

# Listening Skills in Classroom Practices and Testing Systems at the Secondary Level in Bangladesh: An Empirical Appraisal

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> English Curriculum, Listening Skills, SSC Level, Teaching- Learning Activities, Testing System</p> <p><b>DOI:</b> <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v9i2.1718">http://dx.doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v9i2.1718</a></p>	<p><i>Developing language skills is a must for being proficient in any language for successful communication which is one of the most sought-after soft skills in the world today. Given the poor English proficiency of Bangladeshi students, this study investigated the status of listening skills, one of the vital primary language skills, in classroom practices and testing systems at the secondary level in Bangladesh. In this mixed methods research, twelve teachers from different secondary level schools and seventy students from two schools in Jashore district, Bangladesh were surveyed with structured questionnaires. Moreover, semi-structured interview sessions were conducted with six teachers. Simultaneously, the contents of the textbook 'English for Today' (for Classes Nine and Ten), and the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination question papers were also analyzed. The overall findings of this study revealed that listening skills did not have adequate attention and necessary importance in the textbook contents, classroom teaching-learning processes, and testing systems. The existing teaching-learning practices have substantially failed to impart optimum English proficiency, especially listening skills to the students. Therefore, this research recommends the incorporation of listening skills into classroom activities and testing systems proportionately.</i></p>
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## 1. Introduction

People need to be engaged in communication with others during their working hours every day for various purposes through diverse means. This communication is so frequent,

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important, and predominant that people spend 50% to 80% of their workday time communicating (Klemmer & Snyder, 1972). Again, of the total time spent on communication, people spent 42% time listening, 32% time speaking, 15% time reading and only 11% time writing (Barker et al., 1980). So, people spend most of their communication time listening. Hence the significance of developing the listening skills of learners for successful and effective communication is easily understandable. Besides, it is revealed in different studies that listening is one of the soft skills demanded by most employers (Ellis et al., 2014). Therefore, to make students fit for the competitive globalized world, it is a prerequisite to make them efficient in communication, especially in English along with other skills. Due to the functional necessity, it is a must to develop students' listening skills first to make them proficient in other language skills, and competent in effective communication. To ensure it, it is necessary to engage the students in activities that will develop their listening skills resulting in the development of the other three language skills namely speaking, reading, and writing.

Many factors and strategies work behind engaging the students in the activities to develop their language skills (Elashhab, 2020). The learners are motivated to develop a skill or master a subject spontaneously and wholeheartedly only when these are practiced and assessed in the classrooms and subsequently tested in the examinations because assessment and examination work as stimuli for the students to study and learn something seriously (Rahman et al., 2016).

In many studies and research, it is revealed that the English proficiency level of Bangladeshi students is not up to the mark. According to the 2022 English Proficiency Index (EPI) survey conducted by Education First (EF), a Switzerland-based international organization, Bangladesh is ranked 66th among 111 countries based on the English proficiency of its people. The survey classifies Bangladesh under the 'Low' category, representing the fourth out of five proficiency levels (Education First, 2022). Additionally, researchers such as Khan and Chaudhury (2012) reveal that the English proficiency of employees across diverse industries in Bangladesh falls significantly below the expected working level. Another study conducted by Rahman (2005) highlights that the English proficiency of Bangladeshi students is unsatisfactory. Besides, an overwhelming number of Bangladeshi employees cannot prove their English proficiency (Imam, 2005). These findings collectively underscore the existing challenges in the English language proficiency of the students because English now plays a vital role in the job market (Bekteshi & Xhaferi, 2020; Park, 2011). So, it is a must to develop students' proficiency in English by developing first their language skills, especially the primary skills, listening and speaking.

In the process of developing students' language skills, the secondary level plays a pivotal role as this stage is crucial for English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Dincer & Dariyemez, 2020). At this formative stage of life, the EFL students consolidate and advance their English language skills. Furthermore, the preparation of this builds up the groundwork for academic success and career readiness and develops insights and attitudes toward life where English matters. Now the question arises: how much importance has the Bangladeshi English curriculum for the secondary level attached to the development of students' listening skills? So, the researchers set their goals to address this issue by analyzing the real scenario of listening practices in Bangladeshi contexts. More specifically, the core objective of this study is to analyze the present status of English listening skills practices at secondary level

education in Bangladesh. To meet the objective of this study, the following research questions have been addressed:

1. What is the current status of English listening skills in classroom practices, textual content, and testing systems?
2. What challenges do the teachers and students commonly encounter in the instructions and acquisition of English listening skills?
3. How can the barriers associated with listening skills be addressed?

## **2. Literature Review**

EFL researchers in many countries have tried to shed light on listening skills-related issues from different perspectives. For example, Ernita et al. (2022) from Indonesia examined the difficulties in teaching listening; Hamri (2022) from Algeria focused on the impacts that listening comprehension had on learners' motivation; Miranda (2022) from Ecuador analyzed learners' difficulties in learning listening skills. Other researchers like Nadziroh (2022); Nadhira and Warni (2021); Nushi and Orouji (2020); Amir (2019); Sari and Fithriyana (2019); Utomo et al. (2019); Ani (2018); Alrawashdeh and Al-Zayed (2017); Avci and Doghonadze (2017); Syadiah (2016); Assaf (2015); Ulum (2015); Yavuz et al. (2015); Chen (2013); Hichem (2013); Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) also researched different aspects of listening skills.

Using a qualitative descriptive method, Ernita et al. (2022) collected data from three EFL teachers who teach EFL learners of different levels in Nigeria. Interview sessions over the phone were conducted with teacher participants to get a clear conception of the difficulties teachers regularly faced in listening classes. Aspects like low motivation among learners, lack of practice, unavailability of books and materials, difficulties in operating tools, and managing time were felt very crucial for the context. Based on the findings, the researchers put forward some relevant issues for consideration, *e.g.* bringing supporting materials (like a dictionary) by the students in the classrooms, practicing listening skills, even outside the classrooms, watching English movies, or listening to songs.

Nadhira & Warni (2021) conducted their research in West Java, Indonesia to investigate learners' difficulties in comprehending listening texts. This mixed methods research administered a questionnaire to 100 students and conducted in-depth interviews with 8 students who studied in a senior school. The analyses of the questionnaire and interview data exposed that learners felt several issues responsible for making listening texts difficult for them to understand, *e.g.* unfamiliar words and accents, unclear pronunciation, poor audio quality, inadequate facilities, etc. Most of these factors are associated with learners' lack of background knowledge and practices, surrounding noises, and the like. Besides emphasizing the importance of learners' background knowledge and practices, this study urged for well-equipped classrooms and well-designed lessons for overcoming learners' listening comprehension difficulties.

Nushi & Orouji (2020) investigated learners' listening difficulties perceived by the teachers. Questionnaires and interview tools were employed in this mixed methods study to collect data from 208 EFL teachers in Iran. The participants believed that learners' difficulties are related to three broader areas, *i.e.* learners' pronunciation, their characteristics, and text contents. The specific difficulties included crucial aspects like texts consisting of too many

unknown words, colloquial language or idioms, poor audio systems, lack of practice, etc. The study also sought the attention of the curriculum designers to incorporate various listening materials to meet the educational objectives of the context.

In Bangladesh, listening skill-centered research also represented the issues in multi-dimensional ways, most of which dealt with secondary (Rahman et al., 2024; Hasib, 2022; Patwary & Rumman, 2019; Rahman, 2014; Kaiser & Khanam, 2008, etc.), higher secondary (Shurovi, 2014) and tertiary level (Rahman et al., 2023; Akter, 2019; Rani, 2018; Afrin, 2011, etc.) teaching-learning processes.

Patwary and Rumman (2019) carried out their research to analyze the present conditions of listening skills in the curriculum and classroom practices. This mixed methods research selected participants from 11 secondary level schools in Dhaka where 130 students of classes IX and X and 22 English language teachers took part in their survey. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings of this research exposed that teachers usually do not follow any particular method for teaching listening, and they also lack the knowledge of effective teaching as in the curriculum the instructions are not provided for listening skills. The research also put forward several pedagogical recommendations like: raising awareness among teachers regarding the importance of listening and speaking skills, inclusion of listening skills in continuous assessment as well as in the final examinations, establishing and ensuring lab facilities, arranging regular teacher training sessions, etc.

Rahman et al. (2023) conducted a study to analyze the difficulties faced by the tertiary level English language teachers in teaching listening, and the methods that they applied to overcome these difficulties. An instrumental case study approach was adopted for collecting data from one particular English language teacher at a public university. In-depth information was collected using a semi-structured interview and the collected data underwent a thematic analysis process. The findings revealed several distinctive barriers like lack of technological support, teachers' training and large size classrooms, classrooms with mixed-ability students, unsuitable teaching styles, etc. This qualitative study also proposed some possible solutions to mitigate the problems, *e.g.* teaching spoken grammar, emphasizing the process of decoding messages from the text, establishing links between the top-down and bottom-up processes, promoting learners' autonomy, etc.

Still having different studies on listening skills in this context, the present study is unique in the sense that it tried to deal with listening-related issues from different possible aspects. The integration of diverse data collection tools like questionnaires, interviews, question paper analysis, and textbook content analysis alongside the incorporation of the perceptions both from the teachers and students enhanced the practicability of the outcomes. Thus, this research is expected to be a dynamic approach to accurately unearthing the present scenario of teaching listening skills and to offer practical solutions to the related barriers that are connected with and applicable to not only the Bangladeshi context but also other EFL contexts.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Tools and Techniques**

To meet the research objectives, the researchers employed a mixed methods approach to completing the data collection procedures. Teacher and student participants were surveyed

with two separate questionnaires consisting of both close-ended (for quantitative data) and open-ended items (for qualitative data). The closed-ended questionnaires were designed based on a five-point Likert scale consisting of 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree' options. The purposive sampling method was followed in the data collection phase. To collect more detailed information, this study also conducted semi-structured interviews with teacher participants (see Appendix). The data collection duration was the first two weeks of November 2023. Moreover, the contents of the textbook *English for Today* (for Classes Nine and Ten) and the SSC examination (the years 2023 and 2024) question papers were also analyzed to ensure the findings were more trustworthy. This study used the textbook that was written following the revised curriculum developed in 2012.

### **3.2 Participants and Settings**

A total of 70 students from two schools (26 from JUST School and College and 44 from Salua High School) in Jashore district and 12 secondary teachers from both rural and urban areas participated in this study's questionnaire surveys. Six teachers also participated in the interview sessions (see Appendix). The identities of the participants were preserved by maintaining anonymity, and each individual's filled-in and submitted questionnaire was assigned a unique numerical identifier, *e.g.* student participants were numbered as S<sub>1</sub>, S<sub>2</sub>, etc., teacher participants were numbered as T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>2</sub>, etc., and teacher interviewees were numbered as TI<sub>1</sub>, TI<sub>2</sub>, etc.

### **3.3 Data Analysis Procedures**

Quantitative data obtained from closed-ended questionnaire items were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25. The qualitative data, derived from individual responses to open-ended questionnaire items and semi-structured interviews, was analyzed through a thematic analysis procedure and the responses of both student and teacher participants were presented verbatim. Additionally, a qualitative content analysis approach was employed to scrutinize the contents of the textbook and SSC examination question papers. The results of both quantitative and qualitative data were presented in tables and figure. In all the data tables, 'Std' stands for standard deviation, 'SD' for Strongly Agree, 'D' for Disagree, 'U' for Undecided, 'A' for Agree, and 'SA' for Strongly Agree.

### **3.4 Validity and Reliability**

Several steps were followed to maintain the reliability and validity of the research. First of all, careful attention was given to the design and formatting of the questionnaires, and a field-related expert was consulted for finalizing the questionnaires. A mixed methods approach was employed to enhance data reliability. To triangulate the findings of the quantitative data and qualitative data different data collection tools were used, *e.g.* open-ended part of the students' questionnaire, teachers' interviews, textbook analysis, and question paper analysis. Moreover, Participants' verbal consent was taken. They were also assured that their involvement was voluntary, and all provided data would be treated with utmost confidentiality, and will solely be used for research purposes. All these factors helped in collecting the perceptions of the participants ensuring transparency, reliability, and credibility in both data collection and analysis procedures. In this manner, the issues of validity and reliability were tried to maintain. Reviewing existing literature and comparing their findings with this study's findings also helped to increase the credibility of this research.

## 4. Results

The subsequent sections deeply delved into the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data obtained using teacher and student questionnaires, teacher interviews, textbook content analysis, and examination question paper scrutiny.

### 4.1. Results from the Quantitative Data

#### 4.1.1 Students' Questionnaire

The quantitative data were collected through the closed-ended parts of the teacher and student questionnaires. The first part (Section A) of both questionnaires was for collecting demographic information of the participants. The findings of Section A revealed that of the total students, 36 were male and 34 were female students.

Section B of the questionnaires collected participants' views on the status of listening skills in classroom activities, textbook contents, and testing systems. This section of the students' questionnaire consisted of 10 items. The descriptive analysis of the findings in Table 1 (items 1-10) show students' perceptions of the conditions of listening skills in the English classrooms, textbook contents, and testing systems. Students' responses to item 1 exposed that 97.10% of the respondents (85.70% 'Strongly Agree' and 11.40% 'Agree') were conscious of the importance of listening skills in their lives. Items 2 and 3 collected data about the classroom activities and equipment. All of the students opined that classrooms did not have sufficient equipment (100%), so, there was no scope for playing audio texts to develop listening skills (98.60%).

Table 1: *Students' Perceptions of Listening Skills in Classroom Practices and Testing Systems*

SN	Items	Mean	Std	SD %	D %	U %	A %	SA %
01	English listening proficiency is very important in our lives.	4.83	0.450	00	00	2.9	11.4	85.7
02	Our classrooms have equipment for playing audio texts.	1.00	0.000	100	00	00	00	00
03	Audio texts are regularly played in classrooms to develop our listening skills.	1.03	0.239	98.6	00	1.4	00	00
04	Like reading and writing skills, the textbook equally emphasizes listening skills.	1.49	0.697	58.6	37.1	2.9	00	1.4
05	There are sufficient listening tasks in the English textbook.	1.60	0.646	47.1	47.1	4.3	1.4	00
06	I can easily understand the English audio of my textbook.	1.57	0.827	60	27.1	8.6	4.3	00
07	The listening texts/materials in my textbook are available to me.	1.37	0.765	74.3	18.6	4.3	1.4	1.4
08	The listening tasks in the textbook are easily executable.	1.33	0.607	72.9	22.9	2.9	1.4	00

09	There are proper settings for conducting the listening test in the exam halls.	1.03	0.239	98.6	00	1.4	00	00
10	I practice listening as much as I practice reading and writing skills for examinations.	1.24	0.550	80	17.1	1.4	1.4	00
<i>N</i> = 70		1.65	0.50					

The findings of the items 3-8 exposed learners' perceptions of the textbook. The findings revealed that only 1.40% of the participants believed that like other basic language skills, listening skills were equally treated in the textbook and the listening tasks were sufficient. At the same time, according to only 4.30% of the students, textbook-based audio is understandable, and to 2.80% of participants, audio texts are available. Moreover, only 1.40% of the participants found that the textbook-based tasks were easily executable.

Items 9 and 10 present the findings of students' perceptions of the assessment and testing systems for listening skills. The majority of the participants (98.60%) exposed the unavailability of proper settings in the exam halls for evaluating the listening skills of the learners. At the same time, only 1.40% of the participants practiced listening skills as much as they practiced the other skills for final examinations.

#### 4.1.2 Teachers' Questionnaire

The findings of Section A (demographic information) revealed that of the total 12 participants, 10 were male and two were female teachers. Three teachers had less than five years of teaching experience, one of them had less than five years of teaching experience, and the rest eight participants had more than 10 years of teaching experience.

Just like the student questionnaire, Section B of the teacher questionnaire collected participants' observations on classroom-based listening skills practices, the contents of the English textbook, and the testing systems for listening skills. This section of the questionnaire was designed with 12 items.

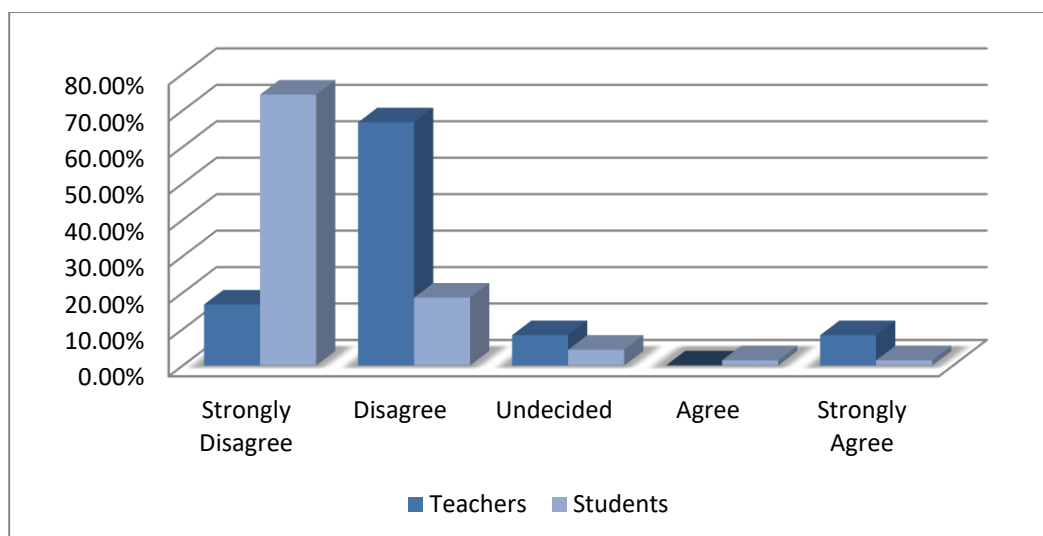
The majority (92.70%) of the teachers believed that (Table 2) the importance of listening skills in daily life was great (item 1). Only 8.30% of the participants mentioned that they had audio equipment in classrooms and the same percentage of the participants played audio texts in the classrooms (items 2-3). Of the total participants, 16.70% believed that they were skilled in operating technological tools (item 4).

Table 2: *Teachers' Perceptions of Listening Skills in Classroom Practices and Testing Systems*

SN	Items	Mean	Std	SD %	D %	U %	A %	SA %
01	English listening proficiency is very important in our lives.	4.50	1.168	8.3	00	00	17.7	75
02	Our classrooms have equipment for playing audio texts.	1.75	0.866	41.7	50	00	8.3	00
03	Audio texts are regularly played in classrooms to develop students' listening skills.	1.92	0.996	41.7	33.3	16.7	8.3	00

04	The teachers are skilled in operating audio systems.	2.83	0.718	00	33.3	50	16.7	00
05	Like reading and writing skills, the textbook equally emphasizes listening skills.	2.58	1.379	25	33.3	8.3	25	8.3
06	There are sufficient listening tasks in the English textbook.	2.17	1.403	41.7	33.3	00	16.7	8.3
07	The students can easily understand the English audio of the textbook.	2.83	0.835	00	41.7	33.3	25	00
08	The listening texts/materials in the textbook are available to me and the students.	2.17	1.030	16.7	66.7	8.3	00	8.3
09	The listening tasks in the textbook are easily executable.	2.33	1.155	25	41.7	8.3	25	00
10	There are proper settings for conducting the listening test in the exam halls.	1.83	1.193	50	33.3	8.3	00	8.3
11	There are well-trained examiners in our school to conduct listening tests.	2.00	1.206	50	16.7	16.7	16.7	00
12	I make the students practice listening as much as we practice reading and writing skills for examinations.	2.17	1.193	33.3	41.7	00	25	00
<i>N=12</i>		2.42	1.09					

Regarding the perception of textbook contents, only 33.3% and 25% of the teacher participants respectively found that listening skills with other language skills were equally emphasized in the textbook and the textbook had sufficient coverage on listening skills. Simultaneously, according to 25% of the participants textbook audio was understandable to the students, only 8.30% opined that the audio texts were available to both the teachers and students, and 25% believed that the exercises were executable (items 5-9).



*Figure 1. Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of the Availability of Listening Text/ Materials*

Items 10-12 present the findings of the teachers' perceptions of the status of listening skills in testing systems (Table 2). According to only 8.30% of teachers, there were proper arrangements for conducting listening tests in the examination halls. At the same time, only 16.70% of the participants opined that there were well-trained examiners to conduct listening tests. Of the total participants, only 25% of teachers engaged learners in listening activities just like the ways they engaged them in other language skills like reading or writing to make them prepare for final examinations.

#### **4.2 Results from the Qualitative Data**

The sources of qualitative data were the open-ended part (Section C) of the teacher and student questionnaires, teachers' interviews, textbook content analysis, and SSC examination question paper analysis.

##### **4.2.1 Teachers' Interviews (Questions 1-7)**

The teachers' interview reported that most of the teachers (4 out of 6) were not happy with students' English proficiency (answer to the question no. 1 of Teachers' Interviews). The same number of the participants (4 out of 6) also believed that it was not possible to achieve effective communication skills without developing listening skills (answer to the question no. 2) and they did not have any audio equipment in classrooms for listening practices (answer to the question no. 3). Though two of the six teachers sometimes used audio or video materials on a limited scale, most of them had to struggle in designing and using authentic listening materials (answer to the question no. 4).

"I share stories and try to conduct the classes more or less in English." (T12)

Of the total participants, four teacher interviewees also found the audio-texts in the textbook insufficient for developing students' listening skills (answer to the question no. 5) and five of them always faced difficulties in collecting and executing textbook audios (answer to the question no. 6).

"We don't have language labs." (T15)

Teacher participants sometimes assessed learners' listening by engaging the students in some kind of listening-speaking tasks in classroom settings but most of the time authentic assessment or testing was not common in classroom practices and final examination (answer to the question no. 7).

"We don't have options for examining listening skills." (T14)

##### **4.2.2 Open-ended Parts of the Questionnaires and Teachers' Interviews (Questions 8 and 9)**

The open-ended parts of both of the questionnaires and the last two questions (questions 8 and 9) of the teachers' interview asked the participants to share their opinions about the difficulties they regularly face in teaching and learning listening skills and also about the possible solutions to the barriers they felt were necessary to be executed in the education system for the overall development of listening skills. The findings of these two sources of data based on the thematic analysis are presented in Table 3 below:

The thematic analysis of the data documented the following themes related to common barriers: i. Lack of technological support at home (S1, S16, etc.), ii. Lack of electronic devices in school (S23, S28, S29; T1, T2, T4, T5; Tl2, Tl3, Tl5, etc.), iii. Lack of listening class/lab facilities (S30, S42, S44; T1; Tl4, etc.), iv. Lack of speaking sessions (S19, S20, S23, etc.), v. Only exam-oriented teaching system (S7), vi. Importance is given only to textbook contents (S18, S27, S30, etc.), vii. Lack of teaching techniques/motivation among teachers (S18, S21, and T4), viii. No listening test in the final examinations (S54, S56, S57, S58, S59, S60, T2, T4, etc.), ix. No importance is given to students' interest (S27 and S44), x. Lack of proper classroom management (S56, S60, S62, etc.), xi. Large classroom (T4), and xii. Lack of well-trained teachers (Tl5).

Table 3: Themes Related to Common Barriers and Possible Solutions

SN	Common Barriers	SN	Possible Solutions
1	Lack of technological support at home (mobile phone, internet, etc.)	1	Ensuring audiovisual equipment
2	Lack of electronic devices in school (audiovisual, internet, etc.)	2	Arranging training for teachers
3	Lack of listening class/lab facilities	3	Listening should be included in the final examinations
4	Lack of speaking sessions	4	Practicing authentic materials
5	Only exam-oriented teaching system	5	Ensuring proper classroom settings
6	Importance is given only to textbook contents	6	Regular practice
7	Lack of teaching techniques/motivation among teachers	7	Use of English in classrooms by teachers and students
8	No listening test in the final examinations	8	Setting up listening labs
9	No importance is given to students' interest		
10	Lack of proper classroom management		
11	Large classroom		
12	Lack of well-trained teachers		

The possible solutions derived from the data were documented under the following themes: i. Ensuring audiovisual equipment (S1, S6, S27, S31, S60, T2, T4, T5, etc.), ii. Arranging training for teachers (T4 and T5), iii. Listening should be included in the final examinations (S23, S56, S69, T2, T4, Tl 4, etc.), iv. Practicing authentic materials (S25, S30, S45, S70, T2, Tl1, etc.), v. Ensuring proper classroom settings (T1), vi. Regular practice (S7, S17, S20, Tl3, Tl5, etc.), vii. Use of English in classrooms by teachers and students (S4, S8, S11, S15, S23, Tl 2, etc.), and viii. Setting up listening labs (S16, S18, and S19).

#### 4.2.3 Textbook Content Analysis

The content analysis findings of the *English for Today* (for classes nine and ten) divulged that there were audio lessons in the textbooks but unfortunately, the number of audio texts was not sufficient (see Appendix for details). Of the 14 units, audio texts were available only in 8 units, *i.e.* in units 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 13, and 14. A different picture is found for other basic skills like reading, writing, speaking, or even in the case of the knowledge of grammar. In comparison to listening skills, these skills got more importance in the textbook contents and thus in almost every unit's activities, these skills were included. Moreover, in the case of listening tasks, learning outcomes were not mentioned in the units where they had coverage.

Even it was not outlined how the teachers would conduct classes on audio texts, or how they would assess the listening outcome or performance of the students.

#### **4.2.4 Question Paper Analysis**

The analysis of the SSC examination question papers (the years 2023 and 2024) of all nine Education Boards in Bangladesh (namely Dhaka, Rajshahi, Cumilla, Jashore, Chattogram, Sylhet, Barisal, Dinajpur, and Mymensingh) disclosed the fact that the English *First Paper* question papers (of 100 marks) covered only reading (50 marks) and writing skills (50 marks) and the *English Second Paper* question papers (of 100 marks) covered only grammar (60 marks) and composition (40 marks). There was no section for testing listening or speaking skills.

### **5. Discussion**

This discussion part aims to enhance the comprehension of both quantitative and qualitative findings, attempting to address the research questions. It also endeavors to juxtapose these findings with the existing literature, thereby facilitating a meaningful conclusion.

The findings of the two questionnaires revealed that listening skills are very important in daily life according to the majority of the students and teachers surveyed. The teacher interviewees also feel that without developing listening skills, the English proficiency of the students cannot be developed and effective communication cannot be made. Researchers like Yavuz and Celik (2017), and Brownell (2010) also have the same observation.

Though listening skills are proven worldwide to be fundamental for developing other language skills, in classroom practices they are not properly addressed at the secondary level in Bangladesh. Both the teachers' and students' questionnaires report these facts which are very similar to the findings of Akter (2019), Rani (2018), and Afrin (2011). Even the textbook contents are not well designed or sufficient enough to meet the learners' needs. The audio texts are also not easily executable which has been mentioned by the teacher-interviewees. These findings also match the findings of the textbook analysis which depicts that the listening skills cover a minimal portion of the textbook contents that have also been observed by Uddin and Reza (2022), and Kaisar and Khanam (2008). The lab facilities are also not available to develop listening skills. This finding is in line with the finding of Akmal et al. (2020).

It is very natural that the lack of proper attention to listening skills in classroom practices, textbook contents, and examination papers ultimately affects the assessment and testing systems negatively. As there remains no scope to assess listening skills in the classroom and final examinations, the assessment and testing systems reflect the negligence in these skills. The question paper analysis findings align with these findings. In all the English question papers of the SSC examinations held in 2023 (conducted by the nine Education Boards in Bangladesh), it was found that only reading and writing skills are assessed while listening-speaking skills are completely excluded from the question papers. This finding aligns with the findings of Kabir and Greenwood (2021).

So, to answer RQ 1, it can be said that listening skills are neglected in classroom practices, textbook contents, and examination systems, and thus, the status/incorporation of listening skills at the secondary level is not at all satisfactory rather it depicts a deplorable condition.

In answering RQ 2, the findings of the qualitative part of the questionnaires and teachers' interviews revealed different barriers to developing listening skills of the learners, *e.g.* lack of technological equipment, lack of listening classes, lack of well-trained teachers and proper classroom management, large class size, negligence of listening activities in the textbooks, absence of listening tests in examinations, etc. Participants' views depicted in the closed-ended parts of the questionnaires also bring out similar scenarios. Thus, the present condition of education systems at the secondary level demands the right steps to be initiated to ensure the initiation of listening skills proportionately. Considering the fact, aspects like the regular practice of listening skills, making audio equipment available, ensuring trained teachers, and incorporating listening tests in examinations are some of the prerequisites to overcome barriers related to teaching and learning of listening skills. All these issues, related to possible solutions, derived from the analysis questionnaire survey and interview responses help get answers to RQ 3.

## **6. Limitations**

This research has some limitations as well, *i.e.* it collected data from the students of only two schools in Jashore district. Data could be collected from some other areas of Bangladesh. The engagement of more participants could increase the reliability of data. In all these cases, time limitations and funding worked as the main constraints. Despite these limitations, the research was a sincere attempt to bring out the real practices of listening skills in secondary-level classrooms and testing systems by surveying different aspects related to teaching and learning listening skills from all possible angles. Hopefully in future research, the researchers of this study or other researchers from Bangladesh or other parts of the world would overcome these limitations.

## **7. Conclusion**

Though the significance of cultivating listening skills is crucial and indispensable for the development of effective communication skills, they have not unfortunately been accorded their rightful place in the textbooks, class activities, assessment, and testing systems at the secondary level in Bangladesh. The minimal attention given to listening skills in the curriculum debar both teachers and students from engaging in sufficient practice and mastery of these essential skills. As the examination system does not evaluate the listening skills of the learners, and the command of these skills has no impact on the examination grades at all, teachers do not prioritize instructing their students in developing these crucial skills. Consequently, students miss out on opportunities to practice listening in classrooms and feel no impetus to practice them outside the classrooms as well, leading to poor proficiency in their English communication.

The findings based on both qualitative and quantitative data and the survey of existing literature urge this study to put forward some practical and explicit issues to be prioritized for reshaping the condition of listening skills at the secondary level in Bangladesh which are also crucial for other EFL contexts. The recommendations include: introducing listening classes and setting up language labs, ensuring technological equipment for practicing listening activities at home and in classrooms, incorporating listening skills in classroom assessments and final examinations, arranging training for teachers, raising awareness among teachers

and students regarding the importance of practicing listening skills, and using authentic materials in teaching listening skills in the classroom.

Recognizing the indispensable importance of English in the contemporary contexts of Bangladesh and other countries, authorities must proactively address the deficiency in students' communication skills in English. Hence initiatives to enhance English communication skills are imperative for the students to succeed in the competitive global world, especially in the job market. Central to this effort is the need to prioritize the development of listening skills, acknowledging their pivotal role in language proficiency. To transform students into an efficient workforce, it is essential to revamp classroom practices, assessment methods, and testing systems to align with contemporary demands, emphasizing the development of students' listening skills.

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**Appendix I**

**Students' Questionnaire  
Section A: Personal Details**

Please provide the right information.

Gender:                      Male                                      Female

School:.....Class.....

**Section B: Closed-ended Items**

Please tick (✓) the option that expresses your opinion best. There is no right or wrong answer.

SD: Strongly Disagree (1), D: Disagree (2), U: Undecided (3), A: Agree (4), SA: Strongly Agree (5)

SN	Items	SD (1)	D (2)	U (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
01	English listening proficiency is very important in our lives.	1	2	3	4	5
02	Our classrooms have equipment for playing audio texts.	1	2	3	4	5
03	Audio texts are regularly played in classrooms to develop our listening skills.	1	2	3	4	5
04	Like reading and writing skills, the textbook equally emphasizes listening skills.	1	2	3	4	5
05	There are sufficient listening tasks in the English textbook.	1	2	3	4	5
06	I can easily understand the English audio of my textbook.	1	2	3	4	5
07	The listening texts/materials in my textbook are available to me.	1	2	3	4	5
08	The listening tasks in the textbook are easily executable.	1	2	3	4	5
09	There are proper settings for conducting the listening test in the exam halls.	1	2	3	4	5

10	I practice listening as much as I practice reading and writing skills for examinations.	1	2	3	4	5
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**Section C: Open-ended Items**

Challenges in Developing Listening Skills	Suggestions for Overcoming These Barriers

**Thank you so much for your kind cooperation.**

**Appendix II**

**Teachers' Questionnaire  
Section A: Personal Details**

Please provide the right information.

Gender:        Male                      Female

School:.....Teaching Experience (year).....

**Section B: Closed-ended Items**

Please tick (✓) the option that expresses your opinion best. There is no right or wrong answer.

SD: Strongly Disagree (1), D: Disagree (2), U: Undecided (3), A: Agree (4), SA: Strongly Agree (5)

SN	Items	SD (1)	D (2)	U (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
01	English listening proficiency is very important in our lives.	1	2	3	4	5
02	Our classrooms have equipment for playing audio texts.	1	2	3	4	5
03	Audio texts are regularly played in classrooms to develop students' listening skills.	1	2	3	4	5
04	The teachers are skilled in operating audio systems.	1	2	3	4	5
05	Like reading and writing skills, the textbook equally emphasizes listening skills.	1	2	3	4	5
06	There are sufficient listening tasks in the English textbook.	1	2	3	4	5
07	The students can easily understand the English audio of the textbook.	1	2	3	4	5
08	The listening texts/materials in the textbook are available to me and the students.	1	2	3	4	5
09	The listening tasks in the textbook are easily executable.	1	2	3	4	5
10	There are proper settings for conducting the listening test in the exam halls.	1	2	3	4	5
11	There are well-trained examiners in our school to conduct listening tests.	1	2	3	4	5

12	I make the students practice listening as much as we practice reading and writing skills for examinations.	1	2	3	4	5
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**Section C: Open-ended Items**

Challenges in Developing Listening Skills	Suggestions for Overcoming These Barriers

**Thank you so much for your kind cooperation.**

**Appendix III**

**Teachers' Interview Checklist**

- 1) Are you happy with the English proficiency of your students?
- 2) Is it possible to achieve effective communication skills without developing listening skills?
- 3) What audio equipment does your classroom have to play audio for developing students' listening skills?
- 4) What classroom activities do you use to develop students' listening skills?
- 5) Are the English audio-texts in the book sufficient for developing students' listening skills?
- 6) Is it easy to collect and execute the textbook audio?
- 7) How do you assess learners' listening skills both in English classes and final examinations?
- 8) What are the difficulties that you face in executing listening activities and testing?
- 9) What are your suggestions for the overall development of English listening skills?

**Appendix IV**

**Textbook Content Analysis**

SN	Unit	Learning outcomes	Text Details
1	Unit 1 (p.13)	Not specified	Online-based listening (Bangabandhu's speech)
2	Unit 2	-	-
3	Unit 3 (pp. 33-34)	Not specified	Listening Text 2
4	Unit 4 (pp. 48-49)	Listen for specific information	Listening Text 3
5	Unit 5	-	-
6	Unit 6	-	-
7	Unit 7 (pp. 100-101)	Listen to an audio text for specific information	Listening Text 5 Listening Text 6
8	Unit 8 (p. 117)	Listen for specific information	Listening Text 7
9	Unit 9	-	-
10	Unit 10 (pp.133-135)	Listen for specific information	Listening Text 8 Listening Text 9
11	Unit 11	-	-
12	Unit 12	-	-
13	Unit 13 (p.167)	Not specified	Listening Text 10
14	Unit 14 (pp. 77-78)	Not specified	Listen to a Poem (The Sands of Dee by Charles Kingsley)