

Teaching English Listening Skills at the Secondary Level in Bangladesh

Md. Nurullah Patwary

Senior Lecturer in English, World University of Bangladesh, Dhaka

and

Md. Sazzadul Islam Rumman

MA in English (Thesis), World University of Bangladesh, Dhaka

Abstract

Teaching English listening skills, though very fundamental, is usually neglected at the secondary level EFL classroom in Bangladesh. This study primarily aims at discovering the current scenario of teaching and learning of listening skills at the secondary level and the reasons for this negligence. It also examines the English listening skills curriculum offered by the NCTB of Bangladesh. This study further proposes some strategies for the development of listening skills. Data was collected from 130 students and 22 English teachers of 11 schools based on the stratified random sampling. For collecting the data, a typology of mixed methods research (QUAN-QUAL) was performed where the data collection instruments were a semi-structured interview and a questionnaire. Secondary level EFL teachers and students participated in the study. The analysis reveals that in most cases the secondary level EFL teachers do not follow any particular method to teach listening skills and they lack knowledge of effective listening skills teaching strategies. The results also show that the NCTB curriculum does not provide proper directions in this regard. Finally, this paper discusses the implications of the findings and offers some recommendations for the considerations of all three groups of stakeholders: authorities, teachers, and students.

Keywords: Listening Skills, Secondary Level, NCTB, EFL, ELT

We have seen that traditionally, listening is labeled as a “passive” skill but this is both misleading and incorrect. Listening is practically an active skill because the listener is involved, for instance, in guessing, anticipating, checking, interpreting, interacting, and organizing (McDonough, Shaw and Masuhara, 2013, p. 137). Though this is considered an important skill, at least theoretically, by the secondary level institutions, we do not see any practical implications of it in the secondary level EFL classrooms in Bangladesh. Listening skill classes are generally unheard of at the secondary level institutions. It is not a part of the terminal assessments of the institutions which even makes the development of listening skills a neglected issue in the EFL classroom. This negligence ultimately affects students’ listening proficiency negatively and consequently their speaking skills. These problems and limitations have been created as most of the learners and teachers do not possess enough knowledge about the importance and strategies of developing listening skills. However, the problems can easily be overcome with the listening tasks becoming inspiring and advantageous for both teachers and students if they have proper knowledge of the importance of listening skills and necessary strategies to develop them. The primary goal of this study is to investigate whether the teachers of the secondary level schools follow any particular method in teaching listening. Another objective of the study is to examine what difficulties students face in developing listening skills in the secondary level EFL classroom. The final objective of the study is

to relate the findings of the study to the standard process of teaching and learning listening skills at the secondary level institutions of Bangladesh. To meet the objectives of the study the following research questions were modeled.

Research question 1: What methods/activities do English teachers follow/carry out to develop students' listening skills?

Research question 2: What difficulties do students face in developing their listening skills?

Research question 3: What strategies can be undertaken to develop students' listening skills in the EFL classroom?

To answer these questions, a brief survey was conducted in 11 secondary level schools of Dhaka city and its surrounding areas in order to elicit the views of the students and the teachers. The survey results are presented and discussed in this paper systematically. Finally, based on the findings and analysis, some pedagogical implications have been highlighted for all the concerned stakeholders.

History of English Language Teaching in Bangladesh

Although Bangla is the official and native language of Bangladesh, proficiency in English has also been argued to be vital for the country's prosperity and connectivity. According to a Euro Monitor International report (Pinon & Haydon, 2010), English proficiency plays a critical role in the international manufacturing and services markets (e.g., the telecom industry, banking, retail, mining), and consequently in the country's economy.

In Bangladesh, English is not a new phenomenon. Its origin and spread goes back to its political history when it was part of the Indian subcontinent under the British Empire. The British Empire ruled the subcontinent for more than two hundred years and consequently, English became the official language of British India. It was Lord Macaulay's Minute of 1835 that, for the first time, addressed the necessity of teaching English in the South Asian subcontinent (Krishnaswamy and Sriraman, 1995). This same view is also supported by Dutta, Selim, and Mahboob, and Choudhury in F. Alam *et al.* (2001).

In 1947, the Indian subcontinent was divided into India and Pakistan. Pakistan was comprised of East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh) and West Pakistan (present day Pakistan), and English was the only medium of communication for both the regions. Hassan (2004) observes that the question of language loomed large after 1947 with the creation of two nation states – India and Pakistan – and India opted for Hindi while in Pakistan, attempts were made to make Urdu the state language. In the face of violent protests by the people of the then East Pakistan, culminating in the tragic shooting death on February 21, 1952, both Bengali and Urdu were made the state languages of Pakistan and English became the common language for communication between East and West Pakistan (Hasan, 2004). Thus, during the Pakistan period, English enjoyed the status of second language and it was taught as a functional language in secondary schools in Pakistan (1962 report of Curriculum Committee).

In 1971, East Pakistan was separated from Pakistan to become an independent country called Bangladesh and Bangla became the state language of Bangladesh. In the process, the status of English was drastically reduced. Bengali replaced English in all official communications – except

those with foreign missions, countries, and in the army, where English continued to be the official language. The schools, where students had previously been able to sit for secondary and higher secondary examinations in three languages like Urdu, Bengali, and English, became single language institutions (Alam *et al.*, 2001, p. vii).

In post-liberation Bangladesh, English lost its official status but it enjoys an important unofficial position. English became a foreign language while Bangladesh emerged. But considering its importance in our social life, English is now studied as a compulsory subject in the national curriculum through primary, secondary, higher secondary, and university levels. McArthur (1996) locates Bangladesh in the ESL territories. However, elsewhere he says that, in Bangladesh, English is neither a second language nor a foreign language. The status of English is in between. In this connection Sarwar (2013) opines, “English has the status of an unofficial second language in Bangladesh and is compulsory from the primary level in all state run schools where the medium of instruction is Bengali” (p. 154).

English now is used by the government, semi-government, and private organizations or companies along with Bengali. It is instrumental in interpersonal, commercial, and official communication as well as other academic purposes. In a nutshell, therefore, it may be said that English language teaching enjoys a special status in Bangladesh, for both domestic and international purposes.

Importance of English Language in Bangladeshi Education

Students in Bangladesh learn English in primary schools, secondary schools, and, to some extent, in the undergraduate level along with their major subjects. Rasheed (2012) illustrates that one of the overarching aim of making English language a compulsory part of the curriculum in both primary and secondary schools is to enable Bangladesh to partake in the global marketplace so that its citizens may feel at ease in working at home and abroad. In other words, patronization of literacy and development of communicative skills of English are fundamental to national development.

Regarding the importance of learning English in Bangladesh, Imam (2005) reports, “In Bangladesh it is now essential for even factory workers, who earn less than the minimum wage, to know some English, the language of the labels on goods and packaging” (p. 480).

Considering the needs of the time, English has been made a compulsory subject in all levels of education in Bangladesh. According to Quader (2017), “English is an academic subject mandatory at all levels of education in Bangladesh, from the lowest till graduation from university and has a heavy weighting in the curriculum” (p. 26-27).

In course of time, to impart appropriate English education, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was first introduced in the secondary and higher secondary levels of Bangladesh in the 1990s by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board keeping the notion of developing communicative competence in the global context (Binoy, Sultana, & Basu, 2007).

Language skills: Listening, speaking, reading, and writing

The four skills of language (also known as the four skills of language learning) are a set of four capabilities that allow an individual to comprehend and produce spoken language for proper and

effective interpersonal communication. The complete learning of a language means acquisition of four major skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing and three sub-skills – pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (Barman, 2017, p. 84).

The general order of learning language skills is listening, speaking, reading, and writing. But Jeremy Harmer (2011) observes that “Teachers tend to talk about the way we use language in terms of four skills – reading, writing, speaking, and listening” (p. 265). But she is a little critical of this order and teaching skills separately.

Importance of listening skills

Listening plays an important role in communication in people’s daily lives. As Guo and Wills (2005) state, “it is the medium through which people gain a large proportion of their education, their information, their understanding of the world and human affairs, their ideals, sense of values” (p. 3). According to Mendelson (1994), “of the total time spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50 %; speaking 25-30 %; reading 11-16 %; and writing about 9 %” (p. 9). Emphasizing the importance of listening in language learning, Peters (2001) states that “no other type of language input is easy to process as spoken language, received through listening ... through listening, learners can build an awareness of the inter-workings of language systems at various levels and thus establish a base for more fluent productive skills” (p. 87).

Listening has an important role not only in daily life but also in classroom settings. Anderson and Lynch (2003) state that “we only become aware of what remarkable feats of listening we achieve when we are in an unfamiliar listening environment, such as listening to a language in which we have limited proficiency” (p. 3). Most people think that being able to write and speak in a second language means that they know the language; however, if they do not have efficient listening skills, it is not possible to communicate effectively. That is, listening is the basic skill in language learning and over 50% of the time students spend functioning in a foreign language will be devoted to listening (Nunan, 1998).

To summarize, listening has an important role both in daily life and in academic contexts as it is crucial for people to sustain effective communication. Emphasizing the importance of listening, Anderson and Lynch (2003) state that listening skills are as important as speaking skills because people cannot communicate face-to-face unless both types of skills are developed together. Listening skills are also important for learning purposes since through listening students receive information and gain insights (Wallace, Stariha & Walberg, 2004).

Secondary level English language curriculum of NCTB and its focus on listening

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) of Bangladesh has offered a curriculum for teaching English at the secondary level. The latest NCTB 2012 Curriculum has covered the four skills of language learning.

The curriculum thus suggests that the language skills-practice activities based on the text materials have to be carried out keeping in mind the following principles:

- All the four basic language skills would be practiced in the class.
- Skills should be practiced in an integrated manner – not in isolation.
- Skills practice should be done in meaningful contexts, i.e., practice in language use should go beyond the textbook and include real life situations.
- Interactive activities should be carried out between teachers and students, and more importantly between students and students. (p. 73)

Another important part of the curriculum document (Brunfaut & Rita, 2017, p. 5) 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-answer sessions on familiar topics. The performances need to be assessed in terms of length (5-10 sentences), coherence, acceptable English, and pronunciation.

Practical scenario of teaching listening skills in Bangladesh

Though the NCTB has framed some guidelines regarding teaching English language skills at the secondary level, the practical scenario of the implementation of the language curriculum is different (Kaiser & Khanam, 2008). Kaiser and Khanam (2008) observe that the main focus is on reading and writing; listening and speaking are given less importance. The authors of this paper are testimony of such practice. There are no listening lessons in schools and no listening skills test is taken in the examinations. Teachers generally do not care about this skill much and the instruments to enhance listening skills are available only in a few institutions in the urban areas. This results in making the students poor in listening and, in most cases, students cannot understand the lectures of teachers when they speak or instruct in English, and do not understand the messages of authentic spoken English materials.

Rahman (2014) states that teachers usually do not focus on the development of the four skills. They are exam-oriented and in the examinations only two skills – reading and writing skills – are tested. So, two other major skills – speaking and listening – remain neglected in the EFL classes (p. 1). In addition to this negligence, Haider and Chowdhury (2012) observed that “teachers had a tendency of slipping in to Bangla after starting a sentence in English” (p. 17).

In general, we see that teachers consider “listening” as the easiest skill to learn, so they do not care much about teaching this skill but, in reality, most students find it difficult to understand authentic English language. This gap has inspired the researchers to conduct a study in order to explore the reasons behind this negligence and the poor listening skills of students.

Teaching listening skills: An overview

Rost (2005) confirms, “In L2 development, listening constitutes not only a skill area in performance, but also a primary means of acquiring a second language” (p. 503). Listening also plays a life-long role in the process of productive communication (Alam and Sinha, 2009). Hedge (2000) says that to establish oneself in this sound system-based society, one must develop a lofty level of aptitude in listening.

Listening is an active skill

We have seen that, traditionally, listening is labeled as a “passive” skill but it is both misleading and incorrect because the listener is involved, for instance, in guessing, anticipating, checking, interpreting, interacting, and organizing. This view is strongly supported by Vandergrift (1999). He says:

Listening comprehension is anything but a passive activity. It is a complex, active process in which the listener must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered in all of the above, and interpret it within the immediate as well as the larger socio-cultural context of the utterance. Coordinating all this involves a great deal of mental activity on the part of the learner. Listening is hard work. (p. 168)

Psycholinguistic account of the listening process

Rost (2005) writes that listening consists of three basic processing phases that are simultaneous and parallel: decoding, comprehension and interpretation. He provides a brief summary of each phase:

- **Decoding** involves attention, speech perception, word recognition, and grammatical parsing;
- **Comprehension** includes activation of prior knowledge, representing propositions in short term memory, and logical inference;
- **Interpretation** encompasses comparison of meanings with prior expectations, activating participation frames, and evaluation of discourse meanings.

In addition to this psycholinguistic account of the listening process, Flowerdew and Miller’s (2005) listening model pays attention to more individualistic and variable dimensions such as:

- the learners themselves
- social contexts, and
- cross-cultural interactions

Rost (1990) even sees the listener in certain circumstances as “co-authoring” the discourse, not just waiting to be talked to and to respond, but by his responses actually helping to construct the conversation.

Key principles to teach listening skills effectively

David Nunan (2015) and Mike Rost (2002) suggest the following principles in this regard:

- Incorporate a wide range of text types into listening lessons
- Incorporate a range of pedagogical and real-world tasks into lessons
- Incorporate strategy training into teaching: predicting, inferring, monitoring, clarifying, responding, and evaluating.

Learner difficulties in listening

Penny Ur (1999, p. 44) gives a list of some probable listening difficulties:

- I have trouble catching the actual sounds of the foreign language.
- I have to understand every word; if I miss something, I feel I am failing and get worried and stressed.
- I can understand people if they talk slowly and clearly; I can't understand fast, natural, native-sounding speech.
- I need to hear things more than once in order to understand.
- I find it difficult to “keep up” with all the information I am getting, and cannot think ahead or predict.
- If the listening goes on for a long time I get tired, and find it more and more difficult to concentrate.

Guidelines for ideal listening texts and tasks

To overcome the difficulties listed above, Penny Ur (1999) suggests the following texts and tasks which can be followed by the teachers in the classroom to help students (p. 44-45).

Authentic listening texts

Authentic listening texts are those that originally emerged in the course of some type of communication outside of the classroom – a casual conversation in a coffee shop, a news broadcast, a train announcement, and so on – and are subsequently imported into the classroom for teaching purposes.

Informal talk: Most listening texts should be based on discourse that is either genuinely improvised, spontaneous speech, or at least a fair imitation of it. Speaker visibility and direct speaker-listener interaction are mostly needed.

Single exposure: Learners should be encouraged to develop the ability to extract the information they need from a single hearing. The discourse, therefore, must be redundant enough to provide this information more than once within the original text.

Listening tasks

Create Expectations: Learners should have in advance some idea about the kind of text they are going to hear.

Provide a Purpose: Similarly, a listening purpose should be provided by the definition of a pre-set task, which should involve some kind of clear visible or audible response.

Ongoing Listener Response: Finally, the task should usually involve intermittent responses during the listening; learners should be encouraged to respond to the information they are looking for as they hear it, and not wait till the end.

Types of activities

No Overt Response: The learners do not have to do anything in response to the listening; however, facial expression and body language often show if they are following or not. They might listen in this way to stories, songs, or entertainment (films, theater, and video).

Short Responses

- Obeying instructions
- Ticking off items
- True/false
- Detecting mistakes
- Cloze tests
- Guessing definitions
- Skimming and scanning

Follow-up task

Longer Responses:

- **Answering questions:** Questions demanding full responses are given in advance.
- **Note-taking:** Learners take brief notes from a short talk.
- **Paraphrasing and translating:** Learners rewrite the text in different words.
- **Summarizing:** Learners write a brief summary of the content.
- **Long gap-filling:** A long gap is left somewhere in the text for learners to fill in.

Extended Responses

Here, the listening is only a “jump-off point” for extended reading, writing, or speaking: in other words, these are “combined skills” activities.

- **Problem-solving:** Learners hear about a problem and try to solve it.
- **Interpretation:** An extract from a piece of dialogue or monologue is provided, with no previous information; the listeners try to guess from the words, kinds of voices, tone, and any other evidence what is going on. Alternatively, a piece of literature that is suitable for reading aloud can be discussed and analyzed.

McDonough, Shaw, and Masuhara, (2013) divides listening activities into: pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening categories (pp. 9-10). Wilson (2008) provides a lot of hands-on examples for each stage:

Pre-listening activities include a short reading passage on a similar topic, predicting content from the title, commenting on a picture, and reading through comprehension questions in advance, etc.

Tasks for while-listening activities

Extensive listening activities include putting pictures in a correct sequence, following directions on a map, checking off items in a photograph, completing a grid, timetable, or chart of information, answering true/false or multiple-choice questions, predicting (preceded by a pause), constructing a coherent set of notes, inferring opinions across a whole text, etc.

Intensive listening deals with specific items of language, sound or factual detail within the meaning framework already established. These activities include filling gaps with missing words, identifying numbers and letters, picking out particular facts, etc.

Post-listening activities may include writing a summary, doing a role play, writing on the same theme, studying new grammatical structures, and practicing pronunciation.

There is, of course, no such person as the “typical learner.” Learners are usually at various stages of proficiency, and they differ in many characteristics – age, interests, learning styles, aptitude, and motivation and so on. Any one specific set of materials may not provide examples of all the types of activities listed above. If the range and variety in a book that teachers are using is very limited, Penny Ur (1999) suggests, they may be able to remedy this by improvising their own activities or using supplementary materials (p. 45).

Research Methodology

Institutions

For collecting necessary data for the research work 11 educational institutions were visited. It took the researchers around 20 days starting from 2nd to 20th November to complete the visits to the institutions, which were all located in Dhaka district and has Bangla as the medium of instruction (Bangla medium schools).

Sample and data collection methods

As the study focuses on the development of teaching listening to students of English particularly at the secondary level institutions, the data was collected from the students of classes IX and X and their concerned English/English language teachers. The quantitative method was employed to collect data from the students using a questionnaire survey. Based on stratified random sampling, a total 130 students from 11 schools were selected. Among them, 65 were male and 65 were female students. They were aged between 15 and 17 years. The questionnaire was carefully designed to ensure that it included all questions on major and important issues required for the development of listening skills. During the survey, we ensured that the respondents understood the questions and all relevant items well. They were encouraged to ask questions to get their confusions cleared. The results of the quantitative survey were then tallied on MS Excel. The results are displayed in percentages in tables below.

Qualitative data was collected from 22 concerned English teachers from those 11 schools. The instrument used was the semi-structured interview. Teachers were invited to participate in an interview session individually and to answer the questions. They were clarified about the purpose of the study and all relevant issues related to the questions. The interviews were audio recorded and short notes were taken on note sheets. The interviews took place in a cordial atmosphere in their own institutions. On average, an interview lasted approximately half an hour.

Analysis of data

Quantitative data analysis of students' questionnaire

Present Status of Students' Listening Skill: The following table shows that only 18% of students have good listening skills while the rest 82% of students' listening skills were either satisfactory or poor. Among them 8% students never thought about listening skill status.

Table 1: Present status of students' listening skill

Status	Total Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Very good	4	3%
Good	20	15%
Satisfactory	80	62%
Poor	15	12%
Not thought about listening skill	11	8%

Students' Level of Understanding Regarding Listening to BBC, CNN, English Movies, or Any Other Authentic Sources of English Language: The following table shows that not a single student can completely understand any authentic native sources of English language. 75% of students responded that they understand moderately or even less than that.

Table 2: Students' level of understanding regarding listening to BBC, CNN, English movies or any other authentic sources of English language

Level of Understanding	Total Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Completely	0	0%
Mostly	33	25%
Moderately	77	59%
A little bit	15	12%
Very little	5	4%

Teachers' Role in Encouraging Students to Improve Their Listening Skills: Teachers are the key people in language teaching. The study, however, revealed the opposite. The result shows that though around 58% of teachers are playing their role by encouraging the students to develop their listening skills, 42% of teachers are seen as not serious enough in this case.

Table 3: Teachers' role to encourage students to improve their listening skill

How Often a Teacher Encourages Students to Develop Listening Skills	Total Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Always	23	18%
Very often	52	40%
Often	36	28%
Occasionally	6	5%
Rarely	11	8%
Never	2	1%

Language Lab Facilities Students Enjoy: The data shows that more than half of the students, around 55%, do not enjoy any lab facilities and only 45% enjoy language lab facilities without headphones. Not a single student enjoys the lab facilities with headphones.

Table 4: Status of language lab facilities

Facilities of the Language Lab	Total Number of Students Availing the Facilities	Percentage of Students Availing the Facilities
The lab is well equipped with the devices and headphones for each student	0	0%
The lab is equipped with loud speakers only	59	45%
No language lab	71	55%

Use of Multimedia to Develop Listening Skill: Table 5 shows that only 19% of students experience regular multimedia backed classes. On the contrary, 63% of students use the multimedia sometimes. 18% of students never get any multimedia-based classes for developing listening skills.

Table 5: Use of multimedia to develop listening skill

Use of Multimedia to Develop Listening Skills	Total Number of Students Availing the Facilities	Percentage of Students Availing the Facilities
Always	2	1%
Very often	23	18%
Often	28	22%
Occasionally	34	26%
Rarely	19	15%
Never	24	18%

Students' Participation in the Classroom to Develop Listening Skills: From the data, we see that in the classroom more than half of the students are slightly interactive in nature. 53% of students interact during class while 47% of students are less interactive.

Table 6: Students' interaction in the classroom to develop listening skill

How Often Students Interact in Class	Total Number of Students	Percentage of Interactive Students
Always	19	15%
Very often	46	35%
Often	44	34%
Occasionally	9	7%
Rarely	7	5%
Never	5	4%

How Interactive are the English/English Language Classes? The study found that only 19% of students feel that their English or English language classes are very interactive. 81% of students feel that their classes are moderately or poorly interactive while 7% of students feel that the classes are not interactive at all.

Table 7: How Interactive are the English/English language classes?

Level of Interaction	Total Number of Students	Percentage of Interactive Students
Very interactive	19	16%
Moderately interactive	46	39%
Poorly interactive	44	37%
Not interactive at all	9	8%

Students' Participation Outside of Classroom to Develop Listening Skills: The following table shows that the students are not concerned about listening skills outside the classroom because only 12% of students interact with their teachers or friends outside the classroom to develop their listening skills. 28% of students never interact with anyone outside the class. 60% of students sometimes interact with others outside the classroom to develop their listening skills.

Table 8: Students' interaction outside of classroom to develop listening skill

How Often Students Interact Outside Class	Total Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Always	2	2%
Very often	13	10%
Often	52	40%
Occasionally	11	8%
Rarely	16	12%
Never	36	28%

What Language is Mostly Used in the Classroom by Teachers as Input? The data shows that only 10% of students find that their teachers use English mostly in the classroom. On the other hand, 65% of students report that their teachers use both English and Bangla in a mixed way.

Table 9: Language used mostly in the classroom by teacher as an input

Language Used by the Teacher in Class	Total Number of Students	Percentage of Students
English	13	10%
Bangla	32	25%
Both	85	65%

Feedback of Teachers While Students are Asking for Clarifications: The table shows that almost 94% students find their teachers very supportive when they ask any questions. Only 6% students find their teachers not enough interactive.

Table 10: Feedback of Teachers to Students Asking for Clarification

Teacher Feedback	Total Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Very interactive	70	54%
Moderately interactive	52	40%
Poorly interactive	5	4%
Not interactive at all	3	2%

Number of Weekly Dedicated English Language Classes to Develop Students' Language Skills: The following table shows that 57% of students do not experience any language class in a week. Only 43% of students experience only one language class in a week.

Table 11: Number of English language classes is held by the students in a week

Number of Dedicated Language Classes	Total Number of Students	Percentage of Students
No language class	74	57%
Once a week	56	43%
More than once week	0	0%

Number of Listening Skill Assessments or Classes Held in Every Six Month Term: From Table 12, it is seen that only 38% of students have one to three continuous assessments on listening and speaking skills. On the contrary, 62% of students face no listening or speaking assessment.

Table 12: Number of listening skill assessments or classes held in every six month term

Number of Continuous Assessments	Total Number of Students	Percentage of Students
No assessments	81	62%
1-3 assessments	49	38%
More than 3 assessments	0	0%

Difficulties Faced by Students While Listening to Authentic Spoken English: The data shows that most of the students, around 79%, find it difficult to understand English vocabulary while listening to authentic English. Almost 73% of students cannot understand the fast speech. 57% of students are unable to understand the native-like pronunciation and accent. 41% of students

understand the words but they cannot interpret the message. 40% of students face all the above-mentioned problems including failure to understand the short forms and connected speeches. Only 2% of students face no difficulties.

Table 13: Difficulties faced by students while listening

Difficulties Faced by Students	Total Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Unable to understand the pronunciation or accent	73 out of 130	57%
Unable to catch the message	52 out of 130	41%
Unable to understand the vocabulary	101 out of 130	79%
Unable to understand the short forms & connected speeches	51 out of 130	40%
Unable to keep up with the speed of the speech	93 out of 130	73%
All of the above	51 out of 130	40%
No difficulties	2 out of 130	2%

Analysis of qualitative data collected from teachers' interviews

A total of 22 English teachers were interviewed. They represented two geographical locations: Dhaka city and Savar Thana. Prior to the interview, teachers provided information on their personal background through a question (see Appendix B). Teachers' backgrounds are summarized below.

Most interviewed teachers (86%) were male; the rest 14% were female. Their ages ranged between 22 and 48. All of them were of Bangladeshi nationality and spoke Bangla at home.

With the exception of 2 teachers (9%), all teachers (91%) had completed graduate studies – mainly BA (Honors) in English. The teachers' experience levels ranged between 1 and 15 years of teaching English. They taught typically both Class 9 and Class 10.

The interviews were conducted in the time given by the teacher. The interviews took place on the school grounds, usually in the office or a classroom. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and consisted of 10 questions. The interview guide can be found in Appendix B. The questions focused on the English listening activities they undertook in their classes and the difficulties they faced in developing their students' English listening skills. The data, the summary of their answers to the interview questions, are presented below.

Most Important Language Skill in Teachers' Opinions: 10 teachers (45%) stated that they consider writing the most important language skill because the examinations mostly focus on writing skills. Speaking is the most important skill according to 8 teachers (36%) as they think English is learnt for communication purposes. Only 3 teachers (13%) stressed the importance of developing students' listening skills. They think listening is necessary to make communication meaningful and successful. Only 1 teacher (.045%) responded that reading is the most important skill to be taught in the class. Here it is found that only 30% of teachers are concerned about the need for developing students' listening skills.

How Much Institutional Facilities Teachers Get To Conduct Listening Skill Activities in the EFL Classroom: Most of the teachers were found disappointed about the institutional facilities.

18 teachers (82%) stated that they did not get any institutional facilities like language labs or multimedia classrooms to teach listening skills. Only 4 teachers (18%) stated that they sometimes had access to a few language lab facilities to develop students' listening skills.

All the teachers suggested that the institution should provide them with more teaching facilities, especially language lab facilities. They also added that the institution should set dedicated language classrooms to teach language skills, especially listening skills, to help students achieve a satisfactory level of listening skills.

Similarly, all the teachers also stressed the necessity of organizing specific teacher training programs so that they could equip themselves with the knowledge and strategies of developing listening skills.

Language Used by the Teachers in the EFL Classroom: Though all the teachers (100%) agreed on the point that they should use mainly English in the class, they also said that it was not always possible because of several limitations. For instance, students' inability to understand all the messages, short class time, pressure of completing the academic syllabuses, etc. Only 4 teachers (18%) stated that they tried to use English language all the time. But the other 18 teachers (82%) confessed that they used both English and Bangla as the medium of instruction in the classroom.

Playing the Role of an Ideal Language Teacher Especially in Teaching Listening: Out of 22 teachers, 19 teachers (86%) stated that they did not get any opportunity to take any measure to develop students' listening skills. As the reason they showed that they had to be involved with different activities apart from taking classes like making question papers, conducting exams, evaluating the answer scripts, implementing different events of their institution, etc. So, they had very little time to take any extra initiative for the development of the students' language skills. The other 3 teachers (14%) stated that sometimes they used some easily available devices like their mobile phones and speakers in the class to take some listening lessons.

General Standard of Students' Listening Skills According to Teachers: In this regard, the views of the teachers are presented below:

- The general standard of the students' listening skills is not up to the mark. The listening proficiency of a large number of students is poor.
- Very few students are capable of communicating fluently.

Activities Undertaken by the Teachers to Teach Listening: 13 teachers (60%) stated that they rarely undertook any listening activities in their classes. 3 of these (13%) teachers said that this weakness existed because listening was not included in the syllabus and one pointed out that the handbooks for Classes 9 and 10 did not include listening tasks. 2 teachers (9%) also referred to the prominence of reading and writing skills in the final English exams where listening and speaking skills were neglected. 7 teachers (31%), on the other hand, reported that they often undertook listening activities, and 2 teachers (9%) said they sometimes did undertake some listening activities.

The main examples of listening activities undertaken by the teachers were:

- a) teachers reading a text out loud and students listening to it (6 teachers reported)

- b) students listening to questions and class discussions asked by the teachers (8 teachers reported)
- c) playing audio recordings and videos from the Internet (4 teachers reported)
- d) listening to each other during pair work activities (2 teachers reported)
- e) playing songs/rhymes (1 teacher reported)
- f) watching a documentary on a topic related to the textbook (1 teacher reported)
- g) rote repetition of words/phrases/sentences spoken out loud by the teacher (1 teacher reported).

Difficulties Faced by the Teachers While Teaching Listening: All the teachers reported that students were not concerned enough about the development of their listening skills. They were not motivated enough to learn listening skills because it was not included in the main examination. Although there was a provision for continuous assessment of listening skills, it was not held properly. So the students were less conscious about this skill.

17 teachers (77%) stated that there was no dedicated language classroom for the students. Again, 15 teachers (68%) stated that the class time was too short to take any extra step to help students develop their listening skills.

12 teachers (54%) blamed the curriculum as the main hindrance towards the development of students' listening skills.

Findings and discussions

From the data, it is found that the development of students' English listening skills is given very little attention in the secondary level EFL classrooms. Poor and inadequate language lab facilities and large class sizes were seen as mainly responsible for this weakness. In addition, some linguistic factors such as students' limited access to English resources and the interference of their mother tongue, Bangla, were found to make the students use English less and Bangla more in their English lessons. Furthermore, it was also found that pedagogical 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, secondary school students were found to be keen on having more English classes and doing more activities in their English lessons to develop their listening comprehension and speaking skills. An extensive range of varied listening and speaking skill activities, and communicative language teaching approach in English lessons, can create a positive environment at the institutions where students can be motivated to use English and enhance listening activities in their classrooms and institutions.

From the qualitative data derived from the answers to teachers' interview questions, it was found that, both in terms of the teaching and assessment of English listening skills, a majority of the teachers had little training on teaching and assessing listening. It was also found that very few teachers purposefully worked on the development and evaluation of their students' listening skills. Teachers who even worked on the development of their students' listening skills used very limited strategies and activities. Some of the activities used included listening to the teacher reading a text out

loud, listening to questions asked, and discussions made by the teacher. At the same time, however, teachers were found to be willing to introduce the ideas and strategies in teaching and assessing listening skills in their English classes, but they were also found to be quite affected by the limitations and challenges they had. Some of the challenges and limitations they encountered were the lack of teacher training programs, scarcity of materials and equipment that can support the teaching and assessment of listening and speaking skills, and too few contact hours to ensure sufficient practice in listening. Furthermore, as suggested by some teachers' comments, as well as by a rough estimate of teachers' English listening and speaking proficiencies by the researcher, it is worth mentioning that much more attention should also be given to increase teachers' communicative skills in English, and raise their awareness of the implementation of the curriculum.

It became clear through the interviews that any initiatives taken with respect to the assessment of secondary students' English listening 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).

Pedagogical recommendations

On the basis of the analyzed data and the findings, the following recommendations can be put forward which, if considered, may help improve the overall quality of the ELT programs at the secondary level education of Bangladesh.

Recommendation for the Policymakers and NCTB

- Proper awareness about following the curriculum objectives regarding teaching listening and speaking skills should be raised among the secondary level EFL teachers.
- Learning outcomes given in the secondary level English language curriculum should be written in a more specific and precise way, and the teachers should be equipped with appropriate language skills assessment approach.
- Continuous assessment, which is mentioned in the secondary level language curriculum, should be properly implemented at the secondary level institutions and the concerned authorities of the Ministry of Education should inspect the process at regular intervals.
- In addition to the above recommendations, the listening skills assessment should be included in the terminal examinations.

Recommendations for institutions

- For teaching language skills in the right manner, a language lab in every institution is a must. The language labs should be equipped with audio and visual aids like multimedia projectors, modern sound system, headphones, and the Internet.
- Teachers should be encouraged to use mainly English as a medium of communication as well as the medium of instruction most of the time inside and outside of English classes.
- Regular teacher training programs should be undertaken for orienting the teachers towards effective language teaching methods and assessing students' listening skills.

Recommendations for teachers

- If any institution cannot afford a language lab, teachers should not overlook the skill;

rather, they can use affordable and available technological devices like smartphones and the Internet to develop students' listening skills.

- Teachers should ensure continuous assessment of the development of students' listening skill according to the recommendations of NCTB.

Recommendations for students

- Students should pay more attention to developing their listening skills for their own benefit. Though it is not included in the terminal examination, they should not wait for their teachers or institutions to help them. They must be autonomous learners.
- They should be more interactive inside and outside the classroom. They should be proactive in order to make the best utilization of the resources available, including their teachers.

Conclusion

This study has explored and reported the teaching and learning situations of English listening skills in Bangladeshi secondary level institutions. It comprised a mixed-method study, which involved a review of relevant prior studies, a review of the English language curriculum of Bangladeshi secondary level education, semi-structured interviews of English teachers, and a close-ended questionnaire survey of secondary level students. Data was collected from 11 government and private schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The findings suggest that the majority of English language teachers in secondary schools are not yet ready to implement a system of continuous assessment of their students' English listening and speaking skills.

In addition to this outcome, 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, the challenges to implement continuous assessment are not only restricted to the area of assessment, but also concern current practices in the teaching and learning of English listening skills at the secondary level.

The data also indicates that students' exposure to oral English is currently very limited. It is observed that most of the English classes are carried out in Bangla with the primary focus on the teaching of reading and grammar. In addition, the types of activities are very restricted and most of the schools lack pedagogical materials and language lab facilities.

The study, therefore, finds that several educational, linguistic, pedagogic, practical, and technical factors currently inhibit the implementation of effective development and assessment of listening skills in English. Nevertheless, both the teachers and the students showed a positive attitude towards strengthening the activities needed to develop listening skills in English classes at the secondary level.

Though this paper has brought out a good number of findings about the practical scenario of teaching listening skills and identified some deficiencies that the learners and teachers have in developing listening skills, it has some limitations too in terms of samples, instruments, and task

types. It represents the findings from only one region of Bangladesh. If the samples had been drawn from some more regions, the paper might have had more comprehensive and reliable results. For future research, this paper proposes to include more institutes from other regions and to use more instruments like the listening proficiency test of the learners, interview of students, and focused group discussions for developing a richer and more balanced database and thus exploring more valuable findings.

References

- Alam, Z. & Sinha, B. S. (2009). Developing listening skills for tertiary level learners. *The Dhaka University Journal of Linguistics*, 2(3), p. 19-52.
- Anderson, A. & Lynch, T. (2003). *Listening*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barman, B. (2017). Integrating language skills: Working with Lp-Sp-Rvg-Wvg model. *Daffodil Journal of Humanities of Social Science*, 4, p. 84.
- Barman, B., Sultana, Z., & Basu, B. L. (2007). *ELT: Theory and Practice*. Dhaka: Friends' Book Corner.
- Brunfaut, T. & Rita, G. (2017). *English Listening and Speaking Assessment in Bangladesh Higher Secondary Schools: A Baseline Study* (Report No. 1). UK: Lancaster University. Retrieved from http://www.research.lancs.ac.uk/portal/services/downloadRegister/175334139/Baseline_study_English_listening_and_speaking_in_Bangladesh_Higher_Secondary_School_Brunfaut_Green.pdf
- Choudhury, S. I. (2001). Rethinking the two Englishes. In F. Alam, N. Zaman & T. Ahmed (Eds.), *Revisioning English in Bangladesh* (pp. 15–26). Dhaka: The University Press Limited.
- Dutta, S. K. (2001). English Language and Literature in Bangladesh. In F. Alam, N. Zaman & T. Ahmed (Eds.), *Revisioning English in Bangladesh* (pp. 123-140). Dhaka: The University Press Limited.
- Flowerdew, J. and Miller, L. (2005). *Second Language Listening: Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Guo, N. & Wills, R. (2005). An investigation of factors influencing English listening comprehension and possible measures for improvement. Presented at the AARE Annual Conference. Retrieved from <https://www.aare.edu.au/data/publications/2005/guo05088.pdf>
- Hassan, M. K. (2004). A linguistic study of English language curriculum at the secondary level in Bangladesh: A communicative approach to curriculum development. *Language in India*, 4.
- Haider, M. Z., & Chowdhury, T. A. (2012). Repositioning of CLT from curriculum to classroom: A review of the English language instructions at Bangladeshi secondary schools. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 2(4), pp. 12-22.
- Harmer, J. (2011). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. China, Pearson Education Ltd., p. 265.
- Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Imam, S. R. (2005). English as a global language and the question of nation-building education in Bangladesh. *Comparative Education*, 41(4), pp. 471-486.
- Kaiser, M. T. & Khanam, M. S. (2008). Listening practice in English language learning: Bangladesh context. *Prime University Journal*, 2(2).
- Krinshaswamy, N. and Sriraman, T. (1984). *English Teaching in India*. Madras: T. R. Publications.
- McArthur, T. (Ed.). (1996). *The Oxford Companion to the English Language (abridged edition)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McDonough, J. & Christopher, S. & Masuhara, H. (2013). *Materials and Methods in ELT: A Teacher's Guide*. UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mendelson, D. J. (1994). *Learning to Listen*. USA: Dominic Press.
- Nunan, D. (1998). Approaches to teaching listening in language classroom. In Proceedings of the 1997 Korean TESOL Conference. KOTESOL, Taejon, Korea.
- Nunan, D. (2015). *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: An Introduction*. NY: Routledge.
- NCTB. *Secondary English Curriculum*. (2012). Dhaka: NCTB Publications, pp. 82-90.
- Pinon, R. & Haydon, J. (2010). The benefits of the English language for individuals and societies: Quantitative indicators from Cameroon, Nigeria, Rwanda, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Report. *Euromonitor International*.
- Quader, D. A. (2017). *Best Practices in ELT: Voices from the Classroom*. Bangladesh: BELTA, pp. 26-27.
- Rasheed, M. M. H. (2012). *Learning English Language in Bangladesh: CLT and Beyond*. Barisal, Bangladesh: Government Teachers' Training College.

Report of Curriculum Committee. 1962. Government of Bangladesh.
Rost, M. (1990): *Listening in Language Learning*. London: Longman.
Rost, M. (2002) *Teaching and Researching Listening*. London: Pearson.
Sarwar, B. (2013). Motivational Strategies in the ELT Classroom: The Bangladeshi Context at the Tertiary Level. *Spectrum, Journal of Dept. of English, University of Dhaka*, 8/9, pp. 154-56.
Selim, A. and Mahboob, T. S. (2001). ELT and English language teachers of Bangladesh: A profile. F. Alam, N. Zaman & T. Ahmed (Eds.), *Revisioning English in Bangladesh* (pp. 141 –52). Dhaka: The University Press Limited.
Ur, P. (1999). *A Course in Language Teaching: Trainee Book*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
Vandergrift, L. (1999). Facilitating second language listening comprehension: acquiring successful strategies. *ELT Journal*, 53/3, pp. 168-76.
Wallace, T., Starha, W. E. & Walberg, H. J. (2004). *Teaching Speaking, Listening and Writing*. France: Typhon.
Wilson, J. J. (2008). *How to Teach Listening*. Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaire for Students

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COLLECTING DATA

TEACHING LISTENING SKILLS: HOW FAR BANGLADESHI EDUCATION SYSTEM FOCUSES ON ITS DEVELOPMENT AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

Questionnaire for Students

Personal Information

Name: Class:
..... Group:
Name of your School:
Thana: District:

Please circle the number of correct option/options as answers to the following questions or statements.

1. How, you think, is your listening skill?

- a. very good b. good c. satisfactory d. poor e. not measured or thought about listening skill

2. How often does your English language teacher encourage you to develop listening skill?

- a. Always b. very often c. often d. occasionally e. rarely f. never

3. What is the condition of the language lab of your school?

- a. The lab is well equipped with the devices and headphones for each student.
b. The lab is equipped with loud speakers only.
c. There is no language lab at all.

4. How often does your teacher use multimedia or language lab to develop your listening skill?

- a. Always b. very often c. often d. occasionally e. rarely f. never

5. How often do you ask your teacher to repeat the part/parts when you miss to understand while listening?

- a. Always b. very often c. often d. occasionally e. rarely f. never

6. How do you find your English/English language classes?

- a. very interactive b. moderately interactive c. poorly interactive d. not interactive at all

7. How often do you interact with your friends/teachers to develop your listening skill?

- a. Always b. very often c. often d. occasionally e. rarely f. never

8. Which language does your teacher mostly use in the English/English language classes?

- a. English b. Bangla c. both

9. How do you find your teacher in the classroom while you are asking some questions?

- a. very interactive b. moderately interactive c. poorly interactive d. not interactive at all

10. How many English language classes are held in a week?

- a. once a week b. more than once classes a week c. no language class

11. How many listening skill assessments or classes (according to NCTB) are taken by your teacher in every six months' term?

- a. no assessments b. 1-3 assessments c. more than 3 assessments

12. How much do you understand BBC English, CNN English, English movies or other authentic sources of English language?

- a. Completely b. mostly c. moderately d. a little bit e. very little

13. What difficulties do you face while listening to your teacher, authentic texts like BBC, CNN or English movies etc.? (You can choose more than one option)

- a. I do not understand the pronunciation/accents
- b. I cannot catch all the message/information
- c. I do not understand some vocabulary
- d. I do not understand the short forms and connected speeches
- e. I cannot keep up with the speed of the speech
- f. all of the above
- g. I face no difficulty

Thank you for your kind cooperation

Appendix B: Semi-structured interview questions for the teachers

TEACHING LISTENING SKILLS: HOW FAR BANGLADESHI EDUCATION SYSTEM FOCUSES ON ITS DEVELOPMENT AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

Interview Questions for Teachers

(The information collected will be kept confidential)

Name:....., Designation:

School:.....

Thana: District:.....

You are humbly requested to answer the following questions:

1. Will you mind introducing yourself in brief?
2. How long have you been teaching English? Give a brief history of your teaching career.
3. Which of the language skills is the most important in your eyes? In which order the language skills should be taught?
4. Do you take any classes only for listening development of your students? If yes, then how?
5. Which language do you use mostly in the class? Why?
6. Do you use multimedia or any other technology to develop students' listening skill?
7. What type of institutional facilities do you get to teach speaking & listening?
8. How is the general standard of the listening skill of your students? Give your comments in favor of your report.
9. What difficulties do you face in teaching listening skill?
10. What activities do you undertake in the classroom to improve your students' listening skill?

Thank you for your time and kind co-operation