Speaking and Listening in *English For Today* at SSC and HSC Levels: Accentuation and Actualization

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Abstract: *To be communicatively competent, speaking and listening skills are two of the four macro-skills to be given importance. However, teaching these two is highly neglected in Bangladeshi classrooms as there have been no initiatives to assess them although the prescribed textbooks English For Today: Classes Nine-Ten and English For Today: Classes Eleven-Twelve by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Bangladesh (NCTB) assign speaking and listening tasks to perform in CLT methodology, which Bangladesh introduced in 2001 (Rahman & Karim, 2015). This study investigates how much emphasis these two set books have given to the two neglected skills i.e., speaking and listening by comparing the tasks assigned in the books. Also, this paper attempts to find out the classroom practices of these activities in reality. To achieve these aims, the books were evaluated following a textbook evaluation checklist. Five teachers teaching English in classes 9-10 and 11-12 were interviewed and 50 students in classes 9-10 and 11-12 were given questionnaires to know the actuality of classroom practices following the activities in the books. The study shows that the books have a range of listening and speaking activities though little exposure to speaking and listening activities is made in classrooms and there is no sufficient logistic support or motivation (i.e., central assessment) for the actualization of them.*

Keywords: *Speaking, Listening, Textbook, Secondary Level, EFL, CLT*

Introduction

In Bangladesh, the official and national language is Bangla (Faquire, 2010). English is not commonly used as a language for conversation; it is largely employed for reasons of particularity (Suchona & Shorna, 2019).

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As a result of the colonial legacy, people in Bangladesh are essentially compelled to use English for bureaucratic, professional, or academic purposes (Rahman et al., 2015). Under a unified national curriculum, English is taught to all students as a required subject for up to class 12 in Bangladesh. Teaching grammar, reading, and translation are typical components of English instruction in Bangladesh, as they are in the majority of Asian nations (Islam & Shafaat Bari, 2012).

Speaking and listening are the two most neglected skills in Bangladesh like in many other EFL settings. The comprehensive approach to English language teaching Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced in Bangladesh in 2001. Hence, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Bangladesh (NCTB) designed a new curriculum and produced new textbooks for different grades at the secondary level in the country. These books went under massive changes in 2013. The new English textbooks with the same name English For Today were written and approved according to the national curriculum in 2012 (Saha, 2020). However, the students practise these materials solely for attaining academic results, and not for learning English as a language (Hani & Siddika, 2018). Nevertheless, textbooks are designed following CLT methodology prescribed by national ELT curriculum aimed at enhancing learners' communicative competence (Ali, 2014).

There is a huge gap between what the textbooks suggest and what the tests assess (Hani & Siddika, 2018). As a result, students and teachers avoid those parts of the textbooks which are not necessary for the examination. The practices are designed following some guidebooks where some model tests are given as per the assessment system. This study, therefore, finds out the extent of emphasis these English For Today books have given to speaking and listening by comparing the tasks assigned and the extent of the actual classroom activities following the books.

Research Questions

The followings are the research questions this study aims to answer:

1. How much emphasis have the NCTB English For Today books given on speaking and listening skills?

2. What are the existing speaking and listening practices in secondary classrooms in Bangladesh?

Review of Literature

The theory of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was initially put forth in England in the 1970s. Since it placed a vital emphasis on conversation in language learning classrooms, this system was viewed as groundbreaking. Since it was largely an ESL (English as a Second Language) methodology, it quickly acquired popularity throughout Western nations. In the teaching of second languages, particularly in ESL countries, the Communicative Approach has been widely embraced by textbooks and curricula (Ozsevik, 2010). The CLT policy was adopted in the hope of creating manpower with "communicative competence" in English, to improve the nation's initiatives to advance its human resources. The majority of secondary and primary school English lessons follow a top-down, instructional approach to delivery, with limited use of a communicative approach, according to research by the EIA project (Shams et al., 2021)

Research has been done in different contexts regarding the learners' and teachers' attitudes towards implementing listening and speaking as part of CLT curricula. Harvey (1985) conducted a course at a Chinese university training teachers. It was found that many were willing to enhance their listening and speaking skills. However, it was also recommended that the local learning method should not be set aside too.

Thompson (1996) found that recognition of CLT, which includes all four skills to be taught in class, differs. He found four misconceptions of CLT which were as follows:
1. CLT does not teach grammar
2. CLT teaches only speaking
3. Pair-work is prescribed
4. CLT is based on native speaker teacher practices

Li (1998) suggests that applying CLT is hard in EFL settings. He undertook a case study in South Korea where there were traditional teaching methods and large classes. He found four types of difficulties which are caused by:

1. The teachers' deficiency in communicative competence
2. The students' low English proficiency, motivation and participation
3. The educational system's not supporting CLT in assessment or funding
4. CLT practitioners not taking into consideration of some salient features of EFL

Kirkgöz (2008) conducted a 2-year case study from 2003 to 2005 on educators' teaching approaches, and the effect of instructor perceptions and training on the teachers' adoption of the Communicative Oriented Curriculum (COC) project. The findings revealed that teachers' instructional approaches varied along the propagation and interpretation instruction spectrum, and teachers' conceptions and earlier training influenced the amount to which the curriculum initiative was implemented. The study emphasizes the importance of providing continual teacher education and options, particularly during the critical initial few years of the innovation process, to encourage the implementation of curricular reform.

Barriers to CLT have been given importance in various research studies (Bekele, 2014; M. J. Islam & Shafaat Bari, 2012; Kabir, 2014; Ozsevik, 2010; Suchona & Shorna, 2019). CLT is not in success in different countries for various reasons including the ineffectiveness of ELT practitioners, financial constraints, administrative structure, infrastructure restraints, cultural conflicts, classroom seating, class arrangement and prevailing language teaching and learning, and testing system (Islam & Shafaat Bari, 2012). According to Bekele (2014), it is also due to teachers' lack of professional development, teachers' preference for conventional methods, teachers' mischaracterization of CLT, teachers' insufficient professional mentoring, teachers' priority for conventional methods, issues about student preferences, challenges involving cultural matters, such as the requirement for contextualizing, issues about the educational system, such as the student population allocated to a particular classroom, the testing system used, the suitability of curriculum (Bekele, 2014). The difficulties in spoken English pedagogy in Bangladesh are due to a lack of logistics and operational resources, adequate pedagogical strategies, and a lack of support. Students felt insecure and afraid while speaking English (Kabir, 2014). Traditional approaches, like the grammar-translation method, still predominate in EFL classroom practices in Turkey even though the current English teaching

curriculum is based on the CLT methodology (Ozsevik, 2010). Many times, a learner's inability to utilize the input at hand due to a lack of anxiety, motivation or distaste for the second language's culture hampers advancement toward acquisition but not always toward learning. English is rarely the language of teaching in classes for majors other than English at the university level in national and public universities while the situation differs in private universities (Suchona & Shorna, 2019).

Some research studies were conducted to examine the teachers' proficiency in teaching the skills required in the CLT context (Butler, 2004; Islam & Shafaat Bari, 2012; Wang, 2008). Butler (2004) worked in the Korean context. According to him, there are still relatively few English teachers in Korea with expertise. They usually do not hire native-speaking teachers. It will be challenging for non-native speakers to use English in the classroom if they are not highly proficient in their second language. The dialogues, drills, practised exercises, and discussions that take place in the classroom when a teacher who is not fluent in English uses his or her (and the students') first language (Islam & Shafaat Bari, 2012). Besides, when they disregarded or undermined pedagogical changes, instructors have frequently been labelled as "resistant to change" or just plain slothful. They can lack the knowledge and resources needed to carry out the directives they perceive the policy worth making for them (Wang, 2008).

In-service teacher training is required to bridge the gaps (Butler, 2004). Most educators get access to begin their careers as educators without any training. The teachers did not properly understand the notions of communicative competence, despite the government having released resources based on CLT. Result-oriented teaching, which primarily emphasizes reading and writing abilities, is still a major concern for a significant number of institutions in Bangladesh (Islam & Shafaat Bari, 2012). For the book to be taught, teachers must receive support (Nayeen et al., 2020). There is a gap between instructors' beliefs and behaviours and students' preferences and needs which significantly hinders the implementation of CLT (Hani & Siddika, 2018).

It has been claimed that Communicative Language Teaching, or CLT, is the most frequently used strategy that may produce the necessary results, showing that students easily gain the communicative competence of a native speaker

(Islam & Shafaat Bari, 2012). The overall goal of the Communicative Approach is to improve learners' grammatical and functional proficiency in l2 (Rahman et al., 2015). Many students were said to have remained at the beginner level of English speaking even after spending quite a year in school (Haider & Chowdhury, 2012).

However, it has been extremely difficult to put the approach's concepts into practice up to this point, largely due to several problematic considerations (Bekele, 2014). The successful HSC-passed students who are accepted into English-based university programs immediately grapple with their language proficiency. The general English proficiency of Bangladeshi students has not been much enhanced notwithstanding all such developments. The book must be taught and read as suggested in it (Nayeen et al., 2020). The curricula do not always match the way that courses are taught (Orafi & Borg, 2009). Additionally, studies have shown that practitioners did not often follow instructions or operate in a way that would achieve policy goals (Wang, 2008). While almost all students and teachers believe that the book is well enough to get into learning all language skills, their learning and teaching activities are more focused on preparing for exams than on helping students become proficient in the language (Hani & Siddika, 2018).

In the summative assessment, only two out of four skills of writing and reading are assessed (Nayeen et al., 2020). Both students and teachers steer clear of any lessons that are not pertinent to the test (Hani & Siddika, 2018).

Self-assessments have grown in popularity recently due to the increased emphasis on learners' autonomy in language learning and teaching as well as the fact that they are effective and relatively simple to administer; they may take less time, for example, than other types of proficiency assessments (Butler, 2004). The Bangladeshi education system necessitates a combination of literary studies in the textbooks, the use of student-centric education, and an attitudinal shift in favour of studying English as a second language (Nayeen et al., 2020).

Methodology

In this research, both qualitative and quantitative data have been used. Some

nterviews of the teachers were also conducted. Some questionnaires for students and teachers have also been used. Moreover, a textbook analysis was conducted.

Sampling

In this research, 10 teachers joined as participants, whose age limit was between 25 to 50 along with 50 students who participated as the sample of the research whose age limit was between 14 to 18. The sample was designated based on purposive sampling and convenience sampling where the schools and colleges were chosen from Ashulia, Dhaka.

Method of data collection

The data for this study were collected from the interviews of the teachers and the questionnaires for the teachers and students. The students were given a questionnaire in English with Bangla translations. The questions were set based on a Likert scale of 5. Teachers were interviewed face to face on the class practice and the textbooks they follow in class. For textbook analysis, English For Today books of class ix-x and xi-xii were selected.

Method of data analysis

Data analysis focuses on the theme based on which the data are collected. For this research, the interviews were transcribed and categorized according to the themes. The percentage of these themes was found to understand the area of significance. On the other hand, for questionnaires, data were thematically categorized and their mean was found to understand on a Likert scale. For textbook analysis, the number of lessons and activities focusing on particular skills were counted and used.

Results and discussions

The findings are described according to the research questions.

Q1. How much emphasis has the NCTB English For Today (XI-X & XI-XII)
books given on speaking and listening skills?
English For Today (xi-xii):

Number of lessons carrying R-W-S-L activities in EFT of XI-XII
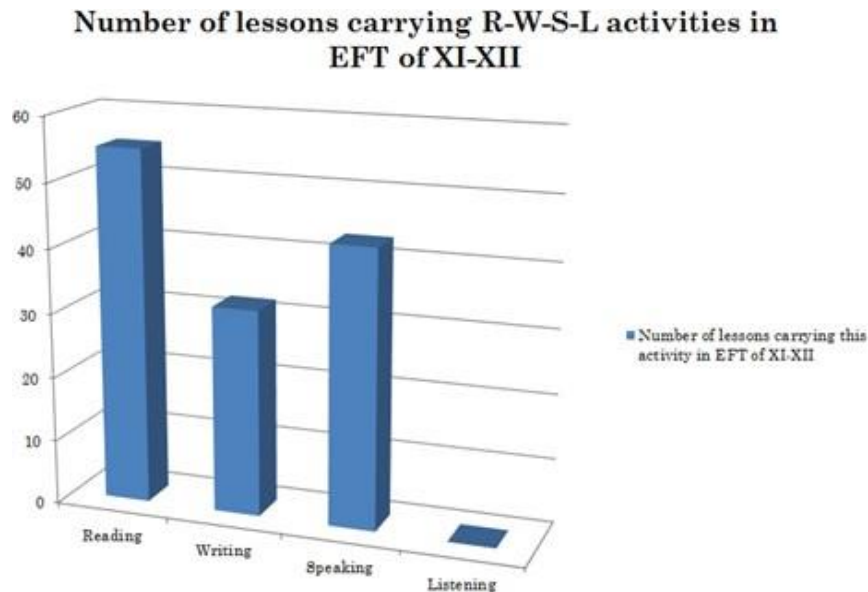
Figure 1: How much emphasis has the NCTB English For Today (xi-xii) book
given on speaking and listening skills?

Figure 1 illustrates the degree of emphasis on speaking and listening skills
given by the NCTB English For Today book for class ix-x. The graph shows
the number of lessons NCTB's English For Today book (xi-xii) contains. The
graph reveals that there are 60 lessons in *English For Today* (xi - x). Among
them more than 50 lessons focus on reading activities and on the other hand,
there are no listening activities. The book also focus on writing activities and
speaking activities. More than 40 lessons contain speaking activities and more
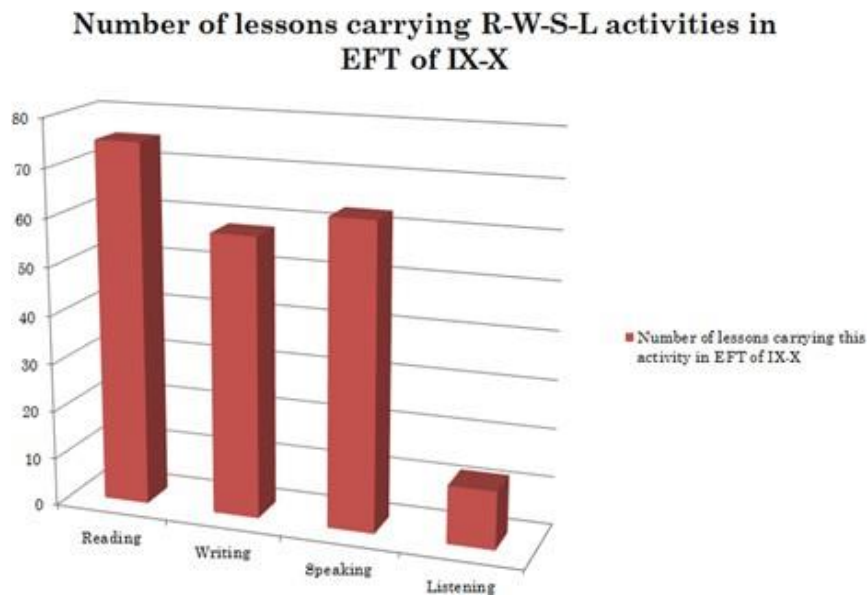than 30 lessons contain writing activities.

English For Today (ix-x):

Number of lessons carrying R-W-S-L activities in EFT of IX-X

Figure 2: How much emphasis has the NCTB English For Today (ix-x) book given on speaking and listening skills?

Figure 2 reveals the degree of emphasis on speaking and listening skills given by the NCTB's English For Today book for class ix-x. The graph shows the number of lessons NCTB's English For Today book (ix-x) contains. The graph reveals that there are 80 lessons in English For Today (ix-x). Among them, more than 70 lessons contain reading activities and on the other hand, there are less than 10 listening activities. The book also contains writing activities and speaking activities. More than 60 lessons contain speaking activities and less than 60 lessons contain writing activities.

Together:

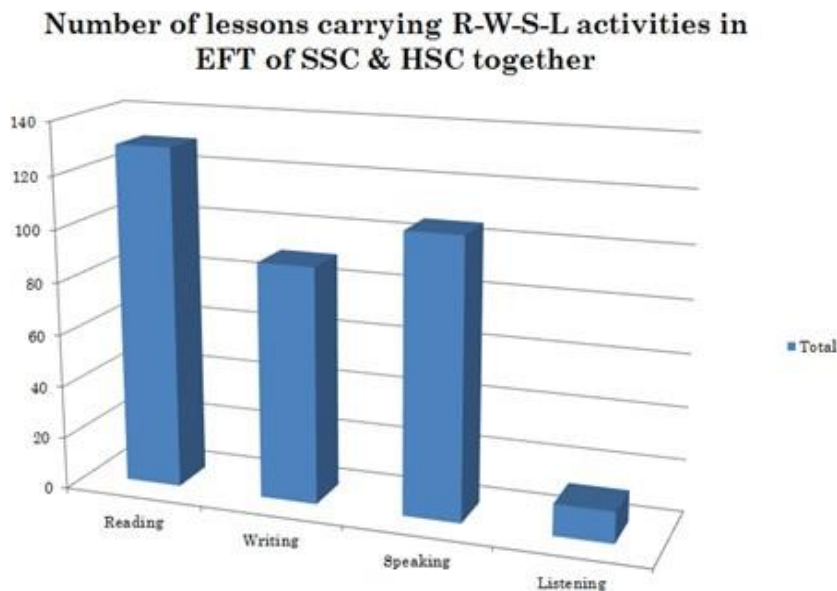**Number of lessons carrying R-W-S-L activities in EFT of SSC & HSC together**

Figure 3: How much emphasis has the NCTB *English For Today* (XI-X & XI-XII) books given on speaking and listening skills?

Figure 3 shows the number of lessons of NCTB's *English For Today* classes IX-X & XI-XII in total. The two books contain 140 lessons. Among them more than 120 lessons contain reading activities, less than 20 lessons contain listening activities, more than 100 lessons contain speaking activities and more than 80 lessons contain writing activities. Therefore, this graph shows these two books (of IX-X & XI-XII) have more emphasis on reading activities and less emphasis on listening activities.

Q2. What are the existing speaking and listening practices in secondary classrooms in Bangladesh?

Table 1: Existing speaking and listening classroom practices from the *English For Today* book (teachers' viewpoints)

ITEMS	Mean
1. Focus on *English For Today* more than model-test-based books	3^U
2. *English For Today* followed for speaking activities	4.5^{SA}
3. *English for Today* followed for listening activities	2.5^U
4. Enough technological support	2^D
5. Focus on learning English more than score	3^U
Mean of the items 1-5	3^U

SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, SA = strongly agree, A = agree, U = undecided

Table 2: Existing speaking and listening classroom practices from the *English For Today* book (learners' viewpoints)

ITEMS	Mean
1. *English For Today* followed more than model-tests-based books	3.71^A
1. Existing speaking practice in class	2.32^D
1. Existing listening practice in class	2.10^D
1. Audiovisual materials played in the class	3^U
Mean of the items 1-5	2.78^U

SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, SA = strongly agree, A = agree, U = undecided

According to question number 2, researchers surveyed the participation of teachers and students. This survey shows the existing speaking and listening practices in secondary classrooms in Bangladesh by presenting the viewpoints of teachers and learners on it. The table was set up with 5 points for teachers to get their opinion on those points. The theme of the 1st point is "Focus on *English For Today* more than model tests based books" that are undecided by the teachers' viewpoints. The 2nd point is *"English For Today* followed for speaking activities". Teachers strongly agree with this point. The 3rd one is *"English For Today"* followed by listening activities" that is also undecided. The 4th point is "Enough technological support". Teachers disagree with this point. Moreover, the last & 5th point is "Focus on learning English more than a score" that is also undecided. The mean of these five points shows that they are undecided in most of the cases. Table 2 reveals the learners' point of view

on the particular question. This table was also set up with 4 points to get learners' points of view on the question.1st point is *"English For Today* followed more than model tests based books" which is agreed by the learners.2nd Point is "Existing speaking practice in class". Learners disagree with this point. The 3rd point is "Existing listening practice in class". The learners also disagree with the 3rd point. The last and 4th point is "Audiovisual materials played in the class" this point is undecided by the learners. The final mean of the table 2 is 2.78 which means they are undecided.

Conclusion

English For Today books for classes ix-x and xi-xii have been designed keeping the communicative approach in mind. These books have given the particular emphasis on reading, writing and speaking while keeping listening activities less than others. Although these tasks are assigned, the logistic support to attain the aims and objectives is not sufficient. The teachers are not provided with any listening audio although the books have instructed so. Also, it is very difficult to implement listening and speaking tests in public exams due to some constraints. The teachers tend to follow exam-focused teaching while there are many discrepancies between the materials and the exam system. Therefore, they follow some model-test-based books which contain only reading passages, grammatical items and some writing activities. In practicality, speaking and listening activities are rarely used. This study recommends a change in the assessment system. There can be some marks in formative assessments that may affect learners' grades. Some trained and independent examiners can be assigned to give speaking and listening tests.

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