questionnaire is summarised below.

The students' self-reported age ranged from one student reporting to be 15 to one 20 years' old (M=17.3), with 52% of the students being 17 years' old and 30% 16 years of age. Of the schools visited, 16 were co-educational schools and in those locations a balance was achieved between female and male students in each focus group. Five other schools were girls-only and one school was boys-only. In total, 57% of the student-participants were female and 43% were male.

All students had Bangladeshi nationality and, with the exception of one Chakma speaker, all spoke Bangla at home. None of the students had visited or lived in English-speaking countries, but almost all students (93%) stated that they used English in their daily life. For the majority of the students this was in order to communicate with friends, relatives or during class time to talk to their teacher, for study purposes or to improve their spoken English. 34% of the focus group students stated that they had studied English for 10 years, 40% for 11 years, 21% for 12 years and 5% stated either 13 or 14 years (M=10.99).

7.1.2 Procedure

Prior to each focus group, a British Council Bangladeshi contracted researcher and a British Council staff member explained to the students in Bangla what the research was about, why they had been invited to take part, what their participation would involve, and provided further details on voluntary participation, data handling and withdrawal options. The students had also been provided with a written information sheet in Bangla (see Appendix 11.5 for an English version) and a consent form in Bangla (see Appendix 11.6 for an English version) as part of the classroom observations, which included details on the focus groups and confirmed the information given orally. Each student

⁵ The imbalance in recruitment between the two Higher Secondary grades was due to the fact that many schools were holding examinations at the time of data collection (November 2016), so many of the 12th grade students had no regular classes.

who participated in the focus groups gave their consent in writing and filled out a personal background questionnaire in Bangla (see Section 7.1.1).

The focus groups with students were conducted following the observation of an English lesson at the school and before or after an interview with the English teacher, depending on the students' timetable. The focus groups took place on the school grounds, in an empty classroom. They were led by one of the researchers and assisted by the Bangladeshi contracted researcher and by the British council staff member who are both native speakers of Bangla and who translated questions and answers (which was necessary almost all the time). The discussions were semi-structured in nature, making use of a focus group guide developed by the researchers which consisted of 13 questions. A copy of the focus group guide can be found in Appendix 11.17. The questions focused on:

- 1) students' views on English listening comprehension and on listening activities in English (q1-q5);
- 2) students' views on speaking English and on speaking activities (q6-q11); and
- 3) students' general perceptions of learning English (q12-q13).

During the focus groups, the researcher noted down salient points from the students' replies to each question. In addition, all focus groups were audio-recorded to support the data analyses where necessary. On average, a focus group lasted approximately 30 minutes.

7.2 Findings

7.2.1 Listening

The first set of focus group questions aimed to gather insights into how students feel about English listening comprehension, i.e. how easy or difficult they find studying this skill (q1), and any activities the teacher used to develop their English listening comprehension, i.e. how much they enjoy these (q2), what kind of activities they do in class (q3) or practice they get outside the classroom (q4), and whether they would appreciate more English listening activities in class (q5).

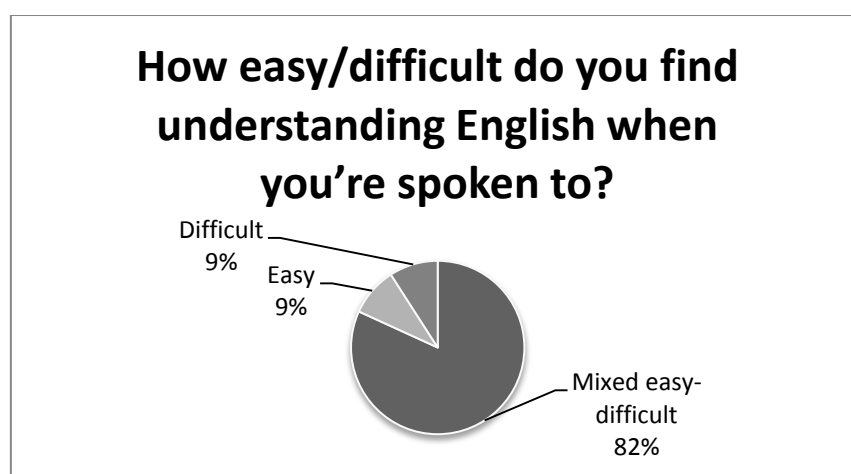
1. How easy/difficult do you find understanding English when you're spoken to? Why do you think that is?

The majority of students (18 focus groups; 82%) felt that understanding spoken English is sometimes easy, in particular if simple and familiar lexis and sentence structures are used, the topic is known, it is spoken by their regular teacher whose accent they are used to, or it is simply a written text they have in front of them that is being read out loud. At the same time, these students also felt that understanding spoken English is sometimes difficult. Factors the students mentioned as playing a role in listening difficulties are: unknown vocabulary (12 focus groups, 55%), speaker accent and pronunciation (8 focus groups; 36%), topic (6 focus groups; 27%), speed of delivery (6 focus groups; 27%), complex sentence grammar (3 focus groups; 14%), length of input (1 focus group; 5%). Two groups in particular discussed their difficulties in understanding native speakers versus the relative ease they experience in understanding Bangladeshi second language speakers of English who the students thought speak more slowly and with shorter sentences. One group also discussed

difficulties with watching English TV programmes without subtitles, and another group referred to translation discrepancies between Bangla and English.

In two of the focus groups (9%), however, the students agreed that understanding spoken English is difficult per se, which they thought is due to the lack of practice they have in this area. One of these groups also felt that their teacher could encourage them more to develop their English listening comprehension. Two other focus groups' participants (9%), on the other hand, felt that English listening is easy, giving as reasons that their teacher helps them with it, that they find English listening interesting, that English is an international/common language, and that they know the context of the listening activities due to reading texts on the topic prior to the listening activity. These findings are summarised in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Students' views on understanding spoken English



2. How much do you enjoy (English) listening activities?

The students in all 22 focus groups gave positive opinions on doing English listening activities. 16 focus groups (73%) said they enjoy these a lot/very much, and three groups said they enjoy these (14%) – with one of these groups adding that they are “excited” to listen to English and find it interesting. Two focus groups (9%), however, gave a more nuanced view and reported to be happy/enjoy it if they understand what is being said.

3. Can you give me as many examples as you can think of, where you have practiced listening in English, in your lessons?

The English listening activities the students mentioned doing most often were: listening to the teacher's instructions (10 focus groups; 45%), the teacher or a student reading a text out loud (9 and 4 focus groups, 41% and 18%, respectively), question-answer exchanges (7 focus groups; 32%), and students speaking to each other (5 focus groups; 23%) or pair/group work (4 focus groups; 18%). Other activities students talked about were: listening to video/audio in a multimedia room (3 focus groups), watching a cartoon (1 focus group), listening to audio on a topic they were working on which the teacher got from the internet and the students then needed to write a summary of (1 focus group), and exchanging standard expressions like greetings at the start of the lesson (1 focus group).

More than three-quarters of the student groups (77%), however, raised the fact that no audio files were used in their English classes. Some groups also talked about: the lack of

video facilities (1 focus group), the lack of listening tasks in their lessons (1), the lack of group work activities (1), and the lack of use of English during the lessons (1). One group pointed out that the only voice they listen to in English is the teacher's, while another group said that at the beginning of the year the teacher had tried to do listening activities but that s/he had stopped doing this because many students were not interested.

4. Do you have practice in listening to English outside the classroom?

Beyond the classroom, almost all focus groups reported listening to English songs (21 focus groups; 95%), watching English-spoken movies (20 focus groups; 91%; although in one group the students pointed out that these sometimes have subtitles) or cartoons (6 focus groups; 27%), and watching news in English (18 focus groups; 82%). Other opportunities to practise listening to English come from watching/listening to cricket matches (15 focus groups; 68%), football (3 focus groups; 14%), or simply sports more generally (1 focus group; 5%). Furthermore, several students mentioned listening to English as part of communication with friends (12 focus groups; 55%; in one group students talked about English conversations on the way home from school) or with family (8 focus groups; 36%). Other English listening practice the students mentioned experiencing was through: watching TV (3 focus groups), watching things on YouTube/the internet (3 focus groups), taking part in an extra-curricular debating club (2 focus groups), listening to the radio (2 focus groups), watching drama (1 focus group), mobile phone conversations (1 focus group), listening to voice messages (1 focus group), ICT (1 focus group), and taking private lessons (1 focus group).

5. How would you feel if there were more listening activities in English lessons?

95% (21 focus groups) agreed that it would be good to do more listening activities in their English lessons, commenting that they would: "like it (very much)" or "a lot"; be "(very) happy" with this; find it "very interesting", "very helpful" or "great"; feel that it would be "better" or "absolutely fine"; and that they would be "pleased". Although one group thought that, at first, they may be a bit afraid to do English listening activities, later it will get easier as they get better. Three groups also emphasized that it would be good for them (the students) to develop their English listening. One group talked about the potential benefits for communication with foreigners, getting good jobs and increasing their knowledge. Two other groups talked about how more listening activities could bring variety into the lessons and generate some interest.

The students in one group were somewhat more hesitant, stating that it would depend on what type of listening activities they would do, with some of the students in this group saying that listening to the teacher reading texts out loud is boring.

In sum, with reference to listening in English, the majority of students reported mixed views on how easy it is to understand spoken English. They find it easy as long as the aural input is constrained to simple and familiar vocabulary, grammar, topics and accents, but feel it is difficult to understand more complex spoken input and particularly struggle with lexical and phonological aspects as well as speech rate variation. Despite these challenges, however, the students enjoy doing activities to develop their English listening comprehension, although two of the focus groups specified that it depends on the extent to which they are able to follow.

The type of listening activities students described doing in their English lessons are very restricted, with the most popular ones being: listening to instructions given by the teacher and to written texts being read out loud, or listening as part of question-answer exchanges. Typically, these activities are not specifically designed for the purpose of developing students' oral comprehension, but simply part of the general lesson routine. The students also raised the issue of lack of aural input beyond their teachers' and fellow students' spoken English (i.e., very limited or no use of multimedia in their lessons), and the prevalence of the use of Bangla during many English lessons. Nevertheless, the students were enthusiastic about the idea of doing more listening activities in their English classes, particularly if these would be broader in range and type of activities. Beyond the classroom, the students indicated that they listen to English by watching/listening to movies, TV, music, as well as sports (with cricket being a popular channel for English input). Some students also stated that listening in English is a way of communicating with friends and family.

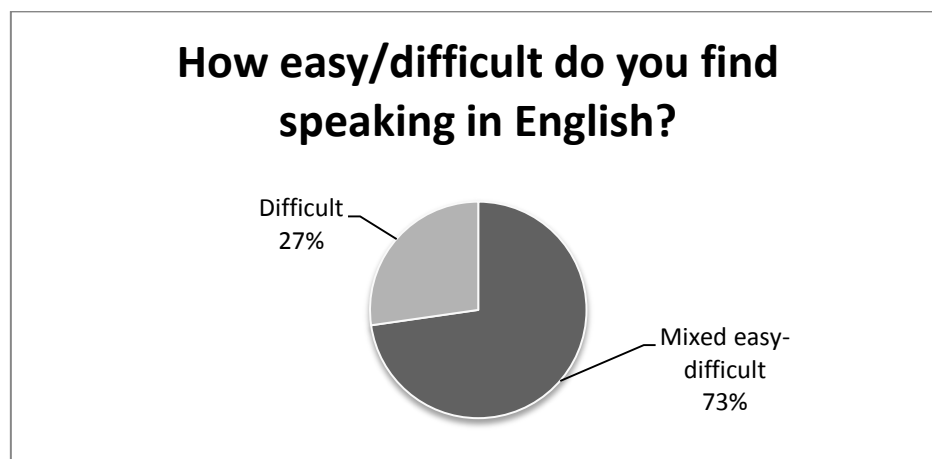
7.2.2 Speaking

Secondly, a similar set of questions was asked to gather insights into how students feel about speaking English, i.e. how easy or difficult they find this (q6), and any activities the teacher used to develop their English speaking ability, i.e. how much they enjoy these (q7); what kind of speaking activities they do in class (q8), how often they do these (q9), and what speaking practice they get outside the classroom (q10); and whether they would appreciate more English speaking activities in class (q11).

6. How easy/difficult do you find speaking in English? Why do you think that is?

The majority of focus groups (16 focus groups; 73%) agreed that speaking English is sometimes easy (in particular when speaking to friends, or if it concerns a familiar topic and simple/short sentences or words), but often it is difficult. In six other focus groups (27%), the students primarily felt that speaking English is difficult. Things that make speaking English difficult according to the students are: limited vocabulary (12 focus groups; 55%), English grammar such as word order (9 focus groups; 41%), pronunciation (5 focus groups; 23%), and lack of opportunity to speak English (6 focus groups; 27%). Several groups (5; 23%) also admitted being shy to speak English and make mistakes, or said that people make fun of them when they speak English (3 focus groups). Other issues mentioned are: that it is a foreign language (2), that some topics are more difficult (2), that the teacher corrects them and thus they are less motivated to speak (1), that the speed of talking and free speech are challenging. Only a couple of individual students thought speaking English is easy (amongst these was a student who had completed Lower Secondary School through the medium of English). Figure 8 provides a visual summary of these findings.

Figure 8: Students' views on speaking English



7. How much do you enjoy (English) speaking activities?

In general, all focus groups held a positive view on doing English speaking activities. 12 groups (55%) said they enjoy these very much/ a lot, and five groups (23%) said they enjoy these (with one group discussing that they were nevertheless a bit scared to speak). One focus group decided they like these "120%" and one said "100%". Another group said they liked these "average". One group admitted, however, that it depended on the topic and the activity.

8. Can you give me as many examples as you can think of, where you have practiced speaking in your lessons?

The speaking activities mentioned most often by the focus group participants were: question-answer exchanges (14 focus groups; 64%; individual or choral answers to teacher questions), pair or group work dialogues (14 focus groups; 64%), summarising a text orally (6 focus groups; 27%), giving a short presentation (4 focus groups; 18%), and introducing yourself (3 focus groups; 14%). Other practice involved reading a text out loud (1 focus group), pronunciation (1 focus group), and responding to greetings (1 focus group).

A few groups (3) discussed never doing pair or group work in English, and another group said that if they did, they first discussed things in Bangla in their group and only did the reporting in English. A further group said that all their speaking activities were simply in Bangla, not in English. One group also talked about the lack of presentation activities in their English lessons.

9. How much opportunity do each of you get to speak in English in the class? (Have you had an opportunity to speak? Does everyone speak? Only some people? Who chooses who speaks?)

Most focus groups (82%) talked about the limited opportunities to speak English in class: 10 focus groups said only some students have the opportunity to talk in class; one group mentioned opportunities in alternating classes; one group said once a week; seven groups stated that few students ever spoke in class (e.g. one group mentioned 2-3 students per week and another mentioned only 5% of students per week); and one

group said it was rare to do speaking activities. Three groups (14%) even stated never having an opportunity to speak English in class. One group, on the other hand, said that for presentations everyone has to speak.

If given the opportunity to speak, many groups (13; 59%) said the teacher often determined who should speak, and three groups talked about this often being front row students. Seven groups did say that students sometimes could choose themselves whether or not to speak.

During the discussions, five groups indicated that the large class sizes were a hindrance, and some others referred to the prevalence of speaking Bangla in the English classes. Two groups talked about how teachers often need to encourage their students to talk for longer, and three groups reported that they had done more speaking activities in Lower Secondary School than is the case now in Higher Secondary School.

10. Do you practise speaking in English outside the classroom?

Almost all focus groups said they practise speaking English by talking to friends (20 focus groups; 91%), family (16 focus groups; 73%), or their neighbours (3 focus groups; 14%). Three groups explicitly mentioned using Skype for such purposes (especially if family/friends lived abroad). In addition, one group each time mentioned speaking as part of a debating club, in extra English classes, during private English lessons, to their teachers, and to oneself.

11. How would you feel if there were more speaking activities in English lessons?

All students welcomed the idea of more speaking activities in their English lessons. They responded that: they would be (very) happy with this, liked it and would enjoy it, would find it a good idea and were very excited about it, thought it would be great and would be helpful for the students and their acquisition of English, and it would be interesting and better than at present. One group summarised their view as “150%” great, and another group decided that everyone should get the opportunity to talk in class.

To summarise, in terms of speaking English, about three-quarters of the students reported mixed views on how easy it is to speak English, whereas the remaining quarter admitted finding it difficult as such. Particular challenges to speaking English, the students stated, are their limited lexical and syntactic knowledge as well as pronunciation issues. Furthermore, several students confessed being too shy to speak English (out of fear of making mistakes, being corrected or laughed at), but many students also pointed out that they have very limited opportunities to practise speaking English. If they do, then it is often only a minority of students who get to say something (with teacher and student preferences playing a role in this, but also the big class sizes in many schools). In addition, the types of speaking activities done in class are restricted (e.g., question-answer exchanges, pair/group work, reading out loud or summarising a text orally) and not all schools offer these (e.g., some students reported never doing pair/group work or presentations). Furthermore, a number of groups emphasised the extensive use of Bangla instead of English in their English lessons, including during speaking activities. Nevertheless, all students said they enjoy doing English-speaking activities and would welcome more in their English lessons.

Beyond the classroom, many students indicated that they practise speaking English by talking to friends or family, sometimes using Skype. Two groups also mentioned an extra-curricular debating club at their school.

7.2.3 General

The focus groups ended with a general question on ease of learning English (q12), and an invitation to share any further thoughts or comments on studying English listening and speaking (q13).

12. What part of learning English do you find easiest? What do you find hardest?

Within several of the focus groups, students expressed different preferences. 44% of all focus group students find reading easiest. Some commented that this is because: this is the skill they do most work on in the English classes, they can see the words in print, or because it just gives them pleasure to read. About a quarter of the students, on the other hand, finds either learning to write (26%) or listen (24%) in English easiest, and only a minority said speaking (4%) or grammar (3%) are the easiest skills.

The latter two areas, consequently, were the parts of learning English most students found the most difficult: 51% of the students said speaking English is the hardest, and 40% finds English grammar the hardest to learn. 7% of the students find English listening comprehension the biggest challenge, and only a couple of students find writing the most difficult or said that all skills are equal in difficulty.

13. Is there anything else regarding studying listening and speaking in English you would like to share with me?

When asked for any further comments or thoughts, students in 12 of the focus groups (55%) expressed the wish for more, longer, or separate English listening and speaking classes. Two focus groups also suggested creating an extra-curricular English club for this purpose, and three groups emphasized the importance of more opportunities to speak English. One group recommended that listening and speaking should be included in the curriculum and in the textbooks, and one group thought that developing students' vocabulary knowledge would also help with developing their English listening and speaking ability.

In a number of focus groups, students commented on the way in which English is currently taught and argued that changes were needed to the pedagogical approaches being used. For example, one student said that a more "western teaching methodology" should be adopted, two focus groups would like more seminar-style teaching, one group felt smaller class sizes would be helpful, two groups thought group work would be beneficial, and two groups suggested adopting more "interesting" ways of teaching. Furthermore, three groups stressed that the English lessons should be conducted in English (rather than Bangla or a mix of Bangla and English). One group thought that occasional class visits by native speakers could help with students' listening and speaking development.

Several focus groups (9; 41%) raised the idea of using multimedia to develop students' English proficiency. As a consequence, they felt there was a great need for media equipment in their schools (ICT, audio, projectors, sound boxes, etc.). In one group, the students suggested that this would allow them to do integrated activities such as watching a

documentary linked to reading topics in the textbook and then doing summary writing as homework.

In one group, the students felt that their English lessons in Higher Secondary School contrasted with those in Lower Secondary which they described as “much more active”. They feared that, as a consequence, students were “losing all motivation in English”. On the other hand, one group emphasised how important their English listening and speaking skills could be for their academic results and jobs later.

Three groups talked about the assessment of English listening and speaking, with one group saying that most students currently fail English. They did anticipate, though, that the introduction of listening and speaking into the assessment system would help motivate students and, as a result, they might improve their skills more. These students did fear, however, that it could be hard for less skilled students and affect their total scores, and thus more activities on listening and speaking and more opportunities to practise these skills will be needed in the classroom.

In sum, when it comes to learning English more generally, slightly less than half of the students thought that learning to read in English is the easiest, with other students having diverse views on which English language skills are easiest to acquire. Speaking English and English grammar, in contrast, were each identified by a large group of students as the most challenging skills to learn (i.e., by half and by two-fifths of the students, respectively).

To further develop their English listening and speaking skills, various focus group students made recommendations such as: more opportunities to practise these skills, including more English lessons; and an overhaul of the pedagogic approaches currently used for the teaching of these skills, including the use of multimedia. Remarkably, some students thought that listening and speaking are not currently included in the English curriculum for Higher Secondary School in Bangladesh.

7.3 Conclusions of the student focus groups

Focus groups with students from 22 schools from four different regions indicate that, at present, the development of students’ English listening and speaking skills is given limited attention in English classes in Bangladesh Higher Secondary Schools. Logistical factors such as limited facilities and large class sizes play a role in this, as well as linguistic factors such as the students’ limited English proficiency, the fact that English is a foreign language, and the extensive use of Bangla instead of English during the English lessons. Furthermore, pedagogic issues such as the restricted range and type, and lack of purposefully-designed listening and speaking activities in the lessons do not really encourage the development of students’ English listening and speaking abilities. At the same time, however, Higher Secondary School students are keen to have more English classes and do more activities in their English lessons to develop their listening comprehension and speaking skills, especially if these are more varied in nature and target a more extensive range of listening and speaking skills, if more communicative approaches are used in teaching, and if English is consistently used as the medium of instruction in the English lessons.

8 Community Focus Groups

Although often overlooked in research, members from the wider society may also have stakes in the education system. Therefore, a number of stakeholders from Bangladeshi Higher Secondary School communities were also approached for participation in the present study. By means of focus groups, their views were gathered on the teaching, learning and assessment of English listening and speaking skills at Higher Secondary School.

The methodology employed to conduct these focus groups with the community stakeholders is described in Section 8.1. The resulting findings are provided in Section 8.2, which also includes intermediate summaries of community stakeholders' views. Conclusions from the focus group findings, relevant to the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking skills, are drawn in Section 8.3.

8.1 Methodology

8.1.1 Participants

Focus groups were held with members of the Governing Body from each of the 22 Higher Secondary Schools visited during the study – hereafter referred to as 'community members'. These members included the head teacher, teacher representatives, parent representatives and founding members of the Governing Body and/or school. One focus group was held at each of the 22 schools visited. In total, 142 community members participated: 37 from schools in Sylhet, 38 in Dhaka-Savar, 36 in Chittagong, and 31 in Dhaka-Narayangonj. At each site, between 3 to 9 community members (M=6.5) took part in the focus group. At the beginning of the focus group discussion, each participant was asked to complete a personal background questionnaire provided to them in Bangla (see Appendix 11.13 for an English version); the participants' bio-data are summarised below.

The majority of community members who participated were male (87%), and 13% were female. Their ages ranged between 28 and 80 years' old (M=50). All of them were Bangladeshi nationals and everyone reported using Bangla as their home language.

92% of the community members indicated that they had studied English, 8% said that they had not. The number of years of English study ranged from 0 to 40 (M=14.8). 20% of the participants, however, said they had no ability to speak English, 59% replied they had a bit, 18% said they could speak it well, and 3% said very well. In terms of understanding English, 4% of the community members said they could not understand English, 49% said they could understand a bit, 39% indicated they could understand English well while a further 8% said very well. A quarter of the community members (25%) said they did not use English in their daily life, while the others (75%) said they did, for example, to communicate with family, friends and foreigners (32%) or in their jobs (29%).

Just over a third of the participating community members (43%) were teachers, and close to a quarter were businessmen (23%). The current profession of other participants was principal or vice-principal (11%), or they had retired (7%). 21% of these community members acted on the Governing Body as teacher representatives and 11% as parent representatives. The educational

backgrounds of the participants ranged from the completion of Primary School (1%), of Lower Secondary School (14%), of Higher Secondary School (11%), to undergraduate degrees (17%) and to post-graduate degrees (55%; mostly MAs) as their highest level of education. Of those with university degrees, eight held B.Ed. degrees, five had M.Ed. degrees, and one had a D.Phil. from a British university.

Close to three-quarters of the community members (73%) reported having 1-5 children in school at the time of conducting the focus groups. 30% of the participants had children in Primary School, 40% had children in Lower Secondary, and 27% had children in Higher Secondary School.⁶

8.1.2 Procedure

A Bangladeshi British Council staff member first gave an introduction to the research in Bangla, providing the community members with information on the research focus, why they had been invited to take part, what their participation would involve, and further details on voluntary participation, data handling and withdrawal options. In addition, the community members were given a written information sheet in Bangla (see Appendix 11.7 for an English version) and consent form in Bangla (see Appendix 11.8 for an English version), confirming the information provided orally. Each community member who agreed to participate in the focus groups gave their consent in writing and completed a personal background questionnaire in Bangla (see Section 8.1.1).

The focus groups were often conducted as the last step of the school visit (i.e. after a classroom observation, teacher interview, and focus group with students), although in some schools they were done earlier in the day due to the availability of the community members. Similar to the other data collection steps, the focus groups with the community members took place on the school grounds, usually in the principal's office. The focus groups were led by the staff member from the British Council in Bangladesh who is a native speaker of Bangla and who translated questions and answers where necessary. One researcher was also present to help as required. The discussions were semi-structured in nature, making use of a focus group guide developed by the researchers and consisting of 16 questions (see Appendix 11.18). The questions focused on the community members' views on:

- 1) the importance of English listening comprehension (q1-q2) and speaking ability (q9-q10);
- 2) challenges and solutions to developing students' English listening comprehension (q3-q4) and speaking ability (q11-q12);
- 3) the introduction of formal assessment of students' English listening comprehension (q5-q6) and speaking ability (q13-q14); and
- 4) students' and teachers' level of English listening comprehension (q7-q8) and speaking ability (q15-q16).

While conducting the focus groups the researcher noted down salient points from the discussion. The focus groups were also audio-recorded to support the data analyses where necessary. On average, a focus group lasted roughly 45 minutes.

⁶ Note that many of the community members had children at several levels of education (Primary and Secondary).

8.2 Findings

8.2.1 Listening

Each focus group started with a set of eight questions on listening in English. Namely, the community members were asked about its importance for students (q1-q2), and any challenges and solutions to developing students' English listening comprehension (q3-q4). The focus of the discussion then shifted to the planned introduction of a formal assessment system for English listening comprehension, on which the community members were invited to share their views (q5-q6). Finally, the researcher asked what the community members thought students' and teachers' current level of English listening comprehension was like.

1. Is listening in English less important, as important or more important than reading and writing in English for students in Higher Secondary School? Why?

Almost all community members (131; 92%) felt that English listening comprehension is more important than reading or writing in English. In one of the focus groups, however, it was noted that it might be the reverse in formal situations. As reasons for the importance of being able to understand spoken English, several of the focus groups mentioned the critical role of listening comprehension in communication (13 focus groups; 59%) or argued that listening comprehension was necessary to be able to read or write (8 focus groups; 36%), also to be able to follow instructions given in the classroom (2 focus groups; 9%). In another focus group, it was stated that listening was the most important medium to gain knowledge, and one focus group posited that listening can be done without the ability to read or write.

Only two community members felt that reading and writing in English are more important across the board, but 10 others thought that all language skills are equally important.

2. Why do you think students need to be able to listen in English? (In what ways might they use listening in the future?)

Almost all focus groups (20; 91%) discussed the status of English as an international language and the role of listening to be able to communicate with people abroad. Some community members referred to increasing globalisation, the world as a "global village", and English as a ticket to "global citizenship" and a way to "keep pace" with the world. Six focus groups (27%) specifically referred to the need to understand English in order to study abroad, three groups (14%) stressed its importance in obtaining knowledge, and one group talked about its importance for working abroad.

Many focus groups (14; 64%) also talked about the need for Higher Secondary School students to understand English to be able to move onto tertiary level education in Bangladesh; and six groups (27%) emphasised its importance for job interviews and getting jobs. Four groups (18%) saw English listening as necessary for commercial purposes, two (9%) for dealing with modern technology, and one (5%) for better salaries.

At the same time, several groups recognised the need to understand English for the students' present studies, i.e. to do well in their English course in Higher Secondary School (5 focus groups; 23%), and to help improve other English skills such as speaking and writing (5 focus groups; 23%).

3. What do you think students find difficult about understanding the English that is spoken to them?

The community members commented on difficulties with understanding English accents/pronunciation (7 focus groups; 32%), a lack of vocabulary (5 focus groups; 23%), issues with understanding grammatical aspects of English such as sentence structure (2 focus groups; 9%), and difficulty with the topics talked about in English due to differences in world knowledge (1 focus groups; 5%). Also, the simple fact that English was not the students' first language was mentioned (5 focus groups, 23%).

A large part of the focus group discussions was spent on exploring reasons for students' difficulties in understanding spoken English. 17 groups (77%) identified a lack of practice in and exposure to English as a key issue, as well as the prevalence of Bangla in daily life and education (10 focus groups; 45%). Seven groups (32%) thought that this made students too shy to use English and afraid to make mistakes. The community members also identified many reasons within the educational system itself, with nine groups (41%) pointing to shortcomings in teacher training inhibiting the development of the learners' English listening skills, and other groups complaining about a shortage of English teachers (1), underpaid teachers (1), "backdated" teaching methodologies being used (1), class sizes being too large (1), and too few English lessons (2). In addition, two groups felt that students are not aware of the importance of listening in English, and one group said parents are not keen for their children to learn English. A number of groups also raised more fundamental problems: several community members felt that English as a subject is not considered a priority within the education system (3 focus groups; 14%), and is not sufficiently focused on at Primary and Lower Secondary level (4 focus groups; 18%). Two groups (9%) also commented that the Higher Secondary curriculum and syllabus does not support or motivate the development of English listening skills, and three groups (14%) thought that the lack of emphasis on listening in the HSC exam was an issue as students only focus on or are interested in developing the skills that are weighted heavily in the exam. Furthermore, some groups argued that the existing materials for teaching English are exam-oriented rather than focused on language acquisition (1), that textbooks are needed (1), that the current textbooks are too difficult (1), and that more equipment is needed for the teaching of English listening (1).

4. What do you think would help the students to improve their understanding of spoken English?

According to the community members, key aids for the development of students' English listening skills would be:

- multi-media resources such as audio, video, projectors, internet access, or music resources (10 focus groups; 45%);
- more practice in and exposure to English (in the first place at school, but some also said at home) (10 focus groups; 45%);
- consistent use of English in the English lessons (as opposed to Bangla) (7 focus groups; 32%);

- teacher training on English listening (in-service as well as pre-service) (6 focus groups; 27%);
- more English lessons (6 focus groups; 27%), with greater role from Primary School (3);
- inclusion of listening in the HSC exam (4 focus groups; 18%) and continuous assessment (1).

Other suggestions made by some focus groups were: watching movies/cartoons/news/documentaries in English (3); extra-curricular activities such as language/debating clubs, preferably sponsored by the government and made mandatory (3); creating greater awareness at students' home of the role of English (3); more extensive reading to expand students' English vocabulary (2); use of English as the medium of instruction in other school subjects (2); making English listening mandatory (2); providing more attractive English textbooks (1); using English outside of the classroom (1); promoting English listening more (1); official recognition of English as the country's second language (1); adverts in English (1); reducing student anxiety in English listening (1); smaller class sizes (1); more English teachers (1); more interactive lessons (1); and better teacher-student relationships (1).

5. In the near future listening is going to be formally assessed / evaluated as part of the students' English language ability. Do you think that is a good idea? Why or why not?

There was unanimous agreement amongst the community members that the introduction of a formal assessment system for English listening would be a good idea ("undoubtedly", "of course", "a very good idea", "best idea"). Primarily, the community members thought that this would ensure that students (and teachers) would place more emphasis on developing their English listening ability (13 focus groups; 59%), pay more attention to the skill of listening (7 focus groups; 32%), be more motivated, interested, inspired or even competitive in developing their listening comprehension (6 focus groups; 27%), be less shy with respect to English (4 focus groups; 18%), give the students more chance to practice their English listening (2), and that teachers would be able to gain insights into their students' ability in this manner (1). Additionally, a couple of focus groups made the general points that listening is a priority for communication in English (1), listening ability is an essential skill (1), and that increased importance of listening would help listening to become viewed as an "everyday skill" (1). In one group, however, the community members also pointed to risks associated with the introduction of formal assessment such as teacher bias and lack of training in this area.

6. The teacher will carry out this formal assessment of the students' listening ability. How easy do you think it is going to be for the teacher to do that?

Five of the focus groups (23%) thought it wouldn't be challenging, with two groups specifying that teachers have the skills to do this. Nine groups (41%), however, had more mixed views, with many saying that it could be difficult for the teachers at first, but that they would become more experienced over time. Four groups (18%) thought it would be difficult for the teachers to carry out formal assessment of students' listening ability.

Half of the focus groups (11; 50%) emphasised that teachers would need training in this area (with one group recommending that this was done at pre-service level rather than while in post). Another important challenge, identified by eight of the focus groups (36%), concerned student-teacher ratios; the community members expressed concerns over the feasibility of formal assessment of listening skills in very large classes and recommended reducing class sizes to, for example, maximum 30 students. Three groups also thought that the formal assessments could become very time-consuming, but four groups suggested that group work could form a partial solution. Several groups furthermore emphasized that a change in assessment should not happen in isolation: two groups called for a structural change to English as a subject as a whole, two groups called for changes to the English curriculum and syllabus, one group recommended the introduction of new teaching methodologies, one group thought more teachers are needed, and one group pointed out the need for suitable materials and equipment to teach listening. Finally, one group discussed the risk of teacher bias, which they felt would not be present if external assessors were involved.

7. What do you think is the current level of Higher Secondary School students' English listening ability in Bangladesh? How do you know?

Nearly two-thirds of the focus groups (14; 64%) suspected that Higher Secondary School students' English listening ability is poor, and four more groups (18%) thought it is very poor. One group, and three individual community members from other groups, estimated students' English listening to be average in level, and three groups thought that there is a mix of levels among the student population. In fact, seven groups (32%) thought that the abilities depend on the location of the schools, with students in rural areas having lower levels than those in urban areas. Other factors that may play a role were thought to be the amount of resources (1 focus group), or whether teachers have been government-trained ('better') or non-government-trained (1 focus group).

The community members based their estimates on observations in schools (6 focus groups), students' test results (4 focus groups), or observations in Higher Education or university test results (4 focus groups). Other things mentioned were: having taught in Higher Secondary, the fact that listening is not in the syllabus, and observations from one's own education, own family, or from talking to teachers, parents, and others.

8. What do you think is the current level of the teachers' English listening ability in Higher Secondary Schools in Bangladesh? How do you know?

Seven focus groups (32%) and three individual teachers from other groups agreed that teachers' English listening abilities are not so good, and two groups (9%) estimated it as being very poor. Five groups (23%) as well as four individual teachers from other groups described teachers' listening ability as medium level, and four more groups (18%) thought it is good. Only four individual community members estimated teachers' English listening ability as high.

The community members based their estimates on observations (7 focus groups), experiences (2 focus groups), meetings and discussions with colleagues (1). Two groups also suspected that there is variation depending on where the teachers graduated from, and two

groups said it depends on the location of the school. Two of the groups who estimated the teachers' listening proficiency as good referred to the fact that the teachers in Higher Secondary Schools are university graduates in English. However, three groups who estimated the teachers' listening proficiency as not being so good/weak stated that the best English graduates don't teach in Higher Secondary Schools as they can get better positions elsewhere. Other reasons given for lower estimates of teachers' English listening proficiency were teachers' lack of training in this area (5 focus groups; 23%), teachers' lack of exposure to English (1), teachers' lack of watching English TV (1), and teachers' lack of use of English in their classrooms (1).

In sum, the community members who participated in the focus group discussions agreed that being able to understand spoken English is important for Higher Secondary School students (including more important than being able to read or write in English) – from an international perspective (e.g., for global communication and study abroad) as well as within Bangladesh (e.g., for Higher Education, employment and business purposes). More than three quarters of the community members estimated, however, that students' level of English listening comprehension is (very) poor (with some possible differences depending on the location of the school, the availability of resources at the school, and the educational background of the teachers). Several community members suspected that, in particular, limited lexical or phonological knowledge of English may contribute to students' difficulties in understanding spoken English. The main reasons for students' low levels in English listening, as suggested by the community members, included: the lack of practice in and exposure to English as opposed to the prevalence of Bangla in daily life and education (including in the English lessons); shortcomings in teacher training and lack of resources for developing learners' English listening; status issues of English as a subject in the education system and of listening more specifically in the Higher Secondary curriculum and final exam. Consequently, to increase students' English listening comprehension skills, key recommendations made by the community members were: providing schools with multimedia resources; ensuring increased practice in and exposure to the English language, including more English lessons and mandatory use of English as the medium of instruction in the English lessons; training teachers in how to develop their students' English listening skills; and allocating a prominent role to listening in tests and other assessment procedures.

All community members welcomed the idea of introducing a system of formal assessment of Higher Secondary School students' English listening ability. They anticipate that this will generate positive washback on the teaching and learning of English listening, as well as the status of this skill, and on students' motivation levels. They recommended, however, that in order for this new assessment approach to be successful, it would be vital to train teachers in conducting such assessments. At the same time, they pointed out that a change in assessment should not happen in isolation, but should also be reflected in the curriculum, materials, and pedagogic approaches (including training teachers in these). They furthermore indicated that lower student-teacher ratios would be needed than presently is the case to make a teacher-driven assessment system feasible in practice. Furthermore, a number of community members suspected that many teachers themselves would need to improve their own level of English comprehension first.

8.2.2 Speaking

After having focused on listening, the same set of questions was asked again, but this time with respect to speaking in English. In other words, first the community members were asked about the importance for students in Higher Secondary School in Bangladesh of being able to speak in English (q9-q10), and any challenges and solutions to developing students' speaking skills (q11-q12). Next, the community members were asked for their opinions on the planned introduction of a formal assessment system for English speaking in Higher Secondary Schools (q13-q14). Finally, the community members were asked what they estimated the current level of English speaking of students and teachers to be.

9. Is speaking in English less important, as important or more important than reading and writing in English for students in Higher Secondary School? Why?

More than two-thirds of the community members (98; 69%) felt that being able to speak in English is more important than reading or writing in English. Almost a quarter of the community members (34; 24%), however, indicated that all skills are equally important. Only a couple of community members (6; 4%) saw speaking as less important than reading or writing, with one person specifying "in Bangladesh".

The importance of being able to speak English was supported by referring to its international use (3 focus groups), its need for studying abroad or in Higher Education (5 focus groups) or for jobs/business (3 focus groups). It was also thought important due to the vital role of communication (3 focus groups); as an enabler to express one's views (3 focus groups), participate (1), or "sell yourself" (1); and also for practical purposes such as shopping or going to a restaurant (1). Furthermore, in three of the focus groups, the community members felt that good oral ability helps with the development of the other language skills. Also, one group said that speaking is "essential in every sphere of life" and in another group it was argued, "because Bangladeshis can't speak English, the country is lagging behind."

10. Why do you think students need to be able to speak in English? (In what ways might they use speaking in the future?)

Many of the focus groups felt that Higher Secondary School students particularly need to be able to speak English to: a) move into Higher Education in Bangladesh or study abroad (16 and 3 focus groups; 73% and 14%, respectively), b) get (good) jobs in Bangladesh or abroad (16 and 4 focus groups; 73% and 18%, respectively), c) to operate globally as English is the "international language" or go abroad (12 and 7 focus groups; 55% and 32%, respectively), and d) to be able to communicate (10 focus groups; 45%). Other reasons mentioned were: being able to express oneself (3 focus groups) or "sell oneself" (1), for business purposes (2), for one's English classes (1), to acquire other language skills (2), to understand English words (1), to acquire knowledge (1), for exam purposes (1), because most materials are in English (1), to participate in daily life (1), to spread Islam and humanity (1), and to enhance the Bangladesh tourism industry (1).

11. What do you think students find difficult about speaking English?

The community members suspected that students find speaking English difficult because of their limited lexical knowledge in English (7 focus groups; 32%), their generally basic level of proficiency in English (4 focus groups; 18%), and their weak grammatical knowledge (2 focus groups; 9%). Also the fact that English is not the students' first language, but a foreign language, was thought to make speaking English difficult (3 focus groups; 14%).

Several reasons for students' difficulties in speaking English were formulated. Those provided by most focus groups were: a) the lack of practice in speaking English at home as well as school (including in the English classes) (16 focus groups; 73%), b) students being too shy to speak English for fear of criticism or mistakes (15 focus groups; 68%), and c) the lack of an English language or cultural environment (versus the main Bangla environment) (11 focus groups; 50%). Other reasons mentioned were: students' lack of motivation and interest (4 focus groups), the lack of emphasis or inclusion of speaking in the English curriculum (2), the lack of English speaking activities in the English lessons (1), the use of grammar-translation methods in teaching English (1), the fact that English is only one of many subjects at school (1), the suspicion that many see English as a subject rather than a language (1), the idea that "the subject of English as a whole is a problem" (1), the view that students don't study hard enough (1), the lack of teachers trained in the area of speaking (1), and the occurrence of code-switching (1).

12. What do you think would help them to improve their spoken English?

The community members made the following main suggestions to further the development of students' English speaking skills:

- mandatory use of English in the English classes (9 focus groups; 41%);
- use of English at home (6 focus groups; 27%) and increase parents' awareness (1; 5%);
- more practice of English speaking (6 focus groups; 27%);
- introduce extra-curricular debating, presentations, films (5 focus groups; 23%);
- put (more) weight on speaking in the exam/assessments (4 focus groups; 18%);
- train teachers in English speaking (4 focus groups; 18%);
- start English speaking from Primary School (4 focus groups; 18%);
- use English as the medium of instruction in some subjects (3 focus groups; 14%), use English as the medium of instruction from Primary School (1 focus group; 5%), or do subjects papers in English (1 focus group; 5%).

A range of other recommendations were also made by one or two groups each time: more teachers (2), more English lessons (2), and longer English lessons (1); motivate students to speak English (2); make it mandatory (2), and emphasise speaking more in the curriculum (2); do more effective and interactive classroom activities (2), including more reading (2), watch more movies and news (2), have conversations with students (2), do more vocab development (1), introduce mini-talks (1), introduce oral interviews (1), and make available extra materials (1). One group summarised their views as: the need to develop a culture of speaking in English.

13. In the near future speaking is going to be formally assessed / evaluated as part of the students' English language ability. Do you think that is a good idea? Why or why not?

The community members reacted positively to the idea of formal assessment of students' English speaking ability, calling it "a good idea" (19 focus groups; 86%), saying "of course" (1 focus group), stating that it is a "very good idea" (1 focus group) and that there is "an absolute need" (1 focus group). One focus group and one community member in another group emphasised, however, that teachers would need to be trained to do this.

The community members anticipate that introducing speaking assessment will create a positive washback effect by which students put more emphasis on and are more aware of speaking (12 focus groups; 55%), practise speaking more (5 focus groups; 23%) and thus increase their ability (3 focus groups; 14%), as well as make teachers put more emphasis on and dedicate more time to speaking English (6 focus groups; 27%). In addition, one group expected that it would reduce students' "shyness" to speak English, that it will be beneficial for global communication (1), and that such a change is needed to make things happen (1).

14. The teacher will carry out this formal assessment of the students' speaking ability. How easy do you think it is going to be for the teacher to do that?

Many community members had mixed feelings about how easy it would be to do, with 6 groups (27%) agreeing that it would be difficult at first but should become easier over time. Four groups (18%) suspected it would be difficult for the teachers. Some key prerequisites for successful assessment were suggested to be: a) training teachers in speaking assessment (11 focus groups; 50%), developing teachers' English oral abilities (2 focus groups; 9%), having more teachers (4 focus groups; 18%) and better paid ones (1 focus group; 5%); b) smaller class sizes (7 focus groups; 32%), and more English lesson time (4 focus groups; 18%); and c) paralleled with revisions to the curriculum/syllabus (2 focus groups; 9%) and suitable materials/equipment/infrastructure (3 focus groups; 14%). As a positive note, one group thought that the introduction of formal assessment would increase authenticity and lead to more information on all students, and that teachers could help each other to implement it.

Only two focus groups (9%) thought that it would be easy for the teacher to assess students' English speaking.

15. What do you think is the current level of students' English speaking ability in secondary schools in Bangladesh? How do you know?

The community members suspected that the majority of students' English speaking ability is poor (6 focus groups; 27%) to very poor (16 focus groups; 73%), with only a minority being able to speak English. According to four of the groups (18%), this depends on the school's location with students in urban areas having a higher proficiency than those in rural areas. The community members based their views on: their observations and experiences (11 focus groups; 50%) and teaching the students (1 focus group); discussions with colleagues (1); the lack of emphasis on speaking in the curriculum (1) and in the exams (1); students' failing their English courses (1); and the fact that Bangla is the medium of instruction of all other courses (1) and there is more emphasis on Arabic in madrasah colleges (1).

Only one group (5%) thought that the students are of 'middling' English speaking proficiency, because of the intermediate exams they need to pass (but note that this exam does not include a speaking component).

16. What do you think is the current level of Higher Secondary School teachers' English speaking ability in Bangladesh? How do you know?

A considerable part of the community members thought that teachers' English speaking ability is not good (12 focus groups; 55%). Some thought it is not so bad (3 groups; 14%), satisfactory (1 group; 5%), or average (5 groups; 23%). Only one community member thought teachers' English speaking ability is high. Some groups recognised variability between teachers, saying that it depends on the location (with higher proficiency in urban as opposed to rural areas; 2 groups) or the institution the teachers have graduated from (1 group) or their salaries (1 group). Weaknesses in teachers' proficiency was thought to be due to their lack of practice in speaking English (5 focus groups; 23%), their lack of training (4 focus groups; 18%), their high/exclusive use of Bangla in their English classes (3 focus groups; 14%), the lack of an encouraging environment to speak English (2 groups) and that it is not mandatory (1). One group also thought English speaking had not necessarily been included in teachers' university training. Some teachers said their views were based on their observations and experiences (5 focus groups; 23%), or the fact that they had not encountered teachers speaking English (2 focus groups; 9%).

To summarise, most participating community members considered being able to speak English to be important for Higher Secondary School students, because of the language's role in the world, for study abroad and Bangladesh Higher Education, and for professional and business purposes, and also because of its wider role in communication and enabling people to express themselves and make themselves heard. Almost all community members, however, suspected that, currently, students' English speaking skills are (very) poor (with some possible differences depending on the location of the school). Several of them thought that the language's foreign language status and students' limited lexical knowledge and generally basic English proficiency formed part of the explanation for students' difficulties in speaking English. Key reasons for students' low levels of English oral proficiency, as identified by the community members, are: the lack of practice in and exposure to English as opposed to the prevalence of Bangla in daily life and education (including in the English lessons); students' anxiety and lack of motivation to speak English; and the lack of emphasis on speaking in the curriculum, classroom, and materials. Accordingly, the main suggestions made by community members in order to develop students' oral proficiency in English were: increasing the use of English and practice in speaking English, including mandatory use of English as the medium of instruction in the English lessons (as opposed to the use of Bangla in English lessons), having more English lessons, and assigning a greater role to English in education; training teachers in developing their students' English speaking skills; and allocating a prominent role to speaking in tests and other forms of assessment.

All community members valued the proposed introduction of formal assessments of Higher Secondary School students' English speaking skills. They expect that this will result in positive washback on the teaching and learning of speaking in English, as well as reduce students' anxiety to speak English, and on students' motivation levels. They suspected, however, that such a change in

the evaluation system would pose a number of challenges, in particular in the beginning, and they argued that it would be important to train teachers in speaking assessment, to lower the student-teacher ratios and increase class time, to parallel the assessment changes with changes in the curriculum and offered resources. In addition, although the community members thought there are differences between teachers, more than half suspected that many English teachers' speaking skills would need to be developed in order for them to be able to successfully conduct speaking assessments.

8.3 Conclusions of the community member focus groups

A series of 22 focus groups with members of the Governing Bodies of Higher Secondary Schools from four different Bangladesh regions indicate that this stakeholder group recognises the importance of being able to understand and speak English for students at this level of education and also welcomes the introduction of a formal assessment system for evaluating students' English listening and speaking skills. Many of these community members, however, suspect that, at present, students' (and potentially also teachers') low levels of listening and speaking proficiency will pose a challenge, but they are hopeful that the new assessment system will generate positive washback. Some of the issues that will need addressing are students' current lack of practice in and exposure to English; shortcomings in teacher training and in available human and material resources for developing learners' English listening and speaking; and status issues of listening and speaking skills in the curriculum, and in teaching, learning, and assessment. Following the advice of community members, measures such as increasing the material resources (e.g., multimedia), human resources (e.g., better student-teacher ratios), time resources (e.g., more/longer English classes), linguistic resources (e.g., mandatory use of English as medium of instruction in the English lessons), and pedagogic resources (e.g., teachers trained in the teaching and assessment of listening and speaking) are highly likely to be beneficial to the planned changes.

9 Overall Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper has reported on the findings of a study that investigated the current practices and perceptions on English listening and speaking assessment in Bangladesh Higher Secondary Schools. This particular study follows a series of baseline studies on the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking at lower levels of the education system, and was conducted in light of the Bangladesh Ministry of Education's plans to introduce a system of continuous assessment of English listening and speaking skills in Higher Secondary School. It comprised a mixed-methods study, which involved a review of relevant prior studies and of the curriculum for English in Bangladesh Higher Secondary Schools, as well as classroom observations, interviews with English teachers, and focus group discussions with students and stakeholders from the wider community at 22 Higher Secondary Schools in four different regions in Bangladesh.

The findings suggest that, generalising from the 22 schools visited in four rural areas of Bangladesh, the majority of **English language teachers in Higher Secondary schools are not ready yet to implement a system of continuous assessment of their students' English listening and speaking skills (RQ1)**. In addition to this outcome regarding the study's first research question, it should be noted that the observed lack of readiness does not solely apply to teachers, but also appears to occur at the level of the **curriculum, schools and their facilities, and learners**. Furthermore, as identified by the study, the challenges to implement continuous assessment are not restricted to the area of assessment, but also concern current practices in the **teaching and learning** of English listening and speaking skills at the Higher Secondary School level.

More specifically, on the one hand, the study indicated that the curriculum contains a considerable proportion of learning outcomes that require the use of listening and speaking skills, which is promising from the perspective of potential positive impact on the teaching and learning of English and instilling communicative competence in learners. On the other hand, however, there is a **risk of negative washback** due to the limited weighting currently attributed to listening and speaking in the high-stakes final exams, the restricted range of test formats and assessment criteria in those exams, and the lack of clarity of the assessment criteria. Indeed, there is evidence from the classroom observations and the interviews/discussions with teachers and students that they view spending time on the lesser weighted skills of the Higher Secondary Certificate examination as detrimental to the chances of passing that examination. In addition, in their current format, the learning outcomes relevant to listening and speaking skills leave a **lot of room for interpretation as to the intended level and specific nature of English proficiency** for learners in Higher Secondary School. Namely, an expert review indicated that the listening and speaking learning outcomes may span an ability range as wide as CEFR A2 level (*Basic User*) to C2 level (*Proficient User*) (although it should be noted that the review also indicated that in most cases there is no 'natural' relationship between the learning outcome statements and the CEFR). At the same time, informal observations of the teachers' and the students' interactions during the classroom observations and interviews and focus group discussions suggested that the **English listening and speaking proficiency of many teachers and of almost all students is low**. In fact, some teachers themselves, as well as students and community members, raised this issue of current English proficiency levels of teachers and students.

Furthermore, the classroom observations as well as the information provided by the teachers, students, and community members all indicated that **students' exposure to and practice in oral English is currently very limited**: most of the English classes are carried out in Bangla, primarily focus on the teaching of reading and grammar, and offer hardly any opportunities for students to interact. In those limited instances where English listening and speaking activities are conducted in class, the types of activities are very restricted (e.g. reading texts out loud, choral completion of teacher's sentences, question-answer exchanges). As was clear from the textbook used in most classes, and as also pointed out by teachers, there is currently a **lack in many schools of pedagogic materials** that stimulate the teaching of listening and speaking. This is further aggravated by the **lack of technical aids and suitable facilities** in the majority of schools, including the lack of multimedia resources, and large size and bad acoustics of most classrooms. Furthermore, teachers, students, as well as community members all identified the **very high student-teacher ratios**, with the average class size in the schools visited around 80 students (but as high as 218), as a major challenge for the teaching and assessment of oral language skills. In addition, even if resources can be made available, several **teachers** indicated that they **feel underprepared** at present to assess, and, in the first place, teach English listening and speaking. The **lack of teacher training** in this area was also a big concern put forward by many community members.

In sum, the study's findings suggest that **several educational, linguistic, pedagogic, practical, professional, and technical factors currently inhibit the implementation of effective assessment of listening and speaking in English (RQ2)**. Nevertheless, all key stakeholders showed a positive attitude towards introducing or increasing the teaching and assessment of listening and speaking skills in English classes at the Higher Secondary level, provided the above mentioned challenges are addressed. They thought that this would be helpful for the development of students' (and teachers') communicative skills and their confidence in English, for their achievements in English as a subject and thus their successful completion of Higher Secondary School, as well as for their life beyond the classroom (e.g., tertiary education, jobs, international access).

A series of **recommendations** follow from the above findings:

- 1. The need to raise awareness of the English curriculum for Higher Secondary School.** Comments made by some teachers, students, and community members suggest that there exist a number of misconceptions regarding the inclusion and weight of listening and speaking skills in the current Higher Secondary Curriculum, with some stakeholders being completely unaware of the inclusion of these skills in the curriculum targets.
- 2. The need to make the Learning Outcomes of the Higher Secondary School curriculum more specific and precise.** The expert review of those learning outcomes relevant to listening and speaking skills indicated that there is a need for qualifiers and contextualising information to be added to the learning outcomes so that the learning outcomes would provide a clear and unambiguous indication of the target level of proficiency for Higher Secondary students. This would help ensure consistent interpretations of the learning outcomes, and is needed to enable a reliable and valid teacher-based assessment approach. In addition, creating greater specificity in the learning outcomes may help ensure transparent, coherent and realistic proficiency objectives across the Higher Secondary level. It should thereby be noted that, if it is considered important to establish a link between the Bangladesh Higher Secondary School curriculum and the CEFR, it should be kept in mind that, at present, there are significant

differences between the constructs underlying the curriculum versus the CEFR. Thus, linking may require significant revisions to the curriculum, and should involve carefully consideration of advantages and disadvantages, potential positive and negative impact, and suitability and meaningfulness of a direct link between the curriculum and the CEFR in the Bangladesh context, including consultation of various stakeholders.

Importantly, if any revisions are made to the curriculum, there will be **a need to make teachers aware of the revisions**, for example via teacher training on this.

3. **The need to communicate plans on assessment reforms.** Comments made by some school principals and teachers (and also students and community members) indicated that many were unaware of the Ministry of Education's plans to introduce a system of continuous assessment of English listening and speaking skills at Higher Secondary level, until they had been approached to participate in this study.
4. **The need to train teachers.** The classroom observations indicated a significant lack of activities that enable the development of learners' English listening and speaking skills. In addition, many teachers (supported by comments from community members) singled out the need for support to become skilled assessors of listening and speaking skills. More specifically, training needs were identified in at least three critical areas:
 - a. The teaching of English listening and speaking skills
 - b. The assessment of English listening and speaking skills
 - c. Teachers' own English listening and speaking skills

An important advantage is that the teachers indicated their willingness to develop their own professional skills in this area and to welcome further training.

5. **The provision of pedagogical and technical aids.** In the majority of schools, all stakeholders pointed to the need for resources that can enable and support the teaching and assessment of students' English listening and speaking skills. They identified the need for technical resources such as multimedia (audio and visual media, projectors, speakers, microphones, internet access, etc.), as well as pedagogical resources such as textbooks and educational aids that specifically stimulate the development of listening and speaking skills. Such resources would enable the increase of the amount, range and types of activities conducted in English classrooms and could help make the lessons more communicative.

Importantly, there will be **a need for teachers to be trained from a technical as well as pedagogic perspective** on how to make effective use of any aids provided.

6. **The need to encourage the use of English as medium of communication in English classes.** Teachers as well as students from many of schools admitted to the extensive use of Bangla versus very limited use of English during English lessons, but realised the detrimental effect this may have on students' acquisition of English. Not the least to increase students' level of exposure to oral English and practice in this area, the use of English as a medium of communication in English lessons needs to be encouraged. The recommendations mentioned above, such as raising teachers' awareness, increasing teachers' English proficiency, increasing teachers' pedagogic skills on teaching and assessing listening and speaking, and increasing the availability and use of pedagogic and technical aids can all be employed to reach this goal.
7. **The need to lower the student-teacher ratio.** Since the Ministry aims to introduce an assessment system that requires continuous and individual student evaluations, a reasonable balance needs to be achieved between the number of students per teacher-assessor. This is in order to ensure reliable and valid judgements, and also to keep it a

feasible and sustainable assignment for the teachers. Any measures taken with regard to reducing student-teacher ratios might also be supplemented with **increases in the number or time of English classes**, and with specific **teacher training on the teaching and assessment of large groups** (see, for example,

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/teaching-large-classes>).

8. **The need to adopt a holistic approach to any assessment change.** What becomes clear from the above findings and recommendations, and was also emphasized by a number of stakeholders in this study, is that assessments are not standalone events, but that any changes in assessment should go hand-in-hand with what is happening at the broader level of teaching and learning.

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11 Appendices

11.1 Participant information sheet: Language testing experts

We are researchers at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom and we would like to invite you to take part in a research study about the assessment of English listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh higher secondary schools.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?

This study aims to gain an idea of how English listening and speaking skills are currently taught and assessed in Bangladesh higher secondary schools.

Why have I been invited?

We have approached you because as part of our research we are required to explore the relationship between the learning outcomes for English listening and speaking in Bangladesh higher secondary schools and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

We would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decided to take part, we will ask you to a) complete a short personal background questionnaire, and b) participate in an activity that explores the relationship between the learning outcomes and the CEFR. This will last approximately 1.5hrs.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

Taking part in this study will allow you to share your experiences and views on the learning outcomes and the CEFR. Your insights will contribute to our understanding of the learning outcomes for English listening and speaking in Bangladesh higher secondary schools with reference to the CEFR.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. Your participation is voluntary.

If you decide not to take part in this study, this will not affect your research group membership or your studies.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you can withdraw from the study until 1 week after the data collection activity took place. In that case, we will disregard your data. Please appreciate that it is not possible to withdraw after one week, since it is not possible to remove data once they have been anonymised and collated.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is unlikely that there will be any disadvantages to taking part. Taking part will mean investing 1.5hrs of your time.

Will my data be identifiable?

Only we will have access to the data you share with us. We will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is we will not share it with others. We will anonymise all data.

How will my data be stored?

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers.

We will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

We will use the data you have shared with us only in the following ways:

We will use it for academic purposes only. This will include a research report and potentially academic and professional journal/book publications. We may also present the results of the study at academic and professional conferences, or use samples for teaching purposes.

When writing up the findings from this study, we will mainly report the results at the general level, for all participants together. We might also like to add illustrations by reproducing some of the views and ideas you shared with us. When doing so, we will only use anonymised quotes, so that although we will use your exact words, you cannot be identified in our publications.

Who has reviewed the project?

This study has been reviewed and approved by Lancaster University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact us, Dr Tineke Brunfaut, XXX, or Dr Rita Green, XXX

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact our Head of Department, Prof Elena Semino, XXX.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project!

Dr Tineke Brunfaut and Dr Rita Green

11.2 Consent form: Language testing experts

Project Title: English listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh higher secondary schools

Name of Researchers: Dr Tineke Brunfaut and Dr Rita Green

Email: XXX

Please tick each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I also understand the information on withdrawal options as detailed in the information sheet.
3. I understand that any information disclosed within the session remains confidential to the group, and I will not discuss it with or in front of anyone who was not involved unless I have the relevant person's express permission.
4. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic/professional articles, publications or presentations/teaching by the researcher/s, but my personal information will not be included and I will not be identifiable.
5. I understand that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.
6. I understand that data will be kept according to Lancaster University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher/person taking the consent _____ **Date** _____ Day/month/year

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

11.3 Participant information sheet: Teachers

We are researchers at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom, assisted by a local Bangladesh researcher, and we would like to invite you to take part in a research study about learning English listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh higher secondary schools.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?

This study aims to gain an idea of how English listening and speaking skills are currently taught and assessed in Bangladesh higher secondary schools.

Why have I been invited?

We have approached you because we are interested in understanding how teachers approach the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh higher secondary schools.

We would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decided to take part, this would involve the following: a) an observation of one of your regular English lessons, including audio- and video-recording, and b) an interview to talk about your approaches and views on developing students' English listening and speaking skills. The interview will take place on the same day of the observation in a quiet room in your school and will last approximately half an hour.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

Taking part in this study will allow you to share your experiences and views on the teaching and assessment of English listening and speaking skills. Your insights will contribute to our understanding of how these skills are currently taught and assessed in Bangladesh higher secondary schools.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. Your participation is voluntary.

If you decide not to take part in this study, this will not affect your teaching position and your relations with your employer.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you can withdraw from the interviews until 1 week after the interview took place. In that case, we will disregard your interview data. You are also free to withdraw at any time before the classroom observation has started. Please appreciate that it is not possible to withdraw from the classroom observation afterwards, since the observations also involve all learners in your classroom and it would thus be difficult to eliminate data from one person only.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part. Taking part will mean investing 30 minutes for an interview we will ask you to take part in.

Will my data be identifiable?

After the classroom observation and interview, only we will have access to the data you share with us. We will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is we will not share it with others. We will anonymise any audio recordings and hard copies of any data. This means that we remove any personal information.

How will my data be stored?

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers.

We will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office.

We will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic).

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

We will use the data you have shared with us only in the following ways:

We will use it for academic purposes only. This will include a research report and potentially academic and professional journal/book publications. We may also present the results of my study at academic and professional conferences.

When writing up the findings from this study, we will mainly report the results at the general level, for all participants together. We might also like to add illustrations by reproducing some of the views and ideas you shared with us. When doing so, we will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from our interview with you), so that although we will use your exact words, you cannot be identified in our publications.

Who has reviewed the project?

This study has been reviewed and approved by Lancaster University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact us, Dr Tineke Brunfaut, XXX, or Dr Rita Green, XXX

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact our Head of Department, Prof Elena Semino, XXX.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project!

Dr Tineke Brunfaut and Dr Rita Green

11.4 Consent form: Teachers

Project Title: English listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh higher secondary schools

Name of Researchers: Dr Tineke Brunfaut and Dr Rita Green

Email: XXX

Please tick each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I also understand the information on withdrawal options as detailed in the information sheet.

3. If I am participating in the classroom observation, I understand that any information disclosed within the classroom remains confidential to the class group, and I will not discuss the observation with or in front of anyone who was not involved unless I have the relevant person's express permission.

4. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic/professional articles, publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but my personal information will not be included and I will not be identifiable.

5. I understand that any classroom observations will be video- and audio-recorded, and interviews will be audio-recorded and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.

6. I understand that data will be kept according to Lancaster University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.

7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____ **Date** _____ Day/month/year

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

11.5 Participant information sheet: Students

We are researchers at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom, assisted by a local Bangladesh research, and we would like to invite you to take part in a research study about learning English listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh higher secondary schools.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?

This study aims to gain an idea of how English listening and speaking skills are currently taught and assessed in Bangladesh higher secondary schools.

Why have I been invited?

We have approached you because we are interested in students' views on learning English listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh higher secondary schools.

We would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decided to take part, this would involve: a) us observing one of your English lessons, and b) taking part in a group discussion with 6-8 students. The discussion will take place in a quiet room in your school and will last approximately half an hour.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

Taking part in this study will allow you to share your experiences and views on how English listening and speaking skills are taught in your school. Your insights will contribute to our understanding of these skills are currently taught and assessed in Bangladesh higher secondary schools.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. Your participation is voluntary.

If you decide not to take part in this study, this will not affect your studies and the way you are assessed on your course.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time before the classroom observations and group discussions have started. Since the observations and group discussions involve many different learners and/or a teacher, it will unfortunately no longer be possible to withdraw and remove your parts of the conversations once the observations and discussions have taken place.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part. Taking part will mean investing 30 minutes for a group discussion we will ask you to take part in.

Will my data be identifiable?

After the classroom observation and group discussions, only we will have access to the data you share with us. We will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is we will not share it with others. We will anonymise any video/audio recordings and hard copies of any data. This means that we remove any personal information. Other students in the group discussion will be asked not to disclose information outside of the group and with anyone not involved in the group without the relevant person's express permission.

How will my data be stored?

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers.

We will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in our office.

We will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic).

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

We will use the data you have shared with us only in the following ways:

We will use it for academic purposes only. This will include a research report and potentially academic and professional journal/book publications. We may also present the results of our study at academic and professional conferences.

When writing up the findings from this study, we will mainly report the results at the general level, for all participants together. We might also like to add illustrations by reproducing some of the views and ideas you shared with me. When doing so, we will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from our interview with you), so that although we will use your exact words, you cannot be identified in our publications.

Who has reviewed the project?

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact us, Dr Tineke Brunfaut, XXX, or Dr Rita Green, XXX

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact my Head of Department, Prof Elena Semino, XXX.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project!

Dr Tineke Brunfaut and Dr Rita Green

11.6 Consent form: Students

Project Title: English listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh higher secondary schools

Name of Researchers: Dr Tineke Brunfaut and Dr Rita Green

Email: XXX

Please tick each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I also understand the information on withdrawing as described in the information sheet.

3. If I am participating in the classroom observation and group discussion I understand that any information disclosed within the group remains confidential to the group, and I will not discuss the observation or discussion group with or in front of anyone who was not involved unless I have the relevant person's express permission.

4. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic/professional articles, publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but my personal information will not be included and I will not be identifiable.

5. I understand that any classroom observations will be video- and audio-recorded, and discussion groups will be audio-recorded and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.

6. I understand that data will be kept according to Lancaster University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.

7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____ **Date** _____ Day/month/year

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

11.7 Participant information sheet: Community members

We are researchers at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom, assisted by a local Bangladesh research, and we would like to invite you to take part in a research study about learning English listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh higher secondary schools.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?

This study aims to gain an idea of how English listening and speaking skills are currently taught and assessed in Bangladesh higher secondary schools.

Why have I been invited?

We have approached you because we are interested in the wider community's views on learning English listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh higher secondary schools. We would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decided to take part, this would involve taking part in a group discussion with 6-8 community members. The discussion will take place in a quiet room in your local school and will last approximately half an hour.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

Taking part in this study will allow you to share your views on learning English listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh higher secondary schools.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. Your participation is voluntary.

If you decide not to take part in this study, this will not affect your position or your child's studies.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time before group discussions have started. Since the group discussions involve many different community members, it will unfortunately no longer be possible to withdraw and remove your parts of the conversations once the discussions have taken place.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part. Taking part will mean investing 30 minutes for an interview we will ask you to take part in.

Will my data be identifiable?

After the group discussion, only we will have access to the data you share with us. We will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you

that can identify you) confidential, that is we will not share it with others. We will anonymise any audio recordings and hard copies of any data. This means that we remove any personal information. Other participants in the group discussion will be asked not to disclose information outside of the group and with anyone not involved in the group without the relevant person's express permission.

How will my data be stored?

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers.

We will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in our office.

We will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic).

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

We will use the data you have shared with us only in the following ways:

We will use it for academic purposes only. This will include a research report and potentially academic and professional journal/book publications. We may also present the results of our study at academic and professional conferences.

When writing up the findings from this study, we will mainly report the results at the general level, for all participants together. We might also like to add illustrations by reproducing some of the views and ideas you shared with me. When doing so, we will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from our interview with you), so that although we will use your exact words, you cannot be identified in our publications.

Who has reviewed the project?

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact us, Dr Tineke Brunfaut, XXX, or Dr Rita Green, XXX

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact my Head of Department, Prof Elena Semino, XXX.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project!

Dr Tineke Brunfaut and Dr Rita Green

11.8 Consent form: Community members

Project Title: English listening and speaking skills in Bangladesh higher secondary schools

Name of Researchers: Dr Tineke Brunfaut and Dr Rita Green

Email: XXX

Please tick each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I also understand the information on withdrawing as described in the information sheet.
3. If I am participating in the group discussion I understand that any information disclosed within the group remains confidential to the group, and I will not discuss the discussion group with or in front of anyone who was not involved unless I have the relevant person's express permission.
4. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic/professional articles, publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but my personal information will not be included and I will not be identifiable.
5. I understand that discussion groups will be audio-recorded and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.
6. I understand that data will be kept according to Lancaster University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____ Date _____ Day/month/year

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

11.10 Personal background questionnaire: School principals

Dear school principal,

Thank you very much for allowing us to do research at your school! We would be grateful if you could complete the following questionnaire. All data will be anonymized.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Tineke Brunfaut and Dr Rita Green

About you

1. First name: Last name(s):
2. Gender: male female
3. Age: years' old
4. Nationality:
5. Language(s) spoken at home:
6. Your highest level of education:
 lower secondary school (Grade 10)
 higher secondary school (Grade 12)
 higher education: undergraduate postgraduate other:.....
 other:
7. Are or were you a teacher? no yes, I teach/taught:
8. Your current job:(please specify)
9. Do you speak English? no a little bit well very well
10. Do you understand English? no a little bit well very well
11. Did you ever study English? no yes, for years
12. Did you ever live in an English-speaking country?
 no yes, in (country) for.....years
13. Do you sometimes use English in your daily life?
 no yes, I use English for

PLEASE ALSO COMPLETE THE NEXT PAGE

About the school

14. Name of the school:.....

15. Location of the school: Chittagong Dhaka Sylhet

16. How many students are there in the school? students

a. How many students are female? students

b. How many students are male? students

17. How many classes are there in the school?

..... Grade 11 classes

..... Grade 12 classes

..... other classes, namely

18. How many students are there in one class?

Lowest number of students in one class:.....

Highest number of students in one class:.....

Average number of students per class:.....

19. Does the school have a shift system?

no

yes

a. Type of shift:.....

Average number of students per class in this type of shift:.....

b. Type of shift:.....

Average number of students per class in this type of shift:.....

c. Type of shift:.....

Average number of students per class in this type of shift:.....

20. How many teachers are there in the school?

a. How many teachers are female?teachers

b. How many teachers are male?teachers

21. How many teachers teach English in the school?

a. How many English teachers are female?teachers

b. How many English teachers are male?teachers

22. Are there assistant teachers in the school who teach English?

no yes, assistant teachers

Thank you! 😊

11.11 Personal background questionnaire: Teachers

Dear teacher,

Thank you very much for taking part in this study! We would be grateful if you could complete the following background information questionnaire. All data will be anonymized.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Tineke Brunfaut and Dr Rita Green

About you

1. First name: Last name(s):.....
2. Gender: male female
3. Age: years' old
4. Nationality:
5. First Language:
6. Do you have a teaching qualification/degree?
 no
 yes, in the following subjects: (please name the subjects)
7. Your highest diploma/degree:
 secondary school
 undergraduate degree in(please name the degree)
 postgraduate degree in(please name the degree)
 other: (please specify)
8. Did you ever live in an English-speaking country?
 no yes, in (country) for.....years

About your job

9. School(s) you currently work at:.....
10. How many years of teaching experience do you have? years
11. What subject(s) do you teach? English other:
12. How many years have you been teaching English? years
13. Number of classes you currently teach English to: classes
14. Level(s) you currently teach English at: Grade 11 Grade 12 Grade(s)

Thank you! 😊

11.12 Personal background questionnaire: Students

Dear student,

Thank you very much for taking part in our research! We would be grateful if you could tell us a bit more about yourself. We will not use your name in any publications.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Tineke Brunfaut and Dr Rita Green

1. First name: Last name(s):
2. Gender: male female
3. Age: years' old
4. Nationality:
5. Language(s) spoken at home:
6. Level of study: Grade 11 Grade 12 other:.....
7. Did you ever live in an English-speaking country?
 no yes, I lived in (country) for.....years
8. How many years have you been learning English? years
9. Do you sometimes use English in your daily life?
 no yes, I use English for

Thank you! 😊

11.13 Personal background questionnaire: Community members

Dear participant,

Thank you very much for taking part in our research! We would be grateful if you could tell us a bit more about yourself. We will not use your name in any publications.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Tineke Brunfaut and Dr Rita Green

1. First name: Last name(s):
2. Gender: male female
3. Age: years' old
4. Nationality:
5. Language(s) spoken at home:
6. Your highest level of education:
 primary school
 lower secondary school (Grade 10)
 higher secondary school (Grade 12)
 higher education: undergraduate postgraduate other:.....
 other:
7. Your current professional activity:
 Student:(please tell us what you are studying)
 Job:(please tell us what your job is)
 Role in the community:.....(please tell us what your role is)
 Anything else?.....
8. Do you have children who go to school?
 no
 yes, in primary school: children (please add the number)
 yes, in lower secondary school: children (please add the number)
 yes, in higher secondary school: children (please add the number)
9. Do you speak English? no a little bit well very well
10. Do you understand English? no a little bit well very well
11. Did you ever study English? no yes, for years
12. Did you ever live in an English-speaking country?
 no yes, I lived in (country) for.....years
13. Do you sometimes use English in your daily life?
 no yes, I use English for

Thank you! 😊

11.14 Learning Outcome – CEFR sheet

LO No.	Skill(s)	Learning outcome	CEFR level	Relevant CEFR scale(s)	Justification/comments
1	L	a) Follow instructions, directions, requests, announcements			
	S	b) Give instructions, directions, requests, announcements			
	L&S	c) Respond accordingly in social situations			
2	L	Follow lectures			
3	S (&L)	Describe people, places, and different cultures			

LO No.	Skill(s)	Learning outcome	CEFR level	Relevant CEFR scale(s)	Justification/comments
4	S	Narrate incidents and events in a logical sequence			
5	S	a) Ask for suggestions/opinions			
	S & L	b) Give suggestions/opinions			
6	S & L	Participate in conversations, discussions, and debates			
7	S	a) Tell stories			
	S & L	b) Analyse stories			

LO No.	Skill(s)	Learning outcome	CEFR level	Relevant CEFR scale(s)	Justification/comments
8	L	a) Recognize English sounds, stress and intonation appropriately while listening and speaking			
	S	b) Use English sounds, stress and intonation appropriately while listening and speaking			
9	L	Listen for specific information on radio, television, and other announcements			
10	L	If read out loud: a) Understand stories, short plays, poems, and other literary pieces			
	L	b) Enjoy stories, short plays, poems, and other literary pieces			
	L & S	c) Interpret stories, short plays, poems, and other literary pieces			
	L & S	d) Critically appreciate stories, short plays, poems, and other literary pieces			

LO No.	Skill(s)	Learning outcome	CEFR level	Relevant CEFR scale(s)	Justification/comments
11	S	Critically appreciate nonfiction works			
12	L	If orally delivered: a) Understand authentic texts and signs i.e. instructions, directions, notices			
	L	b) Follow authentic texts and signs i.e. instructions, directions, notices			
14	S	Describe a process			

LO No.	Skill(s)	Learning outcome	CEFR level	Relevant CEFR scale(s)	Justification/comments
17	S	a) Describe maps, charts, graphs, etc.			
	L	If orally presented: b) Understand maps, charts, graphs, etc.			
	L	c) Interpret maps, charts, graphs, etc.			
18	S & L	Carry out study/survey/project			
20	S	Speak English accurately in all aspects of communication			

11.15 Classroom observation schedule

School: _____ Teacher: _____ Gender: _____
 No. of students: _____ Year: _____
 Date: _____ Time of class: _____

Photograph	Classroom	Teacher	Resources
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Sketch of class	Layout of desks	Teacher's desk	Board	Resources	Seating by gender
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Classroom activities observed		Details including time / frequency etc.
1	Type of listening activity	
2	Type of speaking activity	
3	Nature of other activities e.g. grammar, writing, reading ...	

Language and nature of interaction		Details
4	Conducted in English (%):	Wholly – partly but mostly – half/half – partly but little – not
5	Level of English: indicated by (textbook)/ estimated difficulty level for students.	Above – at – below level
6	% and nature of teacher talk vs. student talk	Teacher talk: % Nature teacher talk: Student talk: % Nature student talk: e.g. individual / choral / groups / pairs % in English:
7	Students producing extended utterances	
8	Individual students producing meaningful (i.e. unpredictable) utterances	
9	Sustained teacher / student interactions Across whole class or parts?	
10	Sustained student / student interactions	
11	Use of activities or materials .	

Assessments observed		Details
12	Type of judgements the teacher makes e.g. 'yes that's right', 'I didn't know that'	
13	Ways teacher gives feedback on errors	
14	Evidence of individual student assessment by teacher	

Teacher's English ability level		Estimate
15	Teacher's English language ability (CEFR) – listening	A1 A1+ A2 A2+ B1 B1+ B2 B2+ C1
16	Teacher's English language ability (CEFR) – speaking	A1 A1+ A2 A2+ B1 B1+ B2 B2+ C1

11.16 Teacher interview guide

School:

Teacher:

Gender:

Date:

Reflections on observation lesson		Response
1	How do you feel the lesson went?	
2	Was this lesson quite typical of usual lessons?	
3	Was there anything you were particularly pleased with?	
4	Was there anything you would do differently another time?	
5	How would you describe the students' reaction to the lesson?	

Listening		Response
6	Do you often do listening activities in your English classes? What are some of the typical ways you teach listening ?	
7	Which listening activities were most successful so far? Why do you think so?	
8	How do these activities help develop students' listening ability?	
9	How easy is it to set up listening activities? What difficulties (if any) do you face?	

Speaking		Response
10	Do you often do speaking activities in your English classes? What are some of the typical ways you teach speaking ?	
11	Which speaking activities were most successful so far? Why do you think so?	
12	How do these activities help develop students' speaking ability?	
13	How easy is it to set up speaking activities? What difficulties (if any) do you face?	

Assessment issues		Response
14	Do you currently assess your learners' listening skills? If so how do you do this? How often?	
15	Have you had training in how to assess listening ability?	
16	Do you currently assess your learners' speaking skills? If so how do you do this? How often?	
17	Have you had training in how to assess speaking ability?	
18	Do you know about the planned introduction of the continuous assessment of listening? (The need to evaluate your learners' progress in listening skills throughout the course, not (just) through an exam.) How do you think that will work?	
19	Do you know about the planned introduction of the continuous assessment of speaking? (The need to evaluate your learners' progress in listening skills throughout the course, not (just) through an exam.) How do you think that will work?	
20	What are your views on this introduction (advantages / challenges)?	
21	What is important in a new assessment system for listening to work efficiently?	
22	What is important in a new assessment system for speaking to work efficiently?	
23	Is there anything else regarding the teaching and assessing of listening and speaking you would like to share with me?	

Teacher's English ability level		Estimate
24	Teacher's English language ability (CEFR) – listening	A1 A1+ A2 A2+ B1 B1+ B2 B2+ C1
25	Teacher's English language ability (CEFR) – speaking	A1 A1+ A2 A2+ B1 B1+ B2 B2+ C1

11.17 Student focus group guide

School:

No of students:

Gender:

Date:

Listening		Response (NB: individual vs. group opinion?)
1	How easy/difficult do you find understanding English when you're spoken to? Why do you think that is?	
2	How much do you enjoy (English) listening activities?	
3	Can you give me as many examples as you can think of, where you have practiced listening in English, in your lessons?	
4	Do you have practice in listening to English outside the classroom?	
5	How would you feel if there were more listening activities in English lessons?	

Speaking		Response (NB: individual vs. group opinion?)
6	How easy/difficult do you find speaking in English? Why do you think that is?	
7	How much do you enjoy (English) speaking activities?	
8	Can you give me as many examples as you can think of, where you have practiced speaking in your lessons?	
9	How much opportunity do each of you get to speak in English in the class? (Have you had an opportunity to speak? Does everyone speak? Only some people? Who chooses who speaks?)	
10	Do you practice speaking in English outside the classroom?	
11	How would you feel if there were more speaking activities in English lessons?	

General		Response (NB: individual vs. group opinion?)
12	What part of learning English do you find easiest? What do you find hardest?	
13	Is there anything else regarding studying listening and speaking in English you would like to share with me?	

11.18 Community focus group guide

Location:

No of participants:

Gender:

Date:

Listening		Response (NB: individual vs. group opinion?)
1	Is listening in English less important, as important or more important than reading and writing in English for students in Higher Secondary School? Why?	
2	Why do you think students need to be able to listen in English? (In what ways might they use listening in the future?)	
3	What do you think students find difficult about understanding the English that is spoken to them?	
4	What do you think would help them to improve their understanding of spoken English ?	
5	In the near future listening is going to be formally assessed / evaluated as part of the students' English language ability. Do you think that is a good idea? Why or why not?	
6	The teacher will carry out this formal assessment of the students' listening ability. How easy do you think it is going to be for the teacher to do that?	
7	What do you think is the current level of Higher Secondary School students' English listening ability in Bangladesh? How do you know?	
8	What do you think is the current level of the teachers' English listening ability in Higher Secondary Schools in Bangladesh? How do you know?	

Speaking		Response (NB: individual vs. group opinion?)
9	Is speaking in English less important, as important or more important than reading and writing in English for students in Higher Secondary School? Why?	
10	Why do you think students need to be able to speak in English? (In what ways might they use speaking in the future?)	
11	What do you think students find difficult about speaking English?	

12	What do you think would help them to improve their spoken English?	
13	In the near future speaking is going to be formally assessed / evaluated as part of the students' English language ability. Do you think that is a good idea? Why or why not?	
14	The teacher will carry out this formal assessment of the students' speaking ability. How easy do you think it is going to be for the teacher to do that?	
15	What do you think is the current level of students' English speaking ability in Higher Secondary Schools in Bangladesh? How do you know?	
16	What do you think is the current level of Higher Secondary School teachers' English speaking ability in Bangladesh? How do you know?	