

Teachers' and students' perspectives on English language assessment in the secondary English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum in Bangladesh.

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Abstract

This qualitative study aims to address the current understanding of English language assessment of both the teachers and students in the secondary schools in Bangladesh. The study conducted semi-structured interviews with six English teachers and focus group interviews with two groups of students in two different secondary schools and these interview responses were compared to probe the related understandings and experiences of both the teachers and the students.

These findings reveal that the present English assessment system in the secondary level in Bangladesh does not reflect a balanced development of all the language skills of the learners and there are inconsistencies between the stated objectives of teaching English and the actual teaching methods in the language teaching in the secondary schools in Bangladesh. Though summative assessment is still dominating, the practice of formative assessment is slowly developing.

The study indicates that there has been a gradual shift in the assessment process and the teachers were trying to use individual assessment strategies to motivate the students' learning. Both the teachers and the students in the study emphasised that current assessment is mainly based on reading and writing. However, for overall development of language skills, the secondary English language curriculum may need to be redesigned so that all the four skills are able to be included in the assessment system. Better opportunities for training to develop teachers' effectiveness and their knowledge of learners should be considered also.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Chapter one: Introduction	
1.1 Context of the study	1
1.2 Author's position	8
1.3 Summary	8
Chapter Two: Review of the literature	
2.1 Definition of assessment	10
2.2 Formative verses summative assessment	11
2.3 Impact of formative assessment on teachers and learning	13
2.4 Formative assessment and current learning theory	18
2.5 Position of English language assessment in the secondary schools in Bangladesh	20
2.6 The challenge for the Bangladeshi teachers in implementing formative assessment	23
Chapter Three: Methodology	
3.1 Research questions	26
3.2 Theoretical rationale	27
3.3 Research Design: Participants and settings:	28
3.3.1 Selection of schools	
3.3.2 Selection of participating teachers	

3.3.3	Selection of participating students	
3.3.4	How to gain access to the school	
3.4	Tools for data collection:	32
3.4.1	Semi-structured interviews with the teachers	
3.4.2	Focus group interviews with the students	
3.5	Procedure:	35
3.5.1	Semi-structured interviews with the teachers	
3.5.2	Focus group interviews with the students	
3.6	Data analysis	38
3.7	Rigour and trustworthiness	39
3.8	Ethical issues	41

Chapter four: Findings of the study

4.1	‘Understandings about language assessment’	43
4.1.1	Teachers’ understandings of language assessment	43
4.1.2	Students’ understandings of language assessment	45
4.1.3	Similarities between teachers’ and students’ beliefs and understandings	47
4.1.4	Teachers’ and students’ understandings of the relationship between teaching and assessment	48
4.1.5	Teachers’ and students’ understandings of curriculum guidelines and the existing assessment system	48
4.1.6	Teachers’ and students’ understandings of classroom culture in assessment practices.	50
4.1.7	Teachers’ understandings of changes of assessment activities in the curriculum:	52
4.2	‘Practices and Assessment of language skills’	55

4.2.1	Teachers' assessment of reading skills.	55
4.2.2	Teachers' assessment of writing skills.	57
4.2.3	Teachers' current assessment of listening and speaking skills in the classroom.	59
4.2.4	Different assessment strategies by the teachers	63
4.2.5	Students' practices of reading and writing assessment	65
4.2.6	Students' opinions about present assessment of reading and writing	66
4.2.7	Students' practices of listening and speaking skills	68
4.2.8	The way English teachers' help students' learning practices.	69
4.3	'The Major Challenges'	71
4.3.1	The challenges teachers face in language assessment	71
4.3.2	The challenges that Teachers face towards change in assessment	73
4.3.3	The challenges of prioritizing curriculum requirements.	74
4.3.4	How the teachers attempt to overcome the challenges	75

Chapter Five: Discussion of the findings

5.1	Formative vs. Summative assessment practices	81
5.2	Issues in current assessment of language skills.	83
5.3	Assessment in the classroom context	88
5.3.1	Observation and feedback	
5.3.2	Peer assessment	
5.3.3	Group /Pair work	
5.4	Assessment practices in the school context	91
5.5	The major challenges for the teachers in effecting change	93
5.6	Suggestions to overcome some of the challenges	95

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1	The main focus/findings	99
6.2	Implication and recommendations	100
6.3	Limitation of the study	102
6.4	Further study	103
Reference		104
Appendices		
Appendix A:		
	Interview questions for the teachers’ ‘Semi-structured interviews’	111
Appendix B:		
	Interview questions for students’ ‘Focus group interviews’	113
Appendix-C		
	Glossary/Definition of the terms	
Appendix-D:		
	Information letters for the Head Teacher/Teachers/Students/Parents	114
Appendix-E:		
	Consent forms for the Head Teacher/Teachers/Students/Parents	124
Appendix-F:		
	Ethical approval letter of University of Canterbury, NZ to conduct the research study	132
Appendix-G:		
	The Bangladesh government’s approval to conduct the study	133

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context of the study

In schools, assessment is a process that teachers use to identify the learners' current levels of understandings and to target areas for further teaching and learning. In Bangladesh, English language assessment is mainly based on summative assessment, where the learners' abilities in memorisation and comprehension skills are being assessed. Other skills such as learners' presentation, analysis, synthesis and critical thinking are rarely considered important for evaluation (Begum & Farooqui, 2008). This study aims to address the understandings of both teachers and students about English language assessment in secondary schools in Bangladesh, including the challenges teachers find in implementing English language assessment in the curriculum. Implications for policy to modify the English assessment system will be discussed.

Bangladesh became independent in 1971 and in the First 'Education Commission was formed in 1974 which stated that Bengali would be the medium of instruction and which positioned English as the second language (Ministry of Education, 1974). English was to be taught only from Grades VI to XII. In 1988, the Ministry of Education maintained a common starting point for English at Grade 6, but also stated that English could be introduced in primary education at Grade 3 (Ministry of Education, 1988). In 1991, the government recommended that English be taught from Grade 1, but this was not implemented until 1997 (Imam, 2005).

According to Rahman (1999, p.14) the report of the Education Commission of Bangladesh in 1974 made the following recommendations with regard to language teaching and medium of instruction:

1. Instruction through the medium of national language is more readily intelligible to the pupils as it helps them develop their original thinking and imagination. We must, therefore, use Bengali as the medium of instruction at all level of education to make our educational schemes successful.
2. Bengali must be used as a compulsory language up to class xii. Textbooks at the higher stages education, especially in the field of science and technical, professional and vocational education must be written in Bengali and translated from foreign languages at government expenditure.
3. Even after the introduction of Bengali as teacher medium of instruction at all levels of education, the necessity will remain for English to be learnt as a second language. For historical reasons and for the sake of reality, English will continue as a second compulsory language (Bangladesh Education Commission Report 1974:15).

The withdrawal of the compulsory study of English for tertiary level students in 1980 and the 'Bengali introduction Law' of 1983 made it clear that Bengali was to be used in all spheres and at all level of government purposes except in case of communication with foreign governments, countries and organisations. As a result, Bengali began to be used in almost all fields of national life. English thus lost its previous status as a second language and came to be treated as a foreign language. As a consequence, especially in the field of higher education, English was no longer a compulsory medium of instruction and adequate attention to the teaching of English was not given at lower levels. More and more students were entering universities with an inadequate command of English (Rahman, 1999).

Recently the government has developed several initiatives to increase the quality of education. The English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP), with the collaboration of the Bangladesh and British governments, has been established since 1997 to improve language teaching in the secondary schools in Bangladesh. The project reviewed and revised the textbooks from class six to twelve, reformed examinations in English and introduced communicative teaching of English at the secondary level through in-service training to the teachers. The project included the sending of some relevant personnel to the United Kingdom to have intensive ELT training. They later became the key people in preparing manuals, conducting Training of the Teachers (ToT) and planning, preparing and implementing other supportive components such as curriculum and text book dissemination, and preparing teachers for new examination assessment (Rahman,1999).

The Ministry of Education (MoE) in Bangladesh has developed many plans and policies for the development of education since 1971. The education system of a country is based on a range of policies with an underlying philosophy that guides the development of teacher education, curriculum and syllabus, text books, examination systems, infrastructures, and specific targets. Though in Bangladesh the government released many policies for the development of the education, none have been properly implemented because of misinterpretation and lack of resourcing. In addition, political unrest, lack of commitment by the authorities, shortcomings of up to date teaching materials, lack of monitoring and accountability might also be responsible for not developing an effective education system. (Islam & Jahan, 1999).

Shahidullah (1999) considers that the language curriculum in Bangladesh is designed by senior academics based on some hypothetically perceived needs of the learners. In this case

learning needs, learners' background of learning English, their learning modes, their expectation and beliefs regarding pedagogy and socio-cultural variables may not be taken into consideration. It is not enough to simply identify the teaching and learning needs but more importantly Shahidulla argues the need for recommendations about how the needs can be met through effective teaching. Although materials for English teaching and learning may mostly be provided from native English speaking countries, those text books produced locally take little account of learners' needs.

According to the curriculum report of the 'National curriculum and Text book Board' (NCTB, 1996), the communicative method has been introduced in the secondary and higher secondary level. This method focuses on four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and aims to address participatory based activities in the classroom situation. However, there are still some fundamental problems such as physical facilities in the institutions, large numbers of students in the class, classroom settings, and duration of the class. Above all, the lack of trained teachers might be one of the main causes for a generally poor standard of teaching (Begum & Farooqui, 2008).

However, although the curriculum emphasises four language skills, examinations are based on only two skills; mainly reading and writing, while the other two skills of listening and speaking are not formally assessed. In some cases, some English language teachers in more effective schools often informally assess the listening and speaking skills of the students in the classroom. Despite this, most students have difficulties in communicating orally in English even after passing secondary level.

Begum & Farooqui (2008) found that in Bangladesh secondary schools, a traditional approach in the assessment of reading skills still exists. Though communicative approaches have been introduced in the language curriculum, most teachers prefer to follow the traditional

grammar-translation method that mainly focuses on the syllabus which is to be completed within a set time with the sole aim of obtaining higher scores in the examination. There is a significant gap between the learners' needs and expectations and teachers' teaching methods.

The same is true for writing. In the assessment of writing skills, students are encouraged to write on the requirements for the examination only. Though there are some practices of guided and semi-guided writing in the classroom, students have limited opportunities in the classroom to practise creative writing. Students are expected to write according to the prescribed set of questions that reflect the content for passing the examination and obtaining a high score. Limited vocabulary knowledge results in students' facing difficulties in constructing sentences for developing ideas regarding the particular topic. Besides this, they do not have enough grammatical knowledge and accuracy with the mechanics of writing. The focus is frequently on the grammatical errors in their writing.

Though the curriculum guidelines emphasise that all four language skills should be practised in the classrooms, both teachers and students do not take listening and speaking skills seriously as these are not included in the formal examination. In most cases, teachers have to face many challenges in engaging the students in different class activities such as: peer work, group work, demonstration, role play, debate, etc.

Shahidulla (1999) comments that in the present curriculum there is a clear focus of a changing trend from the tradition to the new approaches. Through the introduction of school based assessment, teachers are trying to engage the students in participatory based teaching learning. This curriculum emphasises the formative approach of teaching, learning and assessment. The teachers have already started observing and recording students' achievement in seminars, tutorials, classroom performance, and presentation skills. These are recorded and

included them in the year ending examination and final grade. This helps to motivate students in the classroom.

The Teaching Quality Improvement Project (TQI_SEP, MoE), was implemented in 2005, to develop the quality of secondary education. The project has organised many training programmes for the subject based teachers, head teachers, educational administrators not only in Bangladesh but also in other countries. TQI has managed to develop subject- based training modules for the teachers. Besides these, some non-government organisations such as; BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement committee) have been providing English language training to the secondary school language teachers to improve the quality of teaching in the secondary level.

Begum (1999) reports on the mismatch between the learning outcomes and the system of evaluation. Therefore without a clear definition of the objectives of the course no purposeful testing is possible in the English language. All concerned, including the teachers, students, the paper setters and the examiners should have a good understanding about the objectives of the course and there should be a clear reflection of these objectives in the syllabus. The objectives of the course, the syllabus and the examinations all are independent. If Bangladeshi educators were more knowledgeable about what should be taught and how, then it would be easier to develop appropriate assessment.

International research conducted by Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) also emphasise the inconsistency between teachers' perceptions of communicative language teaching and what actually they are actually doing in the classroom and Anderson (1993) considers that the main difficulties lie in the implementation of communicative approaches including teachers' lack of communicative competence, lack of physical facilities and the lack of adequate teacher preparation generally, along with the multiple and excessive workload

placed upon teachers. Nunan (1993) also highlights this by suggesting that there is some inconsistency between the teaching preferences of the teacher and the learning preferences of learners and that by giving more focus to the curriculum requirements may be the causes of difficulties experienced. He argues that teachers should give more focus to what their students think and feel about what they want to learn and how they want to learn.

Philips (2000) in his study (in the context of secondary schools in New Zealand) argues that educational reform should be consistent with curriculum and assessment and that qualifications should improve the students' understandings and reduce disparities in students achievement. The document describes the main focuses of the curriculum, identifies the essential skills and sets achievement objectives which tells students what they will be able to do at each curriculum level. The examination permits students to respond to the questions from either a personal, critical or creative perspective. As well, the examination permits students to express their ideas in any formative way that they deem appropriate to the ideas they wish to express.

From my own experience of the Bangladeshi Education Policy, the English language curriculum and the assessment system over the past ten years indicates that changes need to be addressed to bring some positive changes. The education policy that includes "Language curriculum and assessment guidelines" needs to have a clear focus on how students' learning should be assessed, what criteria should be followed and what are the most effective ways of assessing students' competence for gaining credit in qualifications. Therefore, in order to bring change, language theorists, educators, students and other stakeholders need to work with assessment specialists to help them better understand the constructs they are measuring,

and support them to design assessment procedures that better reflect student needs and inform teachers.

1.2 Author's position

As a teacher educator I have been working with secondary schools English language teachers for twelve years. At the University of Canterbury I studied a course for the M. Ed programme 'Independent Study' that focussed on 'Language Assessment'. As a result of this study, I noticed big differences in language assessment between developed and developing countries. This thinking has motivated me to study English language assessment in my country. The present assessment system in the English language curriculum in the secondary level in Bangladesh is not harmonious with a balanced development of all the language skills of the learners. Therefore, I believe some changes are needed to make the curriculum more dynamic and effective for the learners. I consider that more research is needed to promote a change in the field of language assessment. The reasons for my interest in studying language assessment are to address the problems and challenges with the system mentioned above. A few studies have been done in this field in my country and hopefully this study may discover drawbacks in the current assessment system which may encourage the policy makers to think about the issue of assessment in English. Besides this, it may put a greater and much needed emphasis on language teacher development in general and it may address some changes in the field of English language assessment at the secondary level in particular.

1.3 Summary

To sum up, it could be commented that in Bangladesh, English is a foreign language and it is taught from level one to twelve as a compulsory subject. Both the teachers and the students

consider that assessment is essential both for teachers' and students' development and, without assessment, teaching and learning cannot take place. Assessment is the crucial means of identifying what the student knows and do. Though students learn English for more than twelve years most students fail to develop a good command over English. It is because there seems to be a mismatch between the curriculum guidelines and actual teaching and assessment system. Summative assessment apparently seems to dominate in the assessment system even though both the teachers and the students consider formative assessment more creative for students' development and the practices of formative assessment has already started in the schools. Many teachers think secondary schools may still not be well prepared to formulate the practice of formative assessment. Large classes, want of modern teaching aids, teachers' workload and class time act as barriers in practising and implementing formative assessment as most teachers are not trained and their competency level in English seems to be very poor. In the public examinations such as Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC), only reading and writing skills are assessed and there is no provision for formal assessment of listening and speaking skills. Therefore to overcome such challenges, the language curriculum should be redesigned and all the skills should be included in the assessment process to provide more effective learning opportunities for students.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter will explore the present position of English language assessment in secondary schools in Bangladesh. To establish the greater purpose and background for this study, current research from different countries such as the United Kingdom, USA, New Zealand, Australia and Bangladesh and many others have been studied. This chapter seeks to define assessment and its purpose, particularly formative assessment and its effect on teachers and learning. It also attempts to explain the relationship between formative assessment and social constructivism, the position of English language assessment in Bangladesh, and the major challenges teachers face when implementing formative assessment in the Bangladeshi context.

2.1 Assessment

Assessment is a process of identifying and gathering information about learners, in order to seek ways of addressing needs and means of overcoming barriers to learning. Teachers need to have a clear understanding of different language tools including the strengths, weaknesses and appropriate use of each of the tools and processes, so that they can make informed judgments about how to use these tools with English language learners (MoE, NZ, 2006).

Analysing assessment information provides valuable feedback about the teaching and learning process. Teachers can respond to this information by adjusting their teaching and by

planning further learning to meet their students' identified needs. They can also use information to involve the students in goal setting and self-assessment based on the feedback.

Crooks (2002) argues that the purpose of school-based assessment is to improve students' learning and to give feedback to parents and students. Assessment provides teachers with information regarding the learning needs of the students so as to provide a clear and up-to-date picture of students' current capabilities, attitudes' and progress.

Brown & Hirschfield (2008) adds that students are frequently assessed in schools for the purpose of making them accountable. Assessment is then an act of interpreting students' performance, and evidence can be collected through any multitude of means. The purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning. These authors assist us in understanding teachers' and students' conceptions about assessment and how they are linked to academic outcomes.

2.2 Formative verses summative assessment:

Two kinds of assessment - formative and summative- are discussed in literature. Crooks (2002) explains this:

Assessment of learning (often described as summative assessment) aims to provide a well founded, clear and up-to-date picture of a student's current capabilities or attitudes, progress over time or further growth needs and potential. Assessment for learning (often described as formative assessment) is focused on enhancing student development, and often involves relatively unstructured interactions between student and student or teacher and student rather than a planned formal assessment event (p. 241).

Pryor and Croussand (2008) consider summative assessment to be a powerful institutionalised discourse, as it contributes to text marks, academic reports and qualifications. On the other hand, formative assessment creates space for competence-constructing narratives of students and it informs current teaching. Chappius and Chappius (2008) suggest that both the teachers and the students use formative assessment results to make decisions about what actions to take to promote further learning. They indicate that assessment is an on-going dynamic process. Other writers Cowie and Bell (1999) have observed that interactive formative assessment was challenging for beginning teachers or for more inexperienced teachers with a new class. Teachers' own attitudes towards change can also act as a positive or negative factor in bringing about innovations.

Torrance and Pryor (1998) state that formative assessment is about discovering what the learners know, understand or can do. Summative assessment in contrast is about whether the learners know, understand or can do a predetermined thing (p.153). Besides this Bloom, Hastings and Madau (1971) also noted that:

We have chosen the term 'summative evaluation' to indicate the type of evaluation used at the end of a term, course, or programme for purposes of grading, certification, evaluation of progress, or research on the effectiveness of a curriculum, course of study, or educational plan. Perhaps the essential characteristic of summative evaluation is that a judgment is made about the student, teacher, or curriculum with regard to the effectiveness of learning or instruction, after the learning or instruction has taken place.

Formative evaluation is for us the use of systematic evaluation in the process of curriculum construction, teaching, and learning for the purpose of improving any of these three processes (Bloom *et al.*, 1971, p. 117).

William (2001) points out that the major difference between formative and summative assessment lies in their use rather than the timing of the assessment. An assessment can be summative and formative at the same time, based on their functions. A writing assessment that usually takes place at the end of the school term/year is traditionally considered summative, as it measures what students have learnt in writing in that particular school year, and that scores are being used for evaluating students' performance, reporting the parents, for promoting the students and also for administrative purpose. However, if the information from the assessment is used to inform students about their strengths and limitations in writing and to improve future writing instruction, it is considered formative.

2.3 Impact of formative assessment on teachers and learning

Formative assessment is often considered to be one of the most effective strategies for promoting high student performance. It is also important for improving the equity of student outcomes and developing students' 'learning to learn' skills. It is a way of identifying the present position of learners and teachers about learning and teaching, to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to go there. Studies show that formative assessment is vital component of classroom practice and its use can raise standards of achievement (Black & William, 1998b).

Black & William, (1998b) also advocate that teachers need to know about their students' progress and difficulties with learning beyond what test results reveal. Therefore, teachers

need to find out the types of activities that are useful to provide feedback to the students. The term ‘assessment’ refers to all those activities undertaken by the teachers and such assessment becomes formative assessment when the evidence is used to meet the students’ needs. These authors ask the following questions:

- Is there evidence that improving formative assessment raises standards?
- Is there evidence there is room for improvement?
- Is there evidence about how to improve formative assessment?

Drawing on over 580 studies, Black and Wiliam synthesised existing research, publishing a lengthy review, using material from 250 of these resources, in a special issue of the journal ‘Assessment in Education’, together with comments on their work by leading education experts. The conclusion they have reached from their research review is that, the answer to each of the three questions is clearly affirmative.

More recently, Dibu-Ojerinde (2006) argued that formative assessment helps improve students’ learning in several ways. It helps learners to be attentive in the classroom during teaching; it identifies the areas of students’ learning difficulties, and it facilitates a learning environment both for the students and the teachers. For the teacher, assessment is formative when its outcome could help the teacher in the improvement of his/her teaching, and assessment is formative for schools and districts when its outcome could lead to the improvement of learning quality in the school.

Assessment (formative), then can be seen as a powerful educational tool that can raise the standard of learning if it is used in the right way. Attention should be given to helping teachers use assessment to inform teaching and apply it to raise pupils’ achievement.

Researchers suggest that successful learning occurs when learners develop ownership of their learning, when they understand their learning objectives and when they are motivated

(Assessment Reform Group, 1999). These authors (Black & Wiliam) also identified that successful assessment depends on five key factors. These are: effective feedback, pupils' active involvement, accountability, motivation and the self esteem of the pupils and pupils' ability to access these factors.

Shepard (2005) comments that by using insight about the current understandings of learners, formative assessment allows teachers to locate guidelines and supports for them and is a collaborative process between teachers and learners to improve their (learners) performance. Likewise, Cowie (2005) considers assessment for learning as a joint teacher-pupil responsibility. Pupils consider teachers' feedback plays an active role for them in making sense of ideas. The author states that pupil monitoring or self- assessment is the ultimate aim of feedback and formative assessment.

In other words, effective feedback informs the students about their current position on what they have done appropriately, what they completed inaccurately and how they can improve (Williams, 2001), and Wiggins (1993, p. 182) stated that "Feedback is information that provides the performer with direct, useable insights into current performance, based on tangible differences between current performance and hoped for performance". Sadler (1989) too claims that feedback provides valuable information both for the teacher and the student. The teacher use feedback to identify students' problems and students use it to monitor the strength and weakness of the performance or about how successfully something has been done or is being done.

Nation (2005) in his study 'Teaching reading and writing' suggested some concepts of feedback on students' writing. He thinks when learners in the class have common mistakes in their writing; the teacher can make a written report and hand it to the class. The teacher can

identify the best pieces of writing, the common errors, strengths and weakness and what to do about them. If possible the teacher may make an individual comment but these are not required to be extensive. If a grade is given to the students, the teacher may then explain the range of grades and the criteria for each step in the grading scale.

Besides this, he stated that an effective way to give oral feedback to the whole class is to select 2/3 learners' piece of writing; ask their permission to present these in the class using an overhead projector. Here the learners can see how the teacher has marked the piece of writing, what the teacher was looking for, and what the teacher values most. The teacher also gets the learners to comment and interact on points in the piece of writing. Accordingly to the teacher has to be tactful in making comments so that students can develop positive feelings about their work.

Grabe & Kaplan (1996) suggested for 'classroom based assessment' that students are assessed in the classroom on the basis of their writing samples in the class. Classroom assessment can be based on a single writing task, a series of related writing tasks, a long term writing project or a writing portfolio. Assessment can be on-going or final which can be based on in -class writing or out of class writing that can be focused on formal, rhetorical or content aspects of writing. Assessment can be based on teacher evaluation, student self-evaluations or a negotiation between the two. In summary assessment in class can be oriented towards mastery of certain skills and strategies or towards students' performance compared with other students' performances. Therefore, teachers and institutions have numerous options for carrying out appropriate assessment of students' writing.

Brown, Irving & Keegan (2008) in their study on 'classroom assessment' in New Zealand stated that students need to develop self regulation and autonomy by taking responsibility

for their own learning and suggests that peer assessment helps students develop meta-cognitive insight into the strengths or weakness of a fellow student's performance.

Mueller-Joseph, 2007 in her study on 'Classroom Assessment' in an American context commented that through classroom assessment both teachers and students can exchange information about making decisions regarding learning. She argues that classroom assessment provides educative feedback, not for the sake of rating students' performance. Through the classroom assessment practices, they (teacher and student) can develop an academic freedom, and autonomy in the teaching and learning process and from this the teacher is able to decide what to assess, how to assess, and how to respond to the information gained through the assessment process. Angelo and Cross (1993) too consider that the basic concepts of classroom assessment should be learner-centered, teacher-directed, and context specific which provides a framework for the design of classroom assessment techniques. By using a number of simple classroom assessment techniques teachers can create more opportunities for the students regarding learning in the classroom.

Butler & Stevens (1997) in their study on 'Oral assessment' stated that "Oral assessment is considered as a model of performance assessment in general and it is the critical part of academic communication which includes reading and writing as well as listening and speaking" (p. 214). These writers considered that for developing communicative competence, students should be encouraged to use English in real life situations. This requires both flexibility and variation in the use of spoken language. These researchers suggest that a supportive classroom environment also plays an important role increasing opportunities for practice. Group discussions, demonstrations, role plays, debates might be the useful activities for extending students' communicative ability. Brown (2001) reported that group work generates student to student interactive language exchange. Secondly, group work allows`

students to spontaneously initiate dialogue interpret and negotiate meaning and develop students' increased confidence in their speaking ability.

Stiggins (2002) reinforces the notion that students benefit through formative assessment in several ways:

First they become more confident learners because they get to watch themselves succeeding. Furthermore, students come to understand that it means to be in charge of their own learning. Teachers benefit because their students become more motivated to learn. Parents benefit as well in seeing higher achievement and greater enthusiasm for learning in their children. School administrators and instructional leaders benefit from the reality of accountability standards and from public recognition of doing so (p.764).

2.4 Formative assessment and current learning theory:

According to social constructionist theory, knowledge is derived from conscious observation and our understanding of the world is based on social processes and interactions. In the process, people constantly share with each other to develop knowledge and that knowledge comes from looking at the world from some perspective or other (Burr, 1995).

Lamon (2007) argues that:

Constructivism is an epistemology, or a theory, used to explain how people know and what they know. The basic idea is that problem solving is the heart of learning, thinking and development. As people solve problems and discover the consequences of their actions-through reflecting on past and immediate experience –they construct their own understanding. Learning is thus an active process that requires a change in the learners (p. 1).

Vygotsky (1986) relates constructivism to the theory of learning. He contends that learning is not purely an internal process nor is it a passive shaping of behaviours. He considers that children first learn through social interactions whatever language and logical structure they use. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development model explains how this development occurs. He suggested that "the Zone of Proximal Development is the space between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, p. 86).

Teachers use scaffolding and formative assessment as the strategies to move learning forward. Scaffolding indicates the supports that teachers provide the learners with to help them better understand the lesson. Therefore, from a socio-cultural perspective, formative assessment - like scaffolding - is a collaborative process which can be used to improve learners' performance. If knowledge is constructed through language and interaction, then formative assessment is another form of such scaffolding. Such learning and development are culturally embedded and socially supported processes (Shepard, 2005).

The teacher's role in a constructivist classroom is to provide opportunities for formative assessment such as self-testing, articulating understanding, asking probing questions and reflection rather than merely transferring knowledge. Teachers need to organise information around big ideas and engage the students' interest, in order to assist students developing new insights and to link them with previous learning. The activities should be student-centred where students will carry out their own activities, make their own analogies and come to their own conclusion (Lamon, 2007).

2.5 Position of English Language Assessment in the secondary schools in Bangladesh:

In relation to the Bangladeshi context, Begum & Farooqui (2008) comment that 'National Curriculum and Text book Board'(NCTB) introduced a new form of assessment system from 2006, named SBA (School Based Assessment) from level Six-X, to raise the standard of secondary education and to ensure overall assessment. Six different areas have been identified. These are: class tests, classroom work, homework, assignment, presentation and group work.

Furthermore, Imam (2005) states that the position of English in Bangladesh is poor because of the colonial rule. For want of proper education and language policy, the English learning situation is not standard enough to compete at an international level. English teachers are not trained to teach in the classroom using effective practice; they lack presentation skills and because of large class sizes, teachers cannot manage to engage the students in a variety of learning activities. One problem for the national language policy is that in the minds of most people, national identity and learning English are positioned as antagonistic, and not complementary. This is a direct result of the colonial tradition itself with its long usage of English as a tool of divide and rule policy.

A study conducted by Hamid and Baldauf (2008) with six rural secondary school teachers in Bangladesh which conducted semi-structured interviews highlights the similar situation, where CLT often fails to create sufficient opportunities for genuine interaction in the language classroom as most of the teachers are not familiar with the aural-oral method of CLT. Furthermore all six teachers in his study, including the training recipient, admitted that they have limited understandings how to design speaking activities during practice and

production. Hamid (2010) further comments that there is a big gap between the learning objectives and the actual teaching and assessment practices.

Khan (1999) conducted a study on 'Assessing writing' in a Bangladeshi context based on 'writing composition' at Higher Secondary level to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the students in creative writing. In this study 30 writing tasks and 10 examination compositions were marked according to the analytic marking scheme prepared for the study. The study revealed that in writing composition although most students performed very well on content, they obtained low scores on grammar, vocabulary and organisation. Their weaknesses were reflected in the areas of 'mechanics', 'grammar', and 'cohesion'.

Horak (1999) in her study on 'Oral assessment' in a Bangladeshi context comments that most teachers consider testing oral skills time consuming and in large classes they find it difficult to assess these two skills. The present curriculum has included listening and speaking skills in the assessment process which were previously overshadowed by grammar, writing and reading. This researcher considers that the introduction is a valuable initiative for developing communicative language learning.

In Bangladesh the National Curriculum and Text book Board (NCTB) is responsible for forming the syllabus and curriculum for Secondary and Higher Secondary levels (six-twelve). From class six-nine, semester and final year examinations are the main sources of assessment. After the completion of 10 years academic study, students sit for the public examination which is called SSC (Secondary School Certificate). This examination is conducted by Secondary Education Boards. A student has to sit a three hour written test for each of 10 papers on different subjects on what he/she has studied throughout the year. This testing regime is unable to assess many of the important objectives of secondary education i.e. solving problems, orally expressing thoughts clearly, learning to behave appropriately and

developing sound personal and social values. At the end of the examinations, answer scripts are distributed to the selected examiners, and marked. Then the Board authority prepares results for the students which are officially recorded and sent to each school (NCTB, 2006).

As a teacher educator I have been working in the field of secondary education for about thirteen years and worked particularly with secondary school teachers and the curriculum. During the period I have noticed and identified the gaps between the curriculum guidelines and that of the assessment process. The following few paragraphs demonstrates the mismatch in the language assessment system in the Bangladeshi secondary schools are drawn from my own experience.

According to the current English curriculum at the secondary level (NCTB, 1996, MoE) the English courses at the SSC (Secondary School Certificate) level, as a whole, place much greater emphasis upon the development of reading skills. The course generally is deficient in a range of diverse writing exercises. The final examination offers little or no scope for the assessment of creative writing skills as paragraphs and essays are based on some highly predictable over-used topics. For instance, the chapter “Sample Questions” from English for today: Book Seven-the prescribed text book for classes IX and X, shows that in English: Paper 1, the testing is predominantly based on reading comprehension with ‘multiple choice questions’ or gap- filling. There are also exercises like choosing right words or the rearrangement of words. Any kind of broad informational or creative writing is ignored. In English: Paper II questions have essay writing as the only additional item.

The overall result is that by the end of the course, the ability of the pupils to express themselves correctly and creatively in writing in English is seriously under-developed. As a subject, English is severely disadvantaged at the secondary level by the fact that it does not have any content matter of its own to exploit. Topics chosen in the English lesson for free

composition (essay or paragraphs) mostly tend to be topics relating to the everyday experiences for the pupils (such as, my future plan of life, the most interesting person I have ever met) which can be dealt with quite adequately by means of a simple narrative.

The fact that there is no system for formal testing for speaking and listening in SSC and HSC (NCTB,1996) potentially undermines the levels of English language skills of the students and for that reason they face difficulties in higher education.

2.6 The challenge for Bangladeshi teachers in implementing formative assessment:

To involve students in formative assessment activities, teachers in Bangladesh may need many new understandings as most currently assessment is summative only.

As noted previously, large class numbers (approximately 50-80 students) provide a barrier for the implementation of formative assessment activities. Furthermore, teachers need to have resources such as teaching aids, study materials and proper classroom settings for engaging the students in different activities. However, in most of the cases the above mentioned supports are not available in the Bangladeshi schools.

The curriculum guidelines mainly focus on summative assessment for assessing students' performance. Therefore, to engage the learners in the formative activities might be challenging for the teachers because it is difficult to motivate the learners without rewarding them with marks/grade for their activities.

Teachers may also need to review their understandings of questioning skills to change the traditional culture of the classroom setting to involve the students in the assessment activities.

However, it is quite difficult for the teachers to provide feedback to each pupil on a one to one basis because of the large number of students in their classes. Cowie (2005) argues that students are motivated to achieve social as well as academic goals and to acquire these they tend to avoid taking risks. They also have a fixed view of their intelligence. In this case, teachers' feedback can change students' attitudes and to move them from recipient to active participant in the process of formative assessment.

As a baseline survey (Haq, 2004, p. 52) of secondary schools in rural Bangladesh reported:

Physical conditions of most of the schools were miserable: poor classroom environment, poor furniture (inappropriate, broken and inadequate), insufficient (or non-existent) library and laboratory facility and finally poor and uncared surroundings.

Hamid's (2010, P. 293) fieldwork with eight secondary schools in a rural region in Bangladesh showed that

Not a single school provided student access to computers. Computer use outside school was rare; only three students in a sample of 228 reported having a computer at home. Inadequate infrastructure, limited resources and under qualified teachers result in poor quality of teaching and learning of English.

Stiggins (2002) suggests that a few teachers are well prepared to face the challenges of classroom assessment. I believe in Bangladesh teachers of English language have little training in assessment for classroom practices. 'English in Action' (2010) a language development project operating in Bangladesh stated that the majority of school English teachers do not have the required levels of English proficiency and they have limited

understandings to sustain classroom communication in English. Besides this, a large number of school English teachers do not have a relevant educational background (Daily Ittafaq, 2010). Furthermore, because of being poor or disadvantaged a large number of secondary schools students in the rural areas are unable to invest in their education and therefore, they do not have access to necessary English books/materials, education supplies, and most importantly, private lessons in English (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). Teachers therefore rarely have the opportunity to learn how to use assessment as a teaching and learning tool.

From the above discussion it could be commented that assessment is vital for effective teaching and learning. In this literature review, most critics agree that formative assessment which focuses on the constructivist approaches of learning is more useful for students' development than that of summative approaches. For effective implication of formative assessment in the classroom situation, teachers need much dedication and effort to ensure good links between the learning objectives and that of assessment systems. Though summative assessment still dominates in the education system in Bangladesh, the practice of formative assessment in the present curriculum is slowly improving but there are many challenges that exist for further development and effective implementation.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the procedures of qualitative research methodology that were used to conduct the research using the ‘semi-structured interview’ with six secondary school teachers and two Year 9 ‘focus group interview’ with nine secondary school students four and five in each group respectively. It also describes the procedure of data collection, data analysis, findings and ethical issues.

3.1 Research questions:

This research set out to find out both teachers’ and students’ current understandings of language assessment in the secondary schools in Bangladesh. It also aimed to address how they view, believe and practise language assessment; what challenges they find in assessing/implementing (language assessment) especially in the classroom situation, and how they try to overcome these challenges. As a teacher educator, I noticed a big gap between the curriculum guidelines and that of actual assessment practices. This is why I identified this field of ‘language assessment’ as my research study and therefore I set the following research questions:

- What current understandings do Bangladeshi secondary English language teachers and students hold about assessment?
- How are the language skills currently assessed in Bangladeshi secondary schools currently?
- What challenges do the teachers experience in assessing English language?

3.2 Theoretical Rationale

A researcher's choice of research theory depends on some key factors such as: work experience, social values, values and beliefs, current status and personal influences (Mutch, 2005).

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning that people give to phenomena. A researcher's presence in the field of study is therefore vital to understand the setting, sites and institutions to observe the behaviour in its natural setting. Bogdan & Biklen (2007) comment "qualitative research is a naturalistic process because the researcher tries to gather data from the place where it occurs naturally" (p. 4). They also emphasise that "Qualitative research is concerned with the process rather than simply with outcomes or products and data is analysed inductively. The process of data analysis is like a funnel. It starts in a large scale and gradually moves at specific goals" (p. 6).

(Bogdan & Biklen 2007) also state:

Qualitative research put emphasis on broad descriptive data, and data includes interview transcripts, field notes, photographs, video tapes, personal documents, memos and other official records and data collected in the form of words/pictures rather than numbers. Qualitative articles and reports often contain direct quotations and the written word is very important in the qualitative approach both in recording data and disseminating finding (p. 5).

Qualitative research procedure is not pre-set; the researcher can change his/her design decision according to the need of his/her research. Janesick (2003) comments that just as the choreographer changes his curriculum of dance frequently, in a similar way, a qualitative researcher must be ready to re-adjust schedules and interview times, add or subtract

observation or interview, replace participants and rearrange terms of original agreement. The qualitative researcher asks at least one central question and several sub questions. Qualitative researchers are more interested in the 'how' and 'why' in asking questions. Broad narrative questions are posed to the participants to explain their ideas (Creswell, 2003, p. 106).

Furthermore Bogdan & Biklen (2007) state that qualitative research is flexible, as the data collections and research questions can be adjusted according to the need of the research and no statistical method is necessarily needed for data analysis. In-depth open-ended interviews, focus group interviews, and participant observation are the frequently used elements of data collection and open-ended and probing questions give participants many opportunities to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses.

As a researcher, I wish to develop a clear understanding about the people involved in the process of teaching and learning and to explore how teachers and students thought about the issue of formative assessment, how they interacted with each other, how the teachers preferred to assess their students and what were their common assumptions about the current assessment system. I needed to understand the challenges teachers meet in implementing language assessment and the changes that have occurred in English language assessment system in the last 10 to 15 years. I believe therefore that qualitative research is an appropriate research methodology for language assessment in the secondary level in Bangladesh.

3.3 Qualitative Design: Participants and settings:

There are no particular rules for the selection of sample and participants. Patton (1990) argues that "sample size depends on what you want to know, purpose of the inquiry, what is at a stake, what will be useful and what can be done with available time and resources" (p.

184). As a researcher I selected two schools, six language teachers for individual interviews and nine students for two focus group interviews with four and five in each group respectively because I thought a limited number of participants would be more useful for getting more in-depth information and data.

3.3.1 Selection of school:

In order to conduct qualitative research on English language assessment in secondary schools in Bangladesh, I selected two secondary schools on the basis of current practices and which have good reputations in all respects from the main city area. School A is an old school which is developed both structurally and academically. The number of students in school A is approximately 1500. It is a linguistically diverse school which offers a range of different curricular activities and the results of the public examination are very high. Some English teachers of this school have established a good reputation for their academic performance and some teachers are currently working for the development of teachers' effectiveness providing continuous professional training to the secondary school teachers organised by the government development project, under the supervision of Ministry of Education.

School B is situated in the same area. The number of students in this school is around 2000. It is also a linguistically diverse school. Some teachers of this school have developed their own assessment tools to use in the classroom. The results in the public examination are very high and some teachers have reputations for their expertise in English language teaching. Some English teachers of this school are strong academically and are very much aware of the modern teaching methods and techniques. Some teachers are currently working for the development of teachers by providing continuous professional training to secondary school teachers organised by the government development project, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.

3.3.2 Selection of participating teachers:

I selected six English teachers from two schools, three from each school on the basis of their current practices. A range of teachers of varying experience were chosen for the interviews. I conducted individual interviews for an hour in order to collect explorative and descriptive data. The teachers were each asked to choose a pseudonym for each instead of their real name.

Sonia at school A

Sonia at school A is a leading teacher who has been working for more than 16 years in the secondary level. She has developed her own understanding about modern teaching concepts. Currently she has been working for the development of the quality of the secondary school English language teachers which is Continuous Professional Development (CPD) organised by a government development project (TQI-SEP, MoE). She is also the examiner of the Secondary Education Board which conducts public examinations such as Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC). She sometimes attended some seminars/programmes that worked for the development of secondary education. During her working career she has received training from different development projects of the government such as SESIP, TQI, ELTIP, Ministry of Education.

Nafisa at school A

Nafisa at school A has been working at the secondary level for more than 18 years. She is also a leading teacher and currently working for the development of the secondary schools English language teachers organised by TQI, Ministry of Education. This is 21 day training programme based on English language teaching techniques and methodology. She is also the examiner of the Education Board which conducts the public examinations. She has completed

many training programmes organised from different development projects and has developed the contemporary teaching practices.

Romana at school A

Romana at school A has been working at the secondary level for more than 12 years. She is a leading teacher who has completed many training programmes organised by some development projects such as SESIP, ELTIP, TQI, Ministry of Education. She is also the examiner of the Education Board which conducts public examinations.

Atique from School B

Atique from School B, is a leading teacher. He has a strong academic background on English Language Teaching (ELT). He has been working in the secondary level for more than eight years. He is also an examiner for the Education Board which conducts public examinations. During his teaching career he has attended many training programmes organised by the development projects which has helped him in his professional development. He has developed modern concepts of language assessment.

Shakila at school B

Shakila from school B, is a leading teacher who has been working in the secondary level for more than eight years. She is currently working for the professional development of the secondary school English language teachers providing continuous professional development training to them organised by TQI-SEP, MoE. During her professional career she has attended many training programmes organised by development projects of Ministry of Education. She is an examiner for the Education Board which conducts public examinations. She has strong understanding regarding language assessment in the secondary level.

Arzu at school B

Arzu at school B is a leading teacher. She has been working for more than eight years. She has attended many training programmes organised by some development projects organised by the Ministry of Education. She has strong understanding of language assessment in the secondary level. She is an examiner for the Education Board which conducts examinations for the secondary levels.

3.3.3 Selection of participating students:

Teachers were asked to select four students from school A and five students from school B of level nine. A representative group of students were selected with varying degrees of competence in English. Students were asked to get permission from their parents. Permission slips were handed to the teachers who handed them over to me.

3.3.4 How to gain access to the school:

I am a government teacher educator in Bangladesh and our government has provided consent to research in this field. Firstly, I approached two schools appropriate for my research purpose. I met the Head Teacher personally to share my ideas and research interest with them and to gain oral consent from them. I provided an information letter regarding the research project to the Head Teacher. Before that I had received official letter from the concerned authority to conduct research in any schools in the secondary level in Bangladesh. Once permission was granted, I then met the teachers and students to build rapport with them. As a researcher, I clearly explained my research objectives to the Head Teacher, participating teachers and students. I tried to make it clear that my presence in the schools would not hamper their regular activities.

3.4 Tools for data collection:

Semi- structured interviews, and focus group interviews were used for collecting data.

Information table of the teachers for semi-structured interviews.

Serial No	Name of the Participants	Teaching Experience	Sex	Education	Professional Degree	Training attended	Interview the teachers faced
1	Nafisa	18	Female	MA (ELT)	M. Ed	ELTIP, CPD-1, 2, ToT	One hour semi-structured interviews for each teacher
2	Sonia	16	Female	MSS (Social science)	M. Ed	ELTIP, CPD-1, 2, ToT	so
3	Romana	12	Female	MA (English)	B. Ed	ELTIP, CPD-1,2	so
4	Atique	08	Male	MA (English) MA (ELT)	M. Ed	ELTIP, CPD-1,2, ToT	so
5	Sakila	08	Female	MA (English)	B. Ed	CPD-1,2 & ToT	so
6	Arzu	08	Female	MA (English)	M. Ed	ELTIP, CPD-1,2	so

Notes: ToT: Training of the Trainers; ELTIP: English Language Teaching Improvement Project; CPD: Continuous Professional Development.

3.4.1 Semi- structured interview

Interviewing is a powerful way to understand our fellow humans and to collect data. It can be structured, semi-structured or un-structured. In this study, I used semi-structured interviews to gather descriptive data related to the issue from the lived experience of the participants.

Kvale (1996) states “The qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge. An interview is literally an inter view, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (p. 2). He compares the role of an interviewer with the miner and the traveller. Like a miner an interviewer explores the data meanings out of the subjects’ experience. The essential facts and meaning are sorted by transcribing them from oral to the written mode. Similarly, like a traveller, an interviewer wanders and enters into conversation with participants, asks questions and leads the participants to tell their own stories of their lived experience. Likewise, Burns (2000) considers, in semi-structured interviews, informants can provide his/her own perspectives; he/she can use language naturally, and can enjoy equal rights to the researcher in the dialogue.

Additionally, Fontana & Frey argue that “Unstructured interviewing can provide greater breadth” (2005, p. 705). In this semi-structured interview all the participants were asked the same questions to clarify their understandings about the English language assessment in Bangladesh.

A semi-structured interview is a qualitative data gathering technique through systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in a formal and informal setting (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Semi-structured interviews allow both the researcher and interviewees to go into the depth of the subject of the study. These authors consider that it is one way to capture how a person thinks/understands on a particular topic and it gives freedom to express one’s ideas /opinions in more details.

There are some limitations in semi-structured interviews. Planning and conducting interviews is time consuming. To conduct the interviews the researcher needs skill and experience. It needs hard work to transcribe interviews and analyse the data. For successful interviews, the researcher should develop a relationship with the interview participants being interviewed.

3.4.2 Focus group interviews

According to Wilkinson (2004), focus group interviewing is a method of collecting data and engaging a small number of participants in a group discussion ‘focused’ around a particular topic/issue. The group discussion is based on a series of interview questions where the researcher plays the role of moderator, encourages the group members to interact with each other and facilitates group discussion.

Focus group interviewing can be a useful tool to collect an in –depth response from the participants. They are not as time intensive as a series of individual interviews (Mutch, 2005, p.128).

Fontana & Frey (2005) consider that “in a focus group interview the interviewer directs the inquiry and the interaction among respondents in a very structured/unstructured way depending on the interviewer’s purpose” (p. 703). These authors also argue that it needs similar skills to conduct individual interviews and focus group interviews. However, in a focussed group interview the interviewer must be flexible, objective, and good listener to conduct the interviews so that every student can participate in the discussion process. Conducting focus group interviews is relatively inexpensive. It produces rich data which is cumulative and elaborative.

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) argue that besides some advantages, in the focus group interview, there are some drawbacks. It may not tend to yield generalisable data, recording interviews may be difficult, intergroup disagreement or conflict may arise, data may lack overall reliability and data analysis may be difficult.

3.5 Procedures:

Firstly, I made contact with Head Teacher of both the schools. I gave an information letter to the Head Teacher about the aims and objectives of my research project. The Head Teacher informed the teachers. After gaining consent, I made an appointment for meeting with the teachers. In the meeting, I clearly explained the research objectives to the participating teachers and the Head Teacher. With the help of the Head Teacher, I selected the teachers for my research and asked the teachers to select representative students who have potential in English language. The students had to sign the consent form and also get consent from their guardian. I sent an information letter to the guardian. In the next meeting I explained my research focus to the students and gave the teachers in advance a set of ‘interview questions’ for better understanding regarding the interview so that they hopefully could provide more descriptive and explorative information.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interview with the teachers:

An interview is a purposeful conversation between two/more than two people to gather descriptive data in the participants' own words so that the researcher can develop insights how people make sense of a particular idea (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). To collect data from the interviews with the teachers, some sample questions on language assessment were used.

Teacher interviews lasted for an hour. In the interview session I did not interfere, but listened carefully and sometimes added some probing questions to get more explorative ideas from the participants and interviews were tape recorded so that I could listen to the interviews several times for transcribing the data. The interviews were based on the following key concepts;

The teachers' current understandings of language assessment

The teachers' language assessment practices in the classroom

The practices of language assessment in the schools

Their past and present assessment practices

The contrast between curriculum guidelines and their current assessment practices

The way teacher use different assessment strategies.

After transcribing the data, I provided transcripts to the teachers and asked them to read the script and informed me of anything they think should be added or subtracted.

3.5.2 Focus group interview with the students:

Mutch (2005), comments “Focus group interviews are generally of the structured type with pre-set questions but some negotiation of responses, depending on the purpose and the composition of the group” (p. 127). Citing Hinds (2000), Mutch (2005) mentions that focus group interviews are based on the principle of self- disclosure and after establishing a set of focus group rules they provide an effective method for gathering in-depth qualitative data through a particular set of questions.

Students’ focus group interviews lasted for approximately forty five minutes. They were based on the following key concepts:

Students’ knowledge and understandings of language assessment.

Students’ opinions regarding the practices and assessment of reading and writing skills in the classroom.

Students’ opinions regarding the practices and assessment of listening and speaking skills in the classroom.

The activities the teachers use to assess students in English language classroom.

The ways students like to be assessed.

Before the interview started I spent a few minutes in a friendly chat with them so that they feel easy and confident about responding. Interviews were tape recorded so I could listen to it several times while transcribing the data. Students were given ample opportunity to express their views. I listened very carefully and did not interrupt in their discussion. While a student spoke he/she mentioned his/her name clearly so that it could be easily identified later/at the time of transcribing the data so that information becomes clear.

3.6 Data analysis:

According to Taylor & Bogdan (1998), “data analysis in qualitative research is a difficult part as it requires thinking and reasoning, rather than mechanical and technical process. It is an inductive process” (p. 140). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) comment further by stating that “data analysis involves working with data, organising them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns” (p. 159).

Tesch (1990) states “Data analysis is a cyclical process and a reflexive activity; the analytical process should be comprehensive and systematic but not rigid; data are segmented and divided into meaningful units and the data are organised according to a system derived from data themselves” (p. 95).

As a researcher, firstly I transcribed the interviews so that I could get the data about the teachers’ and students’ opinions of English language assessment in Bangladesh Secondary schools. While transcribing I listened to the recorded interviews several times so that I could transcribe in an accurate way. I read and reread the transcript several times, copied them and sent the interview transcript to the individual teacher and student and asked them to read carefully to check and send it to me with comments.

I examined each piece of data to find out the relationship between the different pieces of the data. I then coded the data and codes were divided into different categories to find out the main themes. Some data belonged to multiple codes. Therefore I started with different colour highlighters to code emerging themes. I created concept maps in the process of sorting, analysing and writing to categorise and make sense of the information. After coding the data I photocopied them so that they could be cut and pasted into categories that emerged during

analysing process. Some parts of documentation could be fitted into more than one category. Many themes crossed into each other; therefore I printed multiple copies from the transcripts to allow for each theme.

For the first time, I used eight interview questions for six teachers and five interview questions for the students, and for the second time I collected the responses of five interview questions from the teachers through E-mail. So, while analysing the data I highlighted each interview question, analysed the different responses of every individual teacher, compared and contrasted each data to find out the similarities, differences and challenges for each problem/question. I then coded and categorised the data to identify themes.

Similarly, I analysed the data on the basis of research questions and grouped them into three headings such as 'Understandings of language assessment', 'Practices and assessment of language skills' and 'major challenges' and each main headings then contained several sub-headings. However, there were some unasked questions/information and these unasked and unanswered questions provide limitation of the data analysis.

3.7 Rigour and trustworthiness:

Rigour and trustworthiness are vital issues for making qualitative research transparent. It mostly depends on the overall performance of the researcher and how he/she collects field notes, transcribes the data, analyses the data, and presents the findings. Many factors are involved in the process mentioned above.

When people read the research they need to be sure about its authenticity. Therefore, a researcher should always be careful to maintain the validity and reliability of the research. To maintain rigour as a researcher after collecting data from the interviews and focus group interviews, I transcribed the data, then read and reread the transcribed data and listened to the

tape recording. I sent transcript to every participant to check and comment. When I found any dissimilarity, I again called the interviewee for clarification.

To establish trustworthiness in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider the following issues credibility and transferability. To establish credibility researcher should take steps to demonstrate a true picture of the study. It needs prolonged engagement, so that every respondent can easily and freely express his/her ideas clearly.

To maintain transferability in the study, participants should be given sufficient access to the field work, and data needs elaborate description. Miles & Huberman (1984), comment that for enhancing credibility, data gathering and analysis techniques must be valid and rigorous. Lincoln & Guba (1985) consider that member checking as the most important component for enhancing a study's credibility and this check may take place immediately, during or at the end of data collection process.

As a researcher I had to show justification of the research decisions, consider the ethical issues, data collection, analysis, and presentation of data. Above all, the researcher's own honesty, sincerity, use of different data sources, use of wide range of informants, personal experience, creativity and presentation styles are also essential.

3.8 Ethical issues:

Ethical issues are the essential principles that guide the researcher on planning, organising and to implementing research. In my study I strictly followed the ethical principles guided by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury and also the basic ethical principles for conducting my research from beginning to end including permission from the Ethical Clearance Committee.

“Do no harm”

One of the most important principles of research is “do no harm”, which calls for awareness on the researcher’s side participants of direct and indirect potentially harmful effects of the research on the participants. (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). In my study I tried to avoid any potential physical, psychological and cultural harm on the participants.

Informed consent:

“Informed consent is a cornerstone element in codes of ethics for research in the social sciences” (Finch, 2005, p. 61). In my study before starting the interviews I sent information letters to the teachers and parents so that they could get a clear idea about the research project.

Voluntary participation:

Participation in any research should be voluntary. Before taking part in a research process, participants should have a clear idea about the objectives and activities they will be involved in if they agree to participate (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). It should be made clear that participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw their participation any time if wish to do so. Though I was granted permission from the government to conduct the study in any secondary schools in Bangladesh, before conducting interviews with the teachers and students of the selected two schools, I talked to them freely about the objectives and guidelines of the research project and they willingly participated in the research study.

Confidentiality and anonymity:

“A participant has reasonable expectations that information provided to the researcher will be treated in a confidential manner” (Litchman, 2010, p. 55). As a researcher I used pseudonyms for the school, teachers and students so that no one can be identified and confidentiality is

assured from data collection to any future publication. Data will be preserved for at least two years in locked filed cabinet after the completion of the research.

Avoid deceit:

Researchers should deal with their participants and their community in an honest and truthful way. I transcribed the data and verified it by sending a copy to the participants to check. I assured them that no one would be allowed to access the data except my supervisors.

Chapter-Four

Research Findings

The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were analysed and considered under headings related to the research questions. The data has been grouped under three main headings such as ‘Understandings about language assessment’, ‘Practices and assessment of language skills’ and ‘Major challenges related assessment, curriculum and school context’. Each of the main headings has different sub- headings. The findings of this analysis are reported in this chapter. The required discussions/explanations and implications of the findings have been discussed in chapter five and six respectively.

4.1 Understandings about language assessment:

This section has been designed under three sub -headings. ‘Teachers’ understandings’, ‘Students’ understandings’ and both ‘The Teachers’ and the Students’ understandings’. The section begins with teachers’ understandings of language assessment, it then describes students’ understandings of language assessment, and it further describes both ‘the teachers’ and the students’ beliefs and understandings of language assessment, relationships between teaching and assessment, the gaps between the curriculum guidelines and the existing assessment system, and the changes of assessment activities in the curriculum.

4.1.1 Teachers’ understandings of language assessment

All six teachers in the study have developed a very clear understanding about the aspects of English language assessment, though each highlighted different aspects. Their ideas indicated that assessment is essential both for teachers’ and students’ development and they

added that though summative assessment is apparently dominating in the present curriculum, the practice of formative assessment in the school system has already been started.

For example, Sonia of school A recognised that “there is a deep relationship between teaching and assessment because the teacher can assess his/her students through assessment, either formatively/summatively and can get a reflection of his/her performances”.

Both Nafisa and Atique also agreed that “without assessment, teaching and learning cannot take place. I have to know the students’ needs. Teachers should know the learning outcomes. So for knowing the students, and the students’ performance, assessment is needed.”

All three teachers suggested that formative assessment is a crucial means of identifying what students know and can do. Nafisa sums up this “through assessment I can identify what students knew, what they could do, and I can identify the next learning steps. I believe that summative assessment is very formal, planned and organised”. Shakila of school B stated that summative assessment is a record which gives us a clear picture of the institution’s success or failure and the result informs the guardians about their issues, success and failure. So it gives a chance to be connected (teachers, students and guardians) to work collectively.

Likewise, Romana expressed that ‘through assessment they can identify students’ problems and can make future planning. It is useful for changing students’ attitude which helps to develop students’ motivation and better improvement”.

Shakila also highlighted or recognised the motivating nature of assessment for students. She claims that “student can get a clear idea about their achievement what they have learnt and they are motivated greatly with assessment because students are likely to take challenges, so it’s a challenge for them”.

She commented on its importance for teachers too in their planning. “For the teachers we can find the drawbacks, how much we are successful about teaching and if we have any drawbacks we can change our plan and develop ourselves”. Besides this she mentioned that:

Assessment plays a significant role in effective teaching. It begins with identification of some learning goals, prepare the students and finally observe how well the goals are achieved. So, it’s a procedure which takes a lot of preparation.

Atique further argued that formative and summative assessment are totally different from each other. Actually he considered that formative assessment is difficult and time consuming. However, he also acknowledged that formative assessment develops students’ creativity and that it is a continuous process.

4.1.2 Students’ understandings of language assessment

Four students of school A and five students of school B expressed their understandings and purpose of assessment. Most of the students thought that teachers using assessment can make the learning process more transparent and easy to them and can adjust the learning goals to better meet their needs. For instance, Swad from school A thought that “assessment is a process of gathering our learning outcomes that we have learned all the year round. These are assessed through semester tests, monthly tests, class tests, class presentation in either pair/group”.

On the other hand Ria of school A argued that “assessment is not only for students’ development but it helps teachers also. Teachers can make future planning through assessment and by being assessed through different tests like oral and written, students can identify their lackings and try to overcome them”.

Bella illustrated that “in our class the teacher chooses some topics for us and going home, we prepare them and present them in the class. We are being assessed in the class and through examinations and thus we are learning”. So there are close links between learning and assessment.

Arnab’s perspective was that “assessment is a way of measuring/evaluating what they have done all the year round, what we have learnt and what to do next. Assessment is essential to develop our language skills”. He also added that generally after presenting a lesson in the class the teacher wants to know whether the students have understood the lesson or not. If the students fail to understand anything, then the teacher tries to explain the lesson and makes it understand to the students. In this way the teacher can understand what necessary steps should be taken by him/her.

He further added that, “there is another assessment (summative) which is taken at the end of the year to evaluate students’ learning. Teachers check the answer scripts and make grade for the students, publish results and promote them to the next class”.

However, Rajib agreed that “actually through assessment we can know what we have learnt/achieved all the year round. Our English teacher presents some lessons in the class involving us in pair/group, and then asks questions orally to check our understandings”.

He acknowledged that the main form of assessment is summative assessment where the teachers assess students through different term examinations. However, he further added that the teachers identify students’ difficulties in learning through term examinations and take necessary steps for improvement.

4.1.3 Similarities between teachers' and students' beliefs and understandings

There are similarities between teachers' and students' beliefs and understandings about assessment. Both the teachers and the students agreed that classroom interaction, sharing learning outcomes and giving feedback bring positive change in students' development.

Shakila of school B believed that "assessment is important both for teachers and students". She also commented that formative assessment helps students to improve their own learning where students get more support from interactions." This is reinforced by Sonia who considered that formative assessment helps their students in day to day improvement and they can identify their needs.

Atique commented that formative assessment develops creativity and promotes learning. He considered that both the teachers and the students should be aware of the need to develop their questioning skills because a good teacher should have the ability to focus on what he/she is going to do.

All six teachers in the study agreed that for developing language skills, subject based skilled and trained teachers should be appointed for the primary stage. They were in agreement that teachers need regular training for building teaching capacity and they also require teaching aids (audio/video) and monitoring to check on whether the teachers are doing the things that they have learned from the training sessions.

Most students in this study claimed that through the practices of formative assessment they learn better and acquire more scope to develop their creativity. One student spoke:

When we are involved in group/pair work, we discuss the topic and share our ideas and complete the activities. Then the teacher asks for responses from us. Through the process we can exchange ideas and thus our speaking abilities increases.

4.1.4 Teachers' and students' understandings of the relationship between teaching and assessment

There is a close link between teaching and assessment. Teachers in this study described that teaching and assessment are interrelated and that one influences another.

For example, Sonia and Nafisa from school A thought that teaching and assessment were very closely related and through assessment the teacher is able to identify students' problem, plan and give more effective feedback. These teachers also added that assessment helps students to understand their learning. Romana added that it also improves motivation.

Focusing on the importance of assessment, Atique and Arzu from school B considered without assessment, teaching and therefore learning cannot take place. Teachers can identify students' needs and learning outcomes. Without assessment students cannot respond or be aware of their own learning needs.

However, most students in this study articulated the links between teaching, learning and assessment. They revealed that through assessment students are able to identify their own problems and try to overcome them and teachers can plan to address them.

4.1.5 Teachers' and students' understandings of curriculum guidelines and the existing assessment system

The teachers in this study were concerned with addressing the gap between the curriculum guidelines and existing assessment system. In order to achieve a standard assessment system they were willing to express their personal opinions regarding this issue.

All six teachers considered that though the present curriculum guidelines focus on the assessment of four skills, examinations are based on mainly two skills; reading and writing. They added that since listening and speaking are not included in the assessment process

students are not aware of the importance on these two skills. So, they would like the 'education authority' to allocate marks for speaking and eventually for listening.

Sonia commented that "Like practical works, some marks could be included in listening and speaking but in this case teachers should deal with the issue fairly as some teachers may be influenced and in this case external examiners may be appointed".

Likewise, Nafisa from school A remarked that the curriculum focus is on the summative assessment. The curriculum guidelines published 1995, were appropriate for that era, but now require change. She was also of the same opinion as Romana in regard to texts, as these items are derived from prescribed notebooks/guidebooks. She considered that these texts should be always unseen as they are more likely to develop students' creativity. Guidebooks/notebooks encourage memorisation with set questions from teachers. Her comments suggest that the present curriculum guidelines should be moderated to include better range of texts and associate activities.

Accordingly, Shakila expressed a need for teachers to undergo training in order to build teaching capacity. She reinforced the need for policy makers and curriculum specialists to consider the issue of inclusion listening and speaking skills in the assessment process and she considered that external examiners should be appointed to reduce teacher bias.

In addition to this, Arzu suggested that in order to achieve the best outcomes teachers should test the listening and the speaking skills at regular intervals during the school year and assess on the basis of their performance over a period of time. Students will then be more motivated to develop their listening and speaking skills. Priority should be given to both written and oral strands of language.

All four students therefore identified a real need to include the assessment of oral language in the classes and other five students expressed the similar opinion. In response to the present curriculum guidelines and current assessment system, students expressed some meaningful opinions regarding the issues.

For example, Labanna from school A considered that the present assessment system is not appropriate as all the four skills are not included in the examination system. This is why students do not pay much attention to listening and speaking skills.

Besides this, Bela from school A thought, “our assessment system is not properly appropriate as we are just focussing on our text books; we are focussing much on grammar but not vocabulary and other skills”.

Sraban from school B acknowledged that “though curriculum guidelines emphasise the four skills, the examination is based on two skills. In this case all the skills should be given equal importance”.

All four students therefore identified a real need to include the assessment of oral language in the classes.

4.1.6 Teachers’ and students’ understandings of classroom culture in assessment practices.

All six teachers in this study commented that there is currently a noticeable change in the classroom assessment practices in the Bangladeshi schools. In the formative process of learning there is a lot of scope for interaction between teachers and students and among students.

Nafisa from school A explained that earlier classrooms were mainly teacher dominated. Recently teachers are trying to change from traditional to the new approaches. She expressed this in the following quote:

Present curriculum focuses on participatory based teaching learning where the role of the students is active and that of the teacher is passive. Teachers try to engage the students in different activities such as pair work, group work, demonstration, presentation, role play etc and try to assess the students' learning.

She further added that in the present curriculum the teacher encourages the students in active interaction which develops their cooperative learning skills. These cooperative skills develop their (students) understanding ability, develops presentation skills, develops teacher –student understanding and creates a better learning atmosphere. Students think that in this way they can develop a high level of awareness that enhances their learning.

Shakila's response was very similar to Nafisa when she explained: "Earlier teachers followed the grammar-translation method but the scenario is different in the present classroom. Now teachers follow the communicative approaches where a lot of skill based activities are being practiced in the classroom and also the form of assessment has changed".

Sonia commented that because of having large number of students in the class and the placement of furniture, it is very difficult to arrange group or pair work. Students find challenges in adapting to this approach but are prepared to work in groups/pairs. She also added that "while doing the group/pair work, I try to make mixed groups so that better students can help the weaker students that help better understanding and sometimes I engage them in peer assessment and sometimes I give them common feedback".

Antique of school B elaborated on this further:

For the last few years teachers are given training through different development projects such as ELTIP, PROMOTE, SESIP, TQI and teachers are being acquainted with the communicative approaches /participatory based teaching learning and they are trying to implement their ideas in the classroom though there are lot of barriers. However, the process of assessment through the communicative way has already been started.

Some students acknowledged that to implement the communicative approaches in the classroom in recent times most teachers encourage the students in active interaction. This interaction between the students and teachers focuses on the common learning needs of the individual or the group. These students consider that by using this approach their teachers can assess them as they engage in active participation which helps them develop their creativity.

Another student in the study was positive about peer mentoring and peer self-assessment that occurred in co-operative learning situations. He said that working in small groups helps them to build confidence because they are able to test out their ideas with a smaller group of peers before sharing them with the whole class or with the teacher.

4.1.7 Teachers' understandings of changes of assessment activities in the curriculum:

The teachers in this study were asked to comment on the assessment changes during the last 10-15 years. They talked about pedagogical shifts and various assessment changes. They all remembered that earlier they mostly focused on summative tests and they had little sharing with other teachers.

For example, Sonia from school A thought that there is a hopeful change in the current assessment system. She added that “earlier assessment encouraged memorisation but recent

assessment gives importance to four skills and creativity. Students read the comprehension, understand the meaning, questions and then answer”.

Nafisa indicated the nature of assessment changes:

Earlier the teacher read the text, students listened. Present curriculum is very much comprehensive where students’ creativity has been given much focus. Some texts are set from the real life situation; students read the texts and answer the given information. So students are not memorising. In the previous system students memorised some answers and delivered it to their answer scripts.

Romana reinforced the following idea stating that “both subjective and objective types of questions have been included in the curriculum”. She claimed that through School Based Assessment (SBA) students are being assessed in the class.

Atique and Arzu pointed out that in writing both guided writing and semi-guided writing have been introduced. Students can understand and write from their own experiences and understandings.

In addition to this Shakila stated “in the previous time we dealt with literature/essay type questions. Students prepared notes, memorised them and wrote the answer. At present for assessing reading skills questions are followed by reading comprehension and is set from real life situation”.

However, most of the teachers in the study considered that there has been a remarkable change in the knowledge and understandings of the teachers about the practice of formative assessment and they have developed how to use this in the classroom to support students’ learning. These teachers also claimed that in the past they had little sharing/discussion among

the staff about the teaching but recent school wide practices of collaboration and cooperation have increased their critical response to their practice.

Some noticeable changes have happened during the last few years (10-15) in the English language curriculum and assessment system in the Bangladeshi secondary schools.

Nafisa and Atique explained that there is remarkable shift from traditional to the new approaches of language assessment and which has become possible for some dynamic initiatives taken by some of the development projects.

They added that since 1997 some development projects, such as; English Language teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP), Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project (SESIP) have been working to improve the position of English language teaching. With the direct supervision of ELTIP a new curriculum of communicative English has been introduced, and text books have been revised from six to twelve classes. To reform and bring positive changes in the secondary curriculum, the government, non- government organisations and other educational organisations have been working to ensure this occurs.

These teachers further elaborated that, besides this School Based Assessment (SBA) has been introduced in the curriculum and teachers are practising all the four language skills in the classroom through the participatory based activities such as; group work, pair work, role play, demonstration, and presentation.

To sum up all six teachers saw assessment as essential both for teachers' and students' development and saw it as a crucial means of identifying what students know and do. Both the teachers and the students in this study were of a similar opinion that formative assessment allows learning and that it develops creativity in the learners. They agreed that there is a close

link between teaching and assessment, and that one influences the other. All six teachers and students in the study agreed that earlier language assessment was very much summative, but that recent curriculum is focussing on both formative and summative assessment. Earlier essay type questions were set in the examination, but at present the curriculum includes both subjective and objective questions in the testing process. All six teachers and the students in this study were of the same opinion that there is a mismatch between the curriculum guidelines and actual assessment practices and they are hopeful about the gradual shift in the assessment process.

4.2 Practices and Assessment of language skills

This section has been designed under three sub - headings. Teachers' practices and assessment of language skills, and students' practices and assessment of language skills, and both the teachers' and the students' practices. The section begins with teachers' assessment of reading skills, it then describes teachers' assessment of writing skills, and followed by listening and speaking skills. Secondly, it describes the students' practices of all the four language skills. Finally it outlines how the English teachers help students' in their learning practices.

4.2.1 Teachers' assessment of reading skills.

Reading is an essential component of language skills. In Bangladesh, English language assessment is mainly based on reading and writing skills. Earlier reading assessment was very traditional. However the present curriculum is giving greater emphasis to the creativity of the students and not just assessing the skills of reading. Teachers mentioned that the present reading assessment has undergone some changes.

Nafisa highlights her strategies:

In our time teachers allowed the students to read loudly in the classroom but now a days we ask our students to read silently because we think it is useful to understand the text. After silent reading, I have some exercises in our text books. As for example, some comprehension questions are there. I ask them to find out the answers with the help of their partners/individually and then I illicit answers individually. The activities that I try to practise answers to the questions includes true-false, multiple choice questions, gap filling using vocabulary

Atique also includes some engaging activities. “For assessing reading skills I set some reading comprehension for testing students’ reading skills. In the classroom I give some idea to the students, engage the students in activities, then take feedback, find out the problems whether they have understood or not”.

Shakila emphasises the importance of motivating pre-reading activities like vocabulary and concept building to ensure that students have the best chance of success in reading.

Her response was:

As a teacher I always keep in mind that English is a skilled based language. So, when I am dealing with reading skills, reading must be students’, not my reading. After entering the class, I do some warm up things to motivate the students to the target topic and before practising reading usually I do two things, first of all I offer all the necessary helps, it may be vocabularies, it may be structure or any kind of information I try to make it clear first, then I set some examples/purpose of the reading. After that I ask them to read silently and individually and when they complete the reading, I go

for feedback. Sometimes, I ask them to write the answers. In this way I assess the reading skills of the students.

Romana's perspective was similar to the others. She expressed that "in order to achieve the best outcome for assessing reading comprehension, I use a text book; they (students) read the text and give the answer". She further added that if students are given an unseen passage, they can read it immediately and apply their skills. Teachers then attempt to use a wide range of strategies, including guided reading approaches, pre-reading activities and different formats to show comprehension. In this way they can demonstrate their use of reading strategies.

4.2.2 Teachers' assessment of writing skills.

Unlike reading skills, teachers saw assessing writing as a difficult process. Teachers need much time and concentration for assessing writing. Some teachers said they use oral/written feedback to the students to assess their writing. Some mentioned individual conferences as being effective for assessing and developing students' writing skills.

Shakila of school B talks of the ways she supported student writing, with guidelines, pre-writing activities, collaborative approaches and conferencing on their work:

For assessment writing skills; suppose it is a paragraph then after entering the class, I declare the topic and collect some related information regarding the topic from their own experience. Then I try to highlight the main points, I write the points and try to get their responses regarding the thing. After that I give them some guidelines to help them writing in a proper way and then I engage them in pair and give each pair a target topic. So, you have to work with this topic.

For example students can do some pre-writing activities such as brainstorming either orally or written, individually or as a whole class. Learners might prepare their first draft in class or as home work, depending on the class time. Then the teacher asks for responses and finally gives them common feedback or the teacher might hold conferences with individual student to discuss their writing and ask questions to assess and clarify ideas.

Nafisa of school A mentioned the importance in her practice of the guided writing process, where students build confidence through the use of small steps, and peer work at different stages of the writing process. She added that:

To assess writing activities, I give our students writing activities from the lesson for assessing their writing outcomes. First of all, I ask them to practise guided writing and gradually I make them capable for free writing. Before engaging the students in writing, I give those (students) some clues or I ask them to practise in pair with some guided activities. Then, I ask them to practise from their present situation.

She further added that after completion of writing, she asks them for peer correction. After peer correction, she asks some students about the answers. Sometimes, she asks individually before peer correction and asks other students whether the answer is right /wrong. If there is wrong, she asks students if they can respond with the correct answer. If they are not capable to answer then she gives them correct answer.

Atique reinforced the idea of developing guided writing, his way of motivating them, way of engaging them in guided writing activities. He spoke that:

I choose some topics. I also give students some clues, sometimes, guided writing. First, I explain the topic in the classroom, give them some idea, sometimes students

discuss among themselves. First, I make some groups, give them a topic and allow them to discuss and provide some help. After students have completed the writing, for assessing I give them common feedback, sometimes peer checking is done, sometimes I check the notebooks.

Sonia of school A mentioned especially, that in their classrooms most of the time they follow guided writing. The teacher sets some writing tasks in front of the students. Students discuss the topic first and then write the topic. Then teacher checks the writing from each group/pair and gives feedback. Because guided writing is easier to assess, it is a favoured approach but students still lack creative writing skills. Creative writing is difficult in our classroom because of large classes, teachers' work load, and time limitations.

All six teachers considered that for assessing writing, they first discuss the topic with the students, and then engage them in discussion. After discussion, students write about the topic, and then the teacher gives feedback. Two teachers mentioned that sometimes they asked the students for peer checking. Another two teachers said that they preferred guided writing in the classroom and this was an important process.

4.2.3 Teachers' current assessment of listening and speaking skills in the classroom.

English language curriculum in secondary schools in Bangladesh focuses on the practice of four skills. But in reality in the public examinations, assessment is based mainly on reading and writing. This may explain why both teachers and students give little priority to the development these two skills. All teachers in this study stated that though they do not have to assess listening and speaking skills formally for the examination, they sometimes assess these two skills in the classroom while teaching the English language.

For example, Nafisa of school A commented that students in Bangladesh learn the English language mainly in the classroom. They have a national syllabus that has to be completed during the year in order to meet examination requirements. She added that students mainly practice their oral skills in the classroom. Outside of the classroom they have few opportunities to practice the English language. The introduction of communicative language skills in the English curriculum is a valuable initiative in the development of listening and speaking skills. In response to assessing listening she stated:

For listening skills there are some listening texts in the book. Sometimes a teacher/student reads the text one or two times loudly in the class. Students listen to the text. Then the teacher gives them some questions on the board such as multiple choice questions, true –false responses, writing short answers, informative questions, title of the text etc. The students complete the task, and then the teacher receives the responses and gives feedback to the students in the class. In this way the teacher assesses listening skills in the classroom.

Shakila commented that in the curriculum for language teaching and learning, all the four skills have given importance but in public examinations listening and speaking are not included. So, as a teacher she argued that there is a little scope to assess students' listening and speaking skills in classroom situation. However, in the newly introduced School Based Assessment (SBA) system each of these two skills are being assessed and students are awarded with five marks out of hundred.

She saw the skills as important:

In the classroom we practise these two skills a lot. For assessing listening skills I use the text given in the textbook, prepare them with necessary structure, information or vocabulary. Then I give them the clues of what they need to listen to. Then I read the

text and students listen. At the end of the lesson they work on the focused questions such as true-false, multiple choice questions, short questions etc.

She again mentioned that some teachers are very weak in their own understanding of the text. They pronounce the word in their own way so often students have difficulty understanding the word. Once again, lack of practice outside the classroom impacts on the development of listening skills.

Sonia stated that in the text books there are some lessons that emphasise listening skills. She describes some of the methods she uses:

Sometimes I practise these lessons in the class. I follow the pre and post listening activities. First I read the text, and then write questions on the board; the students try to complete these, and then I give them feedback. I believe that using only English always in the classroom by the teachers can improve the listening skill of the students.

In response to assessing speaking skills Nafisa commented that for teaching speaking skills, the teacher can engage the students in group/pair discussion. In this way students can exchange their ideas with each other, complete their activities and present them in the class. Sometimes the teacher can engage the students in storytelling. First the teacher begins and then the story continued by a group of students and the teacher plays the role of a moderator.

She shared some of the actual strategies:

Sometimes the teacher can use clue cards; students will select a card at random and try to talk for 5/10 minutes on the topic. The teacher will follow and give feedback after he/she has completed the topic. Sometimes the teacher can arrange a debate or speech in the class/school and therefore encourage the students to improve their English speaking skills.

Shakila from school B clarified this further:

For speaking we ask the students short questions, they describe picture, practise dialogue, role play, present their group work, extempore speech, debate etc. Actually speaking is the toughest ones. Our students are very shy so they do not want to speak loudly as their pronunciation is not good at all.

She reinforced this by saying that when they start speaking they try to translate it in their mother tongue and this makes speaking more difficult. And in speaking they do not get the time to prepare their speech which makes them more confused. Overall, lack of practice and confidence make speaking the most challenging.

Sonia from school A explained that in almost every lessons there are some pictures to promote discussion and questions that will follow. She emphasised that she asks her students to talk about the picture in pairs. After reading instruction skill, the students discuss the possible responses to the comprehension questions in pairs or in groups. In this ways speaking skills are practised by the students.

She also concurred that:

I always encourage my students to speak without hesitation. If they do not maintain the accuracy, I never correct them directly. I show some picture of a family tree in my classroom and ask the students to describe it. They describe it individually and sometimes in group. I ask them to describe a person after looking at the picture using some criteria.

She added that sometimes she showed them some pictures which were not arranged sequentially and asked them to rearrange the pictures after discussing them. These are all speaking activities.

To sum up it could be added that although there is no assessment system of listening and speaking skills in the examination, all six teachers in this study agreed that they practised assessment of listening and speaking skills in the classroom. One teacher said she followed the pre and post listening activities, motivated the students for listening, read the text loudly in the class, then after listening students had to complete the given information, then she gave feedback. For practising speaking, one teacher said she engaged the students in group/pair discussion, another teacher said she sometimes organised debate/speech. Nafisa mentioned that she used story telling strategy and another teacher (Sonia) said she engaged students in picture interpretation either individually/group to teach and assessing speaking skills. In this way they practised listening and speaking in the class.

4.2.4 Different assessment strategies by the teachers

To bring some positive changes in the assessment system, developing a school wide culture of evaluation among the teachers is essential. Teachers who share a language of assessment and track what they have learnt about what works and why, can share their knowledge.

Formative assessment creates opportunities to facilitate this process by focusing and giving discipline to the teacher's discussion on teaching and learning and they can use the data generated in the classroom and school level to inform improvements.

The teachers in the study talked about some individual assessment strategies that they use in different situations. Some of these strategies appear to bring some positive change in students' development.

All six teachers in the study agreed that they organise one to one meetings/conferences with the student and they try to find out a student's personal weaknesses and give feedback to improve that particular thing. They also gave (made) a similar statement about staff

discussion. They mentioned that they discuss with their colleagues the challenges in their classes and share opinions and ideas regarding assessment and development of assessment.

Five teachers mentioned that sometimes they organise workshop/seminar to discuss the students' problem that they find difficult in the classroom or outside the classroom.

Four teachers elaborated further saying that by checking students' portfolios they are able to know students better; know their weakness and background, and it improves their relationships with the students which they then communicate this to the guardians and inform them about students' progress and drawbacks. Moreover, they agreed that after the examination they sit together to discuss the questions and set some standards to mark the answer scripts so that all teachers can maintain some uniformity in their checking.

In addition to this, three teachers expressed that they moderate the questions for the purpose of standardisation. These teachers stated that they collect school data. They mentioned that there are some students who are always experiencing difficulties. They found out what was the previous performance of the student and thus they try to give feedback to overcome the problem.

Besides the strategies mentioned above, Sonia of school A suggested that speaking and listening skills had gained more emphasis in recent times. She added:

Previously we gave no importance on assessing speaking skill, but now in classroom through formative assessment, we are informally giving more importance on assessing speaking skills and listening skills also. Students now improving their speaking and they have come to know that these skills are not for passing the examination but for overall development and language skills are useful in their real life situation not for the certificate and not for the job only.

She further elaborated that “sometimes we share this with the teachers of another school and also try to find some solution that we face while teaching in the classroom”.

Atique indicated that he finds the use of criteria very helpful for him as a teacher and also for students: “Sometimes I use ‘rubrics’ which are criterion- based assessment and recording tools that helps students to plan, monitor and assess their learning”. He adds the importance of making connections with learners’ own lives too. “Sometimes, I discuss for creative writing from the real life situation of the learners. In the class I do not use any particular method but a combination of methods according to the students’ need- to teach and assess them”.

Likewise Shakila expressed that sometimes, peer assessment is also done by the students.

Therefore the above mentioned strategies applied by all the six teachers as a part of formative assessment practices in the school context indicates their continuous professional development effort and they were trying to use these strategies for better teaching and assessment for students’ development.

4.2.5 Students’ practices of reading and writing assessment

The students of both schools have also developed clear understandings about the practices and assessment of reading and writing in the present curriculum and described how their teachers went about assessment.

For instance, Ria from School A said that when her teacher involves them in reading in the class, the teacher makes the pronunciation clear if any mistakes occur. Therefore they enrich their vocabularies and they can understand the meaning of the lesson. She elaborated further that after students have completed their reading, the teacher asks different questions orally either individually/group, or sometimes engages them to write the information and checks the

difficulties and gives feedback. In this way they are assessed which helps them to clear their understandings about the lesson.

Similarly Bella from school A stated that sometimes the teacher constructs some pre-set problems and asks the students to write on them in pair/group. Students discuss the topic first in pair/group, then they write the topic, then the teacher checks it and sometimes asks the students to present them in the class. In this case the teacher can check the writing of each group and can give feedback. That sort of assessment helps students' understanding regarding the topic. She had strong views on how it should be done. She further added that "reading comprehension should not be set from any particular guidebook/note book and it should be unseen so that students can show their creativity".

Ananda from school B mentioned that for assessing reading comprehension some reading passage (text) is set by the teacher. Questions such as true- false, gap filling, matching, question answer etc. are given to us by the teacher to complete in the classroom. First, they read the comprehension and answer the questions. However, he suggested that the teacher should set the comprehension from unseen text outside the text. After completing the task, they share their responses with the class and the teacher gives them feedback. In this way reading skills are assessed.

Rajib from school B commented that in their class the teacher first sets a topic for writing and gives them some ideas regarding the topic. Then the teacher involves them in group/pair and asks them to discuss the topic first. They discuss the topic and gather ideas about the topic. Then the teacher allows them to write the topic. After completing the topic they present it in the class, both the teacher and the students listen to the topic, if there are any mistakes the teacher gives common feedback. In this way writing skills are assessed.

4.2.6 Students' opinions about present assessment of reading and writing.

Students of both schools had contrasting opinions on the present assessment of reading and writing. Some students thought that there was still a traditional approach, and to make it more effective and creative for the students, some changes in the assessment system are immediately needed.

On the other hand Swad's perspective was that:

The present system of assessment of reading and writing is appropriate because whatever they learn in the class is being assessed through tests and what they do not understand is clearly demonstrated to the teacher. Monthly and term tests also allow the teachers to assess the current written language competencies.

On the other hand, Labanna disagreed that "the present assessment system is not appropriate. In pair/group work most of the students do not actively take part in the learning process". She further added that only the better students take part in the learning process and some weaker students lag behind and therefore all the skills are not equally practised.

Ria stated that in reading assessment the teacher first reads the text and then asks them to read text silently and this is not useful. In writing they memorise the paragraph, composition, and write on the answer script. She considered that for developing students' creativity greater choice of topic was needed.

Sraban claimed that "the present reading and writing system is ok, but it should be modified in some areas as letter writing, paragraph writing, composition writing are very traditional". He thinks these encourage the learners to memorise the answers. Again he advocated for more student choice.

Rajib agreed that for better presentation of the lesson modern teaching aids such as computers, OHPs should be included so that the teacher can present lesson in a more engaged

way. He thinks both the teachers and students are too dependent on the text books. In this case, extra topics should be included from other sources. He stated, “Teachers should be sent to the foreign countries to get better exposure of those countries to enrich their ideas regarding assessment”.

From the comments of the students it is clear that, although they considered that in the present curriculum there is some scope for developing creativity through the practices of reading and writing, some suggested that still there are some traditional approaches that needs to be redesigned to facilitate students development

4.2.7 Students’ practices of listening and speaking skills

The students in this study had a clear understanding about the importance of listening and speaking skills. They acknowledged that since listening and speaking are not formally assessed they have little practice of these two skills in the classroom. They highly emphasised that if these two skills are included in the formal assessment process students will be motivated to practise and develop these.

Siam, a student from school B mentioned that:

For developing listening skills sometimes, the teacher asks the student to read the text loudly in the class. Sometimes, the teacher asks us to read from newspapers, magazines or any other articles. Sometimes, the teacher asks for translation and check vocabularies and understanding ability. In this way listening skills are practised and assessed in the class.

Ananda, a student from school B mentioned that:

For developing speaking skills sometimes the teacher discusses and explains the lesson to the learners first. Then he/she involves us in group/pair work. We discuss

the topics and share our ideas and complete the activities. Then the teacher asks for responses to assess our understandings. Through pair/group work students can exchange ideas and thus our speaking abilities increases.

Another student from school B mentioned that actually, in our examination system all the skills are not equally weighted though the curriculum emphasises on all the four language skills. So, the teacher must engage the students in listening and speaking skills, so students can practise in the classroom and develop these skills.

Most students in the study also argued that for developing listening and speaking skills some marks should be included in the school examination so that students become motivated to develop the skills. These students identified the importance of oral presentations for developing listening and speaking skills.

4.2.8 The way English teachers help students' learning practices.

In this study students of both schools expressed their opinions of how their teachers create a learning environment in the class to help them learn more effectively. They suggested that formative assessment creates opportunities for practices in the classroom and if it is properly implemented, students are able to take more responsibility for their own learning as it focuses on students' learning needs.

For example; Ananda from school B mentioned that through pair/work work students learn better and in this way they can share in better ways with other students, which helps them better understand and also develops their questioning skills. He added that:

The teacher sets a particular lesson in the class. The teacher discusses and explains the lesson to the learners first. Then he/she involves us in pair/group work. Teachers sometimes seek to bring quieter students into the discussion, asking them if they agree

with another student's answer. They discuss the topics and share the ideas and complete the activities. Then the teacher asks for responses to assess them.

He further added that to identify students' understandings, teachers most often use questioning techniques and sometimes students' written products also provide opportunities for teachers to assess students' understandings and to enter into written dialogues with them.

However, Bella reported her own experience of engagement in learning and assessment process. She spoke:

The teacher teaches a particular lesson from the text. Sometimes, the teacher reads the lesson to us and explains the meaning. Sometimes, the teacher asks us to read the lesson and check the meaning. If we find any difficulties the teacher tries to make us understand. Then we try to complete the task from our text such as gap fillings, rearrange, and question answers. Then teacher gives us some task as home work. We sit for weekly tests, monthly tests, and semester tests and thus we prove how much we have learnt.

Swad believed that if the students can understand the topic, they exchange their ideas with their teacher, and the teacher explains the lesson to them it makes it clear.

Labanna and Ananda suggested while presenting lesson to them the teacher could present teaching aids that helps better understanding.

Some students commented that through the classroom assessment practices, they get more support from each other and they believed that if the teacher was able to engage them and create effective learning environments in the class, they are very good at helping at each other. All six teachers and the students believed that there is a good relationship between

teachers' objectives of assessment practices and what students knew about the learning through assessment.

To sum up all six teachers and the students suggested that in the present curriculum students were used to memorising the question and answers, in the present curriculum. Reading questions are followed by reading text which does not encourage memorisation and guided and semi-guided writing has been included in the assessment process. They were of the same opinion that for developing reading and writing skills unseen text and unseen topics should be set as the test questions. Besides this although listening and speaking skills are not formally assessed, sometimes teachers can practise and assess these two skills in the class, which helps the development of these two skills. These teachers and students were emphasising the importance of including all the four language skills in the assessment process and they believed that their individual assessment strategies were helpful for students' development.

4.3 The Major Challenges:

This section describes the challenges related to language assessment. It describes the challenges teachers face in language assessment, the challenges that teachers face towards change in language assessment, curriculum requirements, and finally how the teachers attempt to overcome the challenges.

4.3.1 The challenges teachers face in language assessment

The teachers face many challenges while assessing the students in the classroom. Some of these challenges are related to students' ability, some are related to students' and teachers' socio-economic background, while some are related to institutional factors.

In this study both teachers and students identified large classes as a major challenge to practice and assessment in language skills. Sonia of school A mentioned that some students feel very shy and do not participate willingly as they come from poor backgrounds. She said that the large number of students in the class and furniture setting also act as barriers for assessing the students.

Another two teachers identified the ability level of the students as the major challenge. Nafisa and Romana thought that the different levels of students, level of their understandings and teachers' workload, the want of modern teaching aids are the main barriers for assessing the students.

Another teacher Antique mentioned the lack of motivation of the students as a challenge for the teachers to engage them(the students) in the learning process. Because of the different abilities of students, the need for teaching aids, and the lack of student interest, teacher can not engage all students in the learning process. He further stated:

Some students are not interested in participation. Therefore it is very challenging for us to give close observation to each and every student. It is difficult to involve students in group work as their ability varies and sometimes they are not interested to participate in the classroom.

This teacher also mentioned the shortage of resources for effective classroom practices. He added that:

Another problem is that in the class we normally use only text books and sometimes we use some posters, newspaper cutting, and magazine to develop motivation of the students. But most of the time these aids are not available. Sometimes, students are unable to formulate questions because of lack of questioning skills.

Another two teachers Shakila and Arzu acknowledged that that insufficient class time also acts as a barrier as they cannot complete whole the thing and cannot sight every one's responses, and cannot correct every one's tasks. Similar views were echoed from Sonia who thought teachers do not have individual focus and do not have sufficient time for checking writing tasks because of workload. Nafisa mentioned that because of having huge test pressure the teacher has to complete syllabus within the time frame.

Students' beliefs and attitudes also act as a challenge to effective learning and teaching practices. All six teachers in this study considered that most students in Bangladesh falsely believe that learning English means learning its grammatical rules and that after digesting all the grammatical rules they will start speaking fluently. These beliefs lead them to parroting the rules and using them laboriously but actually this process does not enable them to communicate properly. Learning English is not just about grabbing grammatical rules, structures, and vocabulary. It is a matter of regular practice and the use of it in the practical situation. Besides this outside the classroom they (students) have limited opportunity to practice English which acts as a main barrier for developing their communication skills.

4.3.2 The challenges that Teachers face towards change in assessment

All six teachers in the study admitted that assessment for learning is very essential for students' development. However, Nafisa of school A considered that, in Bangladesh in the secondary schools most teachers like a traditional approach, and use mother tongue in the class and focus on completing syllabus within the limited time.

She elaborated that the present curriculum and text books are based on a communicative approach which focuses on student centred activities, interactive approaches and more

student participation. Yet the ELT situation does not reflect this. Most of the teachers are untrained and not familiar with the CLT approach.

She stated that most teachers continue to emphasise grammar and translation methods. They have a lack of knowledge on different activities and also their command on English is not sufficient. The attitude of the teachers, students and parents can also be as a negative factor. Teachers' do not want to change partly because it is always a challenge to break with traditional approaches.

Shakila of school B mentioned that in most cases students are not willingly to take part in the class activities and want to focus on completing the syllabus and acquiring good scores in the examination. Teachers think that in the new communicative approach it is difficult to involve the learners in activities because of not having suitable classroom environments, physical facilities and modern teaching aids.

4.3.3 The challenges of prioritizing curriculum requirements.

Most teachers in the study comment that teachers of secondary schools in Bangladesh are faced with extensive curriculum requirements.

Nafisa was insistent that the nature of the problem was that most teachers focus on examination oriented teaching and students obtaining good scores. Because of having a large syllabus which has to be completed by the due time outlined in the guidelines, it becomes difficult for them to put emphasis on activity based learning.

She elaborated further claiming that another main reason behind this is that the attitude of the authority and also the attitude of the guardians who want that the teacher to complete the course/syllabus in time. Their main focus is to prepare the students to get better scores in the

examination; they do not concern themselves with the actual learning of the students. The performance of the institution is measured on the percentage of failure/success of students in the public examination.

Romana agreed with Nafisa's acknowledgement that syllabus should be shorter as they cannot complete the syllabus within the limited time. They cannot practice activities and the skills in the classroom.

Shakila mentioned that another problem was our examination system as students are always trying to gather information related to the examination, although the teachers are focussing on the skills, the students are not always receptive. She also added that the examination system needs to be moderated and teachers need to get the appropriate focus.

Some students in the study also commented that because of having huge workloads the teacher cannot pay much attention on the text based activities, rather he/she tries to complete the syllabus within the limited time and prepares the student for the examination

4.3.4 How the teachers attempt to overcome the challenges

To overcome such challenges, it needs a lot of effort on the part of teachers and requires some attitude changes as well. In my view, teachers need training in creating English teaching- learning environment in the classroom, curriculum guidelines need to be changed, and teacher -student ratio in the class should be reduced.

Sonia of school A illustrated this to some extent in the following words.

“To overcome the drawbacks of reading and writing, I request the students for peer checking and as a teacher I give them common feedback. Subject based skilled and trained teachers should be appointed”.

Romana considered that that teachers needed to be prepared and familiar with new ideas: “to overcome the drawbacks, teachers should take preparation before coming to the class and use new concepts to motivate/develop the students”.

She also thought that changes were needed at a curriculum level to make what was to be covered more realistic and manageable:

“Teachers who take the class should create English teaching learning environment in the class. Teachers should change their attitude. I think, syllabus should be shorter as we cannot complete the syllabus within the limited time. We cannot practise more activities in the class. So, I think the syllabus should be moderate.

Shakila elaborated saying that she tried to motivate the students with her own techniques, although she tried to focus on practices of language skills, students tried to focus on examination oriented learning. She said:

First of all, she (teacher) tries to improve herself with her techniques and they are trying to develop some teaching aids. They (teachers) are thinking how they can attract the students’ attention, preparing attractive teaching aids. Another problem is the present examination system as students are always trying to looking gather information related to the examination; they are focussing on the skills, so the students are not eager to take the things. As each class has 70-80 students, it difficult to give personal feedback.

However, she is hopeful about the recent change. She commented that “changes are taking place as teachers are being trained. Now, we have the idea that formative assessment is more effective than summative in the classroom situation. Assessment is for making the students

correct and develop his/ her teaching”. She claimed that English is a tool, and teachers should think how they can apply the tools.

Atique expressed the similar comments. He added that in recent times, some development projects (ELTIP, TQI) have been providing training to the secondary school teachers. As a result they are trying to change from the traditional, teacher dominated method to the new approaches. Some more innovative schools have already started teaching using participatory approaches. To bring a change, it needs lot of support from the governments and also funding from private sectors.

Atique considered that for assessing reading and writing, previously seen text should not be given to the students because their use of strategies and interpretation of meaning will be affected through having read the text previously. So, totally unseen/ unknown texts should be given to the students to assess comprehension. Arzu echoed similar views.

Some teachers in the study considered that if the policy included testing the listening and speaking skills in the public examination, it would be easier for the teachers to motivate the learners to practise these two skills in the class. Organisation and resources for holding oral tests will have to be made. So policy guidelines will be essential for effective implementation of ELT programmes in Bangladesh.

Some students in the study addressed the need for teacher training to bring change and they suggested the need for modern teaching aids for developing students’ motivation and they emphasised that an updated assessment system which includes marks for all the four language skills was important.

Sonia commented that teachers complete their training and come back to schools but very few teachers actually apply their training skills in their classroom. So monitoring is

important and monitoring should be for teachers' development, identifying their difficulties in teaching and providing them effective feedback. On the other hand, Nafisa thought that the schools should come out from the huge test pressure as now a days schools have become test based institutions rather than learning based institutions.

Romana stated that the government should take initiatives to take proper steps for teachers' development. Some teachers come from a poor educational background and this is also a major problem. Therefore, she thought that observation, monitoring and accountability should be enhanced to develop overall standard of language teaching and assessment.

To conclude it could be argued that various negative factors work as the barriers to assessment and implementation of language assessment in the Bangladeshi secondary schools. All six teachers and the students in this study agreed that teachers' competency level and confidence, students' level of understanding and their socio-economic background, classroom setting, modern teaching aids, lack of connection between the classroom practices and that of assessment system are the main challenges. Therefore to overcome challenges in language assessment both the teachers and students believe that the government should pay more attention to these areas and provide sufficient funding. An effective language policy should be developed to create opportunities for training for the teachers aimed at building their capacity.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This study describes the current English language assessment system in Bangladeshi secondary schools from teachers' and students' perspectives. It first describes the 'Formative vs Summative assessment practices' then it describes 'Issues in current assessment of Language skills', 'Assessment practices in the classroom context', 'Assessment practices in the school context' and finally 'The major challenges for the teachers in effecting change'.

The results cannot be generalized to all the secondary schools in Bangladesh as the sample has been taken from a particular area in one city. The selected two schools have achieved the above average standard, based on the result of the Secondary School Certificate (Public) examination. The schools were therefore not necessarily representative of schools in Bangladesh. These schools were working hard to upgrade their level implementing communicative approaches through School Based Assessment.

In each case, the teachers selected were experienced and leading teachers who had undertaken extensive professional development with some of them working as the teacher trainers. They understand the wider concept of working with present communicative teaching- learning approaches and were able to talk with considerable knowledge and understanding about the issues.

The selected students for the focus group interviews were also not necessarily typical of students in Bangladeshi secondary schools. A representative group of students were selected with varying degrees of competence in English, who were able to express clearly their ideas

regarding present English language assessment in the secondary school curriculum in Bangladesh. Both the teachers, students and parents of each school were very aware of the necessary changes they needed to implement. From the findings it was evident that the teachers had developed clear understandings among themselves as group. The students also had a high level of consciousness about their own learning needs that were expressed in the data.

Students in this study showed very positive attitudes about their understandings of assessment and their comments indicated that the purpose of assessment is for better learning, that classroom interactions were essential and they also believed that the teacher-student relationship is vital for developing learning. They suggested that classroom interactions and better relationships with the teacher made them confident and empowered them when working together in the classroom.

The evidence from the study indicated that it was not only the teachers who are involved in the language assessment process, but also the students who are actively constructing knowledge about language assessment through their prior and current experience with assessment tasks, and in their interactions with each other.

The study revealed that current assessment tasks do not emphasise all the aspects of the curriculum that focus on the continuous evaluation process. Likewise assessment does not address a wide range of important skills, knowledge and understandings, comprehension ability and development of critical thinking.

The authorities of these two schools were trying to implement recent government policies and the teachers of these two schools were undergoing subject based training programmes appropriate for their professional development in teaching and learning.

The study used semi- structured individual interviews with six English teachers and focus group interviews with two groups of students (nine). These were highly situational. To date very little research has been done in the field of English language assessment, in terms of how teachers have developed their understandings on assessment, how they face the challenges, and how they adjust their practices. The data provided rich and up-to-date information of English language assessment operating in two secondary schools in Bangladesh.

Both the teachers and the students were of the same opinion that successful assessment creates learning opportunities for the students, develops teacher- student relationships and provides guidelines for continuous change and improvement which can therefore enhance the quality of teaching.

5.1 Formative vs Summative assessment Practices:

As I discussed earlier, in Bangladesh summative assessment dominates in the language curriculum. (see the literature review, Chapter-2). While summative assessment has an important role in the overall educational progress and assessment of pupils, it is less important in day-to-day teaching where formative assessment informs teaching decisions. Yet most teachers in the study agreed that they were mostly dependent on summative tests and they did little sharing with the students about their learning and or with other teachers about their teaching, during the process of teaching and learning.

On the other hand, formative assessment refers to frequent, on-going assessments of student progress and understanding while the teaching and learning process is taking place. As a result of formative assessment process, teachers are then able to adjust teaching approaches to better meet identified learning needs. Studies from OECD (2006) show that formative assessment is one of the most effective strategies for promoting high student performance. It

is also important for improving the equity of student outcomes and for developing students' "learning to learn" skills.

Chappius and Chappius (2008) argue that assessment is an on-going dynamic process and through the formative assessment results both the teachers and the students can make decisions about the next learning steps. All six teachers in this study also acknowledged that there is a strong relationship between teaching and assessment. They described how assessment and teaching inform each other. These teachers were aware of the various purpose of assessment and the needs of the students they teach. They mentioned that with formative assessment there is scope to develop more creativity for the students in the classroom situation.

Other writers (Cowie & Bell, 1999) have remarked that for the new or for more inexperienced teachers, the practice of formative assessment was challenging. This view was echoed in my study. Teachers' own attitudes towards change can also act as a positive or negative factor in bringing about innovations. The teachers in this study for example, mentioned that they find it difficult to implement formative assessment since most teachers had only been exposed to the usual summative assessment testing conducted by the Education Board central examination.

If changes are to happen, I would argue that what is needed is well designed professional development to help teachers to become more knowledgeable and feel a stronger sense of efficacy and ownership for the new modes of assessment.

In order to effectively practice this new form of assessment, teachers need proper guidelines around the objectives, a clear sense of direction, proper task design, and transparency in terms of the grading system needed to run the programme efficiently. More effective,

consistent and frequent training on the part of the government will give teachers a better grasp both of the content as well as methods of carrying out formative assessment in schools.

5.2 Issues in current assessment of Language skills.

The major issues of current assessment of language skills in the secondary schools in Bangladesh have been discussed in the literature review.

The Curriculum and Syllabus Report – 1996, has emphasised that at the end of secondary level, students will be able to speak and debate in English confidently; read for understanding; write correct sentences; and develop a good command of English (NCTB,1996). Besides this, the Preface of the English textbook for Grades 9–10 (*English for Today*) explains:

The book follows the communicative approach to teaching and learning English in Bangladesh situations. It provides learners with a variety of materials such as reading texts, dialogues, pictures, diagrams, tasks and activities. These materials have been designed and developed for practice in four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. As a result, classes are expected to be interactive with students actively participating in the classroom activities through pair work, group work as well as individual work. (NCTB, 2001).

Though the curriculum guidelines emphasise the need to practise four language skills through different activities, the study showed that most teachers find it challenging to implement them. The findings from the study have focused on the current views of teachers' understandings regarding the issues they face in assessing the language skills. All the six teachers in this study mentioned that for assessing reading skills they use reading comprehension in the class test. Students are asked to read the text and complete the given

questions, which is followed by the teacher feedback to the students' work. All six teachers claimed that they do not have access to any guidance that can help them to understand how to present a particular lesson in the class. Additionally, there is a lack of teaching aids such as computers, OHPs etc needed to engage the students. A baseline survey (Haq, 2004) of secondary schools in Bangladesh reported on the poor quality of the teaching environment in the classrooms. Similar views were reflected in Hamid's (2010) fieldwork with eight secondary schools which indicated that insufficient resources and lack of teacher effectiveness were the reasons behind the poor quality of teaching. In my study all six teachers identified the similar issues as the main barriers for implementing quality teaching in the classrooms.

For assessing writing, there are some guided writing and some free writing exercises in the text prescribed by the National Curriculum and Text book Board (NCTB). Before writing, the teacher needs to engage the students in many writing exercises. Students first discuss, then write, then check grammar and vocabulary followed by editing and then final draft is completed.

Khan's (1999) study on 'Assessing writing' in the Bangladeshi context based on 'writing composition' on Higher Secondary level reflected the students' poor ability of creative writing. A few teachers in my own study argued that they cannot engage the students in creative writing exercises because of their work load, large class, and duration of the class etc. Besides this, the traditional public examinations offer little or no scope for assessment of creative writing and most students try to write the answers from their power of memorisation.

The students in my study also mentioned that there is some inconsistency in assessing reading. In other cases, both the teachers and the students just follow the prescribed text book but have limited opportunities to practise reading. The Curriculum and Syllabus Report

(NCTB, 2006) has allotted 40 marks for seen comprehension and 40 marks for unseen comprehension out of 200 marks in English in the secondary level (IX-X). The examination questions are set from a text and sometimes guidebooks which students have already read, which does not allow for further reading that can develop creativity of the students. This group also noted that traditional approaches also dominate in the assessment of writing. In particular in the letter/composition section, which students most often memorise, allows for little or no creativity.

The major drawbacks of current assessment of listening and speaking in the secondary schools in Bangladesh have also been discussed in the literature review.

All six teachers in this study emphasised that although 'The Curriculum and Syllabus Report' (NCTB, 1996, p. 125) mentioned that "English is not a content-based subject rather it is a skill-based subject" and emphasise assessment of the four language skills, examinations are based on two skills reading and writing. They stated that both teachers and students pay less attention to assessing listening and speaking skills. Butler & Stevens (1997) also identified listening and speaking skills as a critical part and they have emphasised more students engagement for developing these two skills.

Hamid and Baldauf (2008) claimed that lack of confidence of the teachers, insufficient practice in the classroom resulted in the poor standard of CLT approaches in the secondary schools in Bangladesh. Other researchers demonstrate that speaking is one of the most important skills in learning a second or foreign language. Another researcher Horak (1999) commented that most teachers tried to avoid testing oral skills as they think it is time consuming and they found it difficult in the large class.

In Bangladesh, speaking skills are a critical part of language learning and the teaching process and it is extremely difficult for students to master the English language in terms of

speaking and listening as these are not currently assessed formally for the examination. Additionally, in most of the schools, classrooms are not well designed or furnished for assessing these skills. Besides this, they have no audio/video and other resources. Although most teachers themselves lack proficiency in spoken English, they have the requisite level of proficiency in grammar, reading and writing. In most cases teachers appear to avoid oral assessment as it is time consuming and needs lots of preparation and physical support.

There is a need for teachers to develop an awareness of how to connect the topics in the prescribed text to what students already know in terms of their language skills, personal lives, and real world situations. In my view and given the current restraints, Bangladeshi English language teachers are not yet well enough prepared to face the current challenges. Both the teachers and the students in this study also expressed this opinion. If the education authority included the testing of listening and speaking skills in the assessment process for both internal and public examinations, it would be easier for the teachers to motivate the students to practise these two skills in the classroom.

As a consequence, teachers need to improve their teaching competence, including testing and evaluation in order to take responsibility for the development of oral language and devising strategies to help their learners. For this to happen, new policy guidelines for the more effective implementation of ELT programmes in Bangladesh are essential.

One of the six teachers (Nafisa) in this study emphasised that to incorporate listening and speaking skills in the assessment system some marks should be allocated for both in the internal and in the public examinations. The government should recruit effective teachers and arrange training programmes for the teachers. Every school should develop a language laboratory and collect necessary materials such as audio/recording devices and other

supporting materials. In every week there should have at least one class focusing on listening and speaking. And in leisure time students can practice listening in the laboratory. The teacher must speak English in the class room and he/she must create an English speaking environment and encourage the students to speak English.

One teacher suggested that for examination reform, language teachers should be given training at least for a month to give them better exposure to the techniques of testing different language skills and three to seven days training to construct their ideas of how to develop more reliable and valid test items for testing different language skills.

This teacher added that a package of formative assessment should be developed and distributed to the teachers to make them familiar with how they can assess their students' achievement more effectively. She thought that the teacher could assess the students throughout the year, keep records and include the grade in the final examination. She suggested that in the public examination, an external examiner should be appointed to maintain fairness in the assessment process.

Another teacher claimed that some marks should be allocated by the authority for the assessment of these two skills in the public examination. These examinations could be held in the examination centre and should be assessed by some external teachers appointed by the authority. This teacher suggested that for including these two skills in the final assessment first the teacher needs to be well trained. He/she needs dedication, effort and creativity to prepare listening texts. I think teachers need to ensure that there is enough practice in the classroom. Marks should be allocated for each skill. Different types of listening and speaking materials could be delivered. Then this will help us to assess our students' listening and speaking skills more successfully.

5.3 Assessment practices in the classroom context

In regarding classroom assessment, Mueller-Joseph (2007) acknowledged that it creates opportunities for more student interaction, provide student academic freedom and autonomy and the teacher can decide how to assess and respond to their (students) information. Begum and Farooqui (2008) stated that Bangladeshi teachers rarely practise oral skills in the classroom but focus much more on completing the syllabus. All six teachers in my study acknowledged that in terms of teaching in the classroom, they engaged the students in different activities. Because of the large numbers of students in each class, it becomes very difficult for the teachers to know the background, interests and weaknesses of each individual student. The duration of the classes (35-40 minutes) may also be key factor. Besides this, because of their high workload, they cannot manage to use a lesson plan in the classroom to conduct the class effectively. In this limited time, it is difficult for the teachers to identify the individual student needs. Consequently, weaker students often fail to cope with the learning in such an environment.

Both the teachers and the students acknowledged that sometimes they (the teachers) set specific questions and attempted to cover the whole of the prescribed lesson within the limited time of the class. In this case, only limited numbers of students participated. It becomes difficult for the teachers to involve the weaker students in the questioning process because of large number of students in the class. This may be why weaker students frequently fail to develop an understanding of key concepts and why they are often reluctant to ask the teacher questions.

Strategies and methods:

5.3.1 Observation and feedback

Most teachers in this study believed that working together on student's assessment has helped them to develop a more collegial culture and deepened their understandings of formative assessment. Sometimes the teachers stated they take opportunities to observe each other and share practical ideas on how to address challenges in the classroom. They suggested that as teachers, they need to consider a variety of learning opportunities in order to meet the different level and needs of the learners.

These results affirmed Black & Wiliam (1998a) claim that feedback is the main component of formative assessment. Feedback is useful for giving information to achieve the expected level of learning outcomes. The authors claim that teachers should not only give their students only grades but also provide each student with specific guidance on strengths and weaknesses.

Williams, (2001) emphasised effective feedback for students' improvement. Wiggins (1993) stated that feedback provides the students with useful insights which enhance their learning and Sadler (1989) claimed that both the teachers and the students can identify their difficulties and can take next steps of teaching and learning. The Bangladeshi teachers emphasised that they find insufficient time to give feedback to each and every student. Consequently, without feedback from the teacher, students find it difficult to improve their learning. Therefore, providing effective feedback whenever possible is a challenge that teachers need to focus on including the development of skills and strategies to produce this. Most students in this study emphasised that they would like more support from their teachers so that they could make better progress. Some students commented that oral feedback is more useful as they can correct their work immediately. Other students preferred written feedback but they all agreed that feedback is beneficial when it is given in a timely manner and in a way that students can understand. They also believed that both oral and written feedback is useful for developing and enhancing students' development.

5.3.2 Peer assessment

Peer assessment develops students' metacognitive insights and helps them to take responsibility for their own learning. Students claimed that peer assessment provide better scope to share their ideas and build social skills (Brown, Irving & Keegan (2008). However, it was also clear that students need careful coaching if they want to provide useful assessment for their peers. This includes giving feedback on the things that work well in their peer's work as well as offering constructive criticism. Students also claimed that they develop a better sense of understanding when examining their peer's work to clarify areas of weakness and strengths in their own work.

5.3.3 Group /Pair work

Butler & Stevens (1997) commented that a group discussion technique is useful assessment approach to develop students' creativity and interaction ability and most students feel comfortable working in a group. Brown (2001) claimed that it develops students' confidence and students can interpret and exchange their ideas freely. Most students in this (my) study considered that in group/pair work they are able to get feedback both from the teacher and fellow students. Students get more support from each other and they feel much comfortable as they are confident about asking questions when they do not understand. This opportunity of working in group/pair also develops their cooperative skills, interaction ability, which in turn promotes learning. However, some students found group work less effective when the levels of understanding differed among the members of the group.

5.4 Assessment practices in the school context

The changes that the teachers have made in their assessment practices in their school context need are worth examining further. This group has been part of change focused on implement CLT based teaching. In other words, they have been trying to bring change to the process of traditional approaches to teaching and making it more student oriented. Though they have been facing underlying concerns about their way of implementing the new approaches, the practice has already been started. Implementation of the practice of formative assessment in the school context appears to have created better opportunities and understandings among the teachers and students.

The influence of formative assessment to help develop students' creativity and engage them in better learning has been well discussed in the literature review. Both the teachers and the students in this study agreed that formative assessment is useful for promoting students' learning. The teachers of these two schools also agreed that changes are necessary and they were trying to implement the current policies and practices. They believed in their ability, they believed in the changes they were making, they shared and discussed their ideas with other teachers as an integral part of their professional development in an effort to create better learning opportunities for the students. However, they also indicated that they could not effectively apply the skills of formative assessment in the classroom as they faced a lot of barriers.

To develop more effective systems, school-wide cultures of assessment and evaluation are essential. Teachers who share a language of assessment, with other teachers and students about what they have learned is effective are able to develop better understandings of their practice (OECD, 2006). Most of the teachers in this study talked about his /her own assessment strategies to help students. They believed that school wide professional

cooperation and discussion have shaped their thinking and had a positive influence in their practices.

All six teachers in this study claimed that there were noticeable changes in the classroom practices. They were trying to break the traditional approaches of teaching and learning which earlier was mostly teacher dominated. The present National Curriculum (NCTB, 1996) focuses on student centred teaching where classroom activities are given more priority. Teachers engage students in different activities where students share their ideas with their peers, complete the tasks and present them to the class. Teacher–student classroom interactions provide an insight into possible experience of, and participation in, assessment for learning. In this way they build their confidence, develop a high level of awareness and this helps for better understanding and hopefully learning.

Teachers in this study showed that they were well informed about the current assessment system. Their narratives also indicated some shifts were taking place in their attitudes, beliefs and understandings about the current language assessment. All six teachers indicated that they have been trying to establish a whole school learning culture through the development of a closer working relationship between teachers and students using classroom interactions such as, asking questions, group work, pair work, role play and different strategies to develop students' performance.

These teachers believed that assessment is important both for the teachers and the students. Through assessment a student can get a clear idea about their achievement, what they have learnt and with the teacher can identify learning goals. These teachers were hopeful about the changes that were happening and gradually that these changes will enhance the quality of teaching and learning at the school level and these teachers believe that the inclusion of

Primary School Examination (PSC), and Junior School Examination (JSE) in the recent school assessment would definitely be helpful to reduce dropout rates.

They confirmed that in earlier years, students memorised the questions and answers and wrote on their answer scripts in essay type responses. However, with the recent curriculum focus on the creativity of the students, there are both subjective and objective types of questions. Writing tasks now include opportunities to write from their own understandings and experiences.

5.5 The major challenges for the teachers in effecting change:

Although all six teachers in this study considered that new communicative approaches are more effective for students' development, they also see advantages in traditional approaches. This raises a number of issues around lack of training, and lack of resources especially when both the teachers and the students are reluctant to involve themselves in the activity based learning. Lack of time and expertise in material development was also a challenge as they are overloaded with work and lack of expertise in the actual design of communicative activities was also a concern among the teachers. Hamid's (2010) considered that many teachers were yet to receive the CLT training, and those who had been trained, have limited understandings about CLT and its application in the classroom.

Both the teachers and the students in my study also highlighted the inconsistency between the curriculum guidelines and the actual assessment system in the schools. Though communicative approaches are the recommended methods for teaching, teachers find it

difficult to engage the students in the required activities because most students usually have a small English vocabulary and a limited command of English structures and lack of proficiency in English. Consequently the teachers found it difficult to do any oral communicative activities with them. Gradually they lose interest in trying to speak English and become too discouraged to do it. This is why teachers often fail to motivate students in the classroom with the consequence that the learning objectives from national standards are not being achieved.

Teachers in Bangladesh have few opportunities to influence policy makers in decision making with regard to education policy. Each school is bound to follow the guidelines prescribed by the Education Board and National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), MoE. Most teachers in this study commented that they cannot go outside the guidelines of the 'National Curriculum and Textbook Board' for assessment decisions.

At this point in time there are tensions between the curriculum guidelines and current language assessment in the secondary schools in Bangladesh. Although 'The Curriculum and Syllabus Report' (NCTB,1996) emphasises that teacher should assess the language skills and sub-skills formally in regular and on a monthly basis, in reality only the reading and writing skills are assessed, the other two skills listening and speaking are not included in the assessment process. Besides these issues, I believe that there are problems in the selection of reading texts and writing topics which are most often traditional. The consequence of this is that students have limited opportunities to practise with a range of texts, particularly those related to their own knowledge and interests.

The students in my study also expressed the similar views. They too considered that the present assessment system is not appropriate since it does not assess all the four skills. As several noted "we are just focussing on text, focussing on grammar but not vocabulary on

other skills”. Therefore both the teachers and the students agreed on the importance of allocating marks for listening and speaking skills assessment.

Educational reform should emphasise students’ learning needs and identify and focus the skills that students will be able to do after a certain period (Philips, 2000). However, in Bangladesh, most of the curriculum reform programme has been unable to achieve its goals adequately because of many limitations. Every ten years, a new curriculum reform activity has been initiated, contents have been rearranged, the structure of the curriculum has been changed and then the changes were implemented for few years. After a few years another curriculum reform activity was initiated.

Such a fragmented approach has tended to undermine curriculum development efforts.

Another limiting factor has been that in most cases teachers and head teachers have been more interested in the strategies to help their students score high marks in the examinations, rather than are focusing on the instructional objectives of secondary education.

5.6 Suggestions to overcome some of the challenges:

The teachers in my study appreciated and acknowledged the fact that the government has recently taken a number of initiatives to ensure the quality of education and to bring some positive changes in the assessment system. Teaching Quality Improvement (TQI_SEP, MoE), a development organisation has been working since 2005, to improve the quality of secondary education. The organisation has been developing training programmes for subject based teachers, head teachers, educational administrators both in Bangladesh and abroad. TQI has managed to develop subject based training modules for the teachers. It has also developed

a curriculum and syllabus for the one year B. Ed training programme under the National University in Bangladesh.

Besides this, a number of projects such as 'English Language Teaching Improvement Project' (ELTIP), English in Action (EiA), English for Teaching, Teaching for English (ETTE), Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project (SEQAEP) have been organising language teacher training to improve the teaching and learning of English in Bangladeshi schools. To train teachers as an on-going process the government needs to develop permanent infrastructure and institutional capacity.

To develop national capacity for sustainable teacher training, the Bangladesh government can utilise the potential of education and English departments of public universities with their expertise and infrastructure. By providing financial incentives, the government of Bangladesh, developing nations and donor agencies can encourage local ELT experts, academics and language educators from local universities to work with primary and secondary schools and English teachers to contribute to the latter's professional development and on-going learning as a kind of community service (Hamid, 2010).

In order to meet the current and future needs and challenges of the socio-economic developments of the country, the education system of Bangladesh is continually undergoing reforms. Despite all remarkable achievements, high rates of failure in the public examination and the increased dropout of students from the schools reflect the declining quality in secondary education system. The Bangladesh government should recognise the needs on a priority basis to improve the quality of education alongside its efforts for creating equitable access to secondary education. Though the government has limitations, yet more investment in this sector is needed if development of education is to face the challenges of the time. (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah & Rahman, 2010).

The results of this study suggest that in a country like Bangladesh the development of language assessment through school Based Assessment (SBA), language planning needs to be provided more extensively in order to improve the teaching in English classes. For example, the English curriculum would benefit from a shift to a student oriented approach. Class activities such as presentation skills, class participation, and appropriate tasks should be given priority. As teachers plan, they would identify the purpose of assessment, plan the assessment itself, involve students in self-and peer assessment, know the curriculum and collaborate with other teachers when possible.

In the new education policy 2010 (MoE, 2010) the Bangladesh government has addressed some major changes in the education system. However, it is time to consider whether the government is institutionally prepared enough to bring the necessary changes. Therefore, the government should allocate more financial support to set up effective, supportive infrastructures, particularly in thrust areas, to strengthen capacity building of the teachers to operationalise the new policy as a possible effective way to make education truly useful for the economy.

From the analysis of the results of this study it is evident that the teachers and the students consider that assessment is an inseparable part of teaching. The teachers in this study mentioned that though CLT has been introduced in the secondary level for more about fifteen years most teacher are still not well informed about the system. Besides this, because of the gap between the stated objectives of teaching English and the assessment system, communicative based language teaching is not working well because of teachers' level of competency and want of effective classroom environment. Both the teachers and students in this study have emphasised the need to practise formative assessment for more student

engagement. These teachers considered that there is a hopeful change in their value, beliefs and attitudes and they are trying to bring a change from the traditional to the new approaches and they think that the government should create more opportunities for the development of teachers' capacity building to ensure quality in the secondary education.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The research has been conducted in order to explore teachers' and students' understandings of language assessment at the secondary schools in Bangladesh. The study of literature review in the Bangladeshi context revealed that summative assessment seems to be still dominating in the language assessment system. The study shows that both the teachers and the students consider formative assessment provide better learning opportunities for developing students' creativity. However, as there are apparently many barriers for effective teaching to occur, teachers find challenges in implementing formative assessment practices. Both the teachers and the students have addressed the need to include all the language skills in the assessment process, and they have given greater focus on developing physical facilities in the classroom for better language teaching.

6.1 Main focus/findings of the study

This study showed that both the teachers and the students have been trying to emerge from a traditional approach to a new communicative approach of language teaching. A hopeful change is noticed in the practice of classroom teaching. Both the teachers and the students appreciated the different teaching -learning strategies practised by them which helped them with better understandings. Both the teachers and the students emphasised the value of more student engagement using different learning activities such as group work, pair work, role play, demonstration for more effective learning and they addressed the need for some changes in assessment process, the need to reduce student- teacher ratio and overcome the classroom barriers by developing physical facilities. The findings revealed that both the teachers and the students are very much aware of their learning needs and they can identify

the gap between the curriculum guidelines and the present assessment system and have addressed the need for training for building teaching capacity of the teachers.

6.2 Implication and recommendations

This thesis highlights a number of challenges that need to be addressed if continued progress in the implementation of a broader understanding and forms of assessment is to be made.

These issues include the implication for pre-service and in-service teacher education as well as implications for resourcing and policy.

Implication for pre-service and in-service teacher education

Teacher education plays the vital role in developing quality teachers. In Bangladesh the National University conducts and supervises the government controlled one year teacher education programme (B. Ed & M. Ed). These programmes are currently run through 14 government Teachers' Training Colleges as well as private TTCs. To ensure quality of these programmes I think more focus should be given on practical approaches of the training, and they should have strong monitoring and accountability system.

To introduce the new trends in English language teaching, regular professional development courses could be conducted for teachers of English and opportunities for training for English language teachers should if at all possible be extended. Some development projects have organised training programmes for short periods (2-3 weeks). Short training courses of three and six months duration could also be run for teachers currently. Teachers complete the training and return to the schools but very few teachers appear to implement new strategies and understandings as there is no monitoring system from the education authority.

Therefore it is the time for policy makers to analyse the ways and means of implementing effective and cost efficient professional development training for developing national capacity for sustainable teacher training and to achieve these goals, the government may explore the potential of local institutes and their expertise.

Implication for resourcing.

Resource materials are the essential components for effective classroom teaching. For developing the students' motivation and to engage them in the activities and to make the classroom more lively teachers need to use teaching aids frequently. However, the classrooms in the secondary schools in Bangladesh in most cases are not well equipped with resources/teaching materials. Because of financial constraints of the governments/institutes, the authority/teachers cannot provide/manage these materials. As a result, teachers are sometimes limited in providing effective learning opportunities.

Therefore to ensure quality in teaching more support from the part of the governments and private sectors are immediately needed. For developing listening and speaking skills of the students, the education authority could create better opportunities for the students to practice in the classroom using modern technology such as audio/video, and TV. A language laboratory where students could practice in their free time could be established in secondary schools.

Implication for policy

A well- defined language teaching policy should be formulated with an effective curriculum that includes the guidelines for assessing all the four English language skills, in the secondary schools. Input from teachers, students, parents and administrators may create a greater awareness of the need to develop a more effective system for the overall development of

language skills so that the students are better equipped to meet challenges of second language learning, particularly in oral competencies. A focus on the selection, recruitment and the professional development of teachers of English is crucial. It is necessary to adjust the teacher training curriculum so that teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement a range of assessment practices.

If real changes in teaching and language assessment throughout in secondary schools are to happen, policies need to be strengthened and a deeper investment in implementation must occur. The policy makers need to address the gaps between the breadth and depth of English language curriculum to ensure economic development and more equitable outcomes.

6.3 Limitation of the study

The limitations of the study have been addressed in the discussion chapter. The sample size of this study is small which has been taken from the city. It could be better if the samples were chosen from the diverse sources like urban, semi-urban and rural areas. In the study only six English language teachers and nine students from level nine have been included for semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews and no teachers and students were selected from the secondary madrashas which is also another form of mainstream (government controlled) education. More teachers and students from diverse groups could reflect different results for the study. In the study no samples (people) were selected from the policy level who could give more informative guidelines to improve the ELT condition in the Bangladeshi secondary school context. Beside these, classroom observation was not included in the study that could have provided rich data on classroom interactions and realities what is going in there between the teachers and the students.

6.4 Further study

From the findings of this study many unanswered questions have arisen which must be addressed. In the present study, samples have been selected from a particular area. I believe more diverse samples from different sources may give different results. I believe class observation by the researcher could give some insight into how the English language teachers and the students interact, and how they response to a particular information. In a further study some samples (people) from the policy level could be included that may provide different insight in the study. I believe that a quantitative/mixed study taking a large sample of teachers and students from different areas of the country could provide more insight about the current language assessment situation in the secondary schools in Bangladesh.

In conclusion it could be commented that to improve the ELT situation in Bangladesh, curriculum guidelines will need to be changed and all the strands of English included in the assessment process. Therefore, some reforms of the examination system are required. The development of resources and more training for the teachers are integral to the success of these reforms. Ideally, the Ministry of Education should form a committee of the experts to identify national needs, including the development of a national language policy which should identify the goals and objectives of language learning backed by research that will best contribute to the economic, social, political and cultural development of Bangladesh as an independent nation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview questions for teachers ‘Semi-structured interviews’

Question-1

How do you assess the students in a classroom situation? Can you describe the activities?

What challenges do you find with these activities?

Question-2

In your opinion what is the relationship between teaching learning, and assessment?

Question-3

How do you assess the reading and writing skills of the students in the English language classroom? What drawbacks do you find? How do you try to overcome them?

Question-4

What do you understand to be the meaning of formative and summative assessment?

Question-5

What changes have occurred in the assessment system in the last 10 years?

Question-6

Can you mention any recent development in English language assessment that has occurred in this school?

Question-7

What do the curriculum guidelines say about the current assessment approaches? Do you agree with the guidelines? What changes do you think could be useful? Why and why not?

Question-8

In your opinion what is the teachers' attitude towards change in language assessment in the secondary schools in Bangladesh?

Question-9

How would you address the classroom barriers in the secondary schools in Bangladesh?(Including yours)

Question-10

Do you think in most cases teachers in our secondary school prioritize curriculum requirements rather than activity based teaching-learning

Question-11

What is your opinion about classroom culture and setting in the secondary schools in Bangladesh? (Including teacher student relationship, learning environment)

Question-12

How do you assess listening and speaking skills in the classroom situation currently? Give some examples. What challenges do you find? In what ways do you think these two skills could be formally assessed? What would you do?

Question -13

Any more comments?

Appendix B

Interview questions for students' 'Focus group interviews'

Question-1

What do you understand English language assessment? Can you give some examples?

Question-2

What activities do the teachers use to assess you in English language classroom?

Question-3

How does your English language teacher help you to learn?

Question-4

What are the skills do you think useful to be a good learner?

Question-5

How are the language skills assessed in English language classroom? Do you think present assessment system of these skills is appropriate?

Appendix-C

Definition of the terms/Glossary

‘Secondary school’ means from level Six - Ten in Bangladesh.

Teachers refer to secondary school teachers.

‘Students’ refer to secondary school students. In my study I have focussed on students of level ‘nine’ as sample.

‘Communicative approaches’ refer to a particular kind of teaching method, where the teachers teach in the classroom involving the learners in different kinds of activities such as group work, pair work, demonstration, role play and interaction between the teacher and students, and students and students.

‘Grammar-translation’ method refers to a particular kind of teaching method, where the teachers teach in the classroom using grammar and translation. In this method, teachers translate the passage and vocabularies into students’ mother tongue not using English terms. As this approach does not focus on all the language skills appropriately, students fail to develop an overall command on the language.

SSC-Secondary School Certificate. This examination is held after the completion of Year Ten academic study.

HSC-Higher Secondary Certificate. This examination is held after the completion of Year 11 and 12 academic study.

MoE- Ministry of Education. In Bangladesh it is a government department which is responsible for reforming, forming and implementing education policies.

NCTB, MoE- National Curriculum and Text book Board, Ministry of Education. It is a government department which is responsible for designing and implementing curriculum and manages the publication of the text books for the primary, secondary and Madrasha level in Bangladesh.

CPD- Continuous Professional Development. It is a three weeks Training Programme for the secondary English teachers conducted by TQI-SEP, MoE.

TQI-SEP, MoE-Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project, Ministry of Education. It is a development project which has been working for the development of the secondary education in Bangladesh since 2005.

ELTIP, MoE-English Language Teaching Improvement Project, Ministry of Education. It is a development project which has been working for the development of the English language improvement for the secondary education in Bangladesh since 1997 and which conducted a ‘Training programme’ for the secondary school English teachers for two weeks.

SESIP, MoE-Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project, Ministry of Education. It is a development project which had been working for the development of secondary education in Bangladesh from 1999 to 2006.

PROMOTE, MoE-Programme to Motivate, Train and Employment Female Teachers in Rural Secondary Schools in Bangladesh, Ministry of Education. It was a development project which had been working for the development of secondary education in Bangladesh from 1995-2005.

Appendix-D

Information letter for the Head Teacher/Teachers/Students/Parents

Telephone: +64 3341 1500 Extn 52030, 0088-01552-393119

Email: mal144@uclive.ac.nz

Date-

Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on English Language Assessment: Reading and Writing Skills in the Secondary English Language Teaching Curriculum in Bangladesh.

Information Letter to the Head Teacher

Dear Sir/Madam

I am Mohammad Ali and currently studying Master of Education at the College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand. As a part of my study I am undertaking a thesis that focuses on English language assessment in the secondary schools in Bangladesh. I will be working under the supervision of Dr Ronnie Davey, Principal Lecturer, and Faye Parkhill, Senior Lecturer, College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

The aim of the project is to find out the current level of understanding of teachers and students. It also focuses on how teachers understand and manage their assessment. I will conduct semi-structured interviews with six English language teachers individually for an hour and a focus group interview with eight students for around 45 minutes.

Teachers and students will be provided with interview questions so that they can provide descriptive information. I would like to have preliminary discussions with the teachers and students so that I can clarify certain information and respond to any of their questions.

I would like to work in your school because of its cultural diversity, supports, and experienced teachers. The interview will be audio-taped so that I can listen to the responses several times to transcribe the interviews. After completing the transcripts, I will send them to the teachers and students so that they can check and give me feedback

Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. Pseudonyms of the school, teachers and students will be used. Participation in the project is voluntary and any participant can withdraw at any time. The data will be stored in a secure place and will be destroyed after five years.

I am seeking your approval to conduct the research in your school and I need your help to nominate three teachers and four students for the purpose of the study.

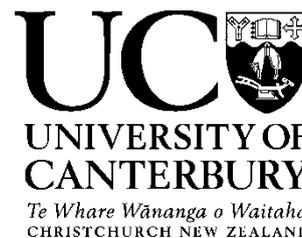
If you have any complaints, you can contact Mr Md. Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary & Project Director, TQI-SEP (Phone: 9562228, Email: nazrul@tqi-sep.org) or the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch; email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz.

Yours sincerely

Mohammad Ali

Telephone: +643-3411500 Ext-52030, 0088-01552-393119

Email: mal144@uclive.ac.nz



Date-

Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on English Language Assessment: Reading and Writing Skills in the Secondary English Language Teaching Curriculum in Bangladesh.

A Letter of Information to Participating Teachers

Dear Participant

I am Mohammad Ali and currently studying Masters of Education, at the College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand. As a part of my study, I am undertaking thesis that focuses on English language assessment in the secondary schools in Bangladesh. I will be working under the supervision of Dr Ronnie Davey, Principal Lecturer, and Faye Parkhill, Senior Lecturer, College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

The aim of the project is to find out the current level of understanding of teachers and students. It also focuses on how teachers understand and manage their assessment.

I have discussed the aims and objectives of the project with the Head teacher and he/she has suggested your name.

I will conduct semi-structured interviews with six English language teachers individually.

You are one of the six teachers who are invited to work in this project. Each teacher will be provided with interview questions so that he/she can provide descriptive information of the questions.

You have been selected because of your experience in this field.

I would like to have a preliminary discussion with you so that I can clarify and respond to any of your questions. The interview will be audio-taped so that I can listen to responses several times in order to transcribe the interviews accurately. After completing the transcripts, I will send them to you so that you can check and give me feedback.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. Pseudonyms of the school, teachers and students will be used. The data will be stored in a secure place and will be destroyed after five years.

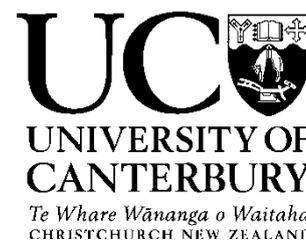
Participation in the project is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time during the project.

If you have any complaints of the research process you may contact, Mr. Md. Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary & Project Director, TQI-SEP(Phone: 9562228, Email: nazrul@tqi-sep.org) or the chair of the Educational Research Human Ethics, University of Canterbury, New Zealand and also with my supervisors.

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided. I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contribution.

Yours sincerely

Mohammad Ali



Telephone: +643-3411500 Ext-52030, 0088-01552-393119

Email: mal144@uclive.ac.nz

Date-

Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on English Language Assessment: Reading and Writing Skills in the Secondary English Language Teaching Curriculum in Bangladesh.

A Letter of Information to the Parents and Caregivers

Dear Parents and Caregivers

I am Mohammad Ali and currently studying Masters of Education, at the College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand. As a part of my study I am undertaking a thesis that focuses on English language assessment in the secondary schools in Bangladesh. I will be working under the supervision of Dr Ronnie Davey, Principal Lecturer, and Faye Parkhill, Senior Lecturer, College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

The aim of the project is to find out the current level of understanding of teachers and students. It also focuses on how teachers understand and manage their assessment.

Three teachers from your child's school are participating in the project.

I will conduct focus group interviews to investigate how children feel about English language assessment. Interview sessions will be for 45 minutes.

Teachers and students will be provided with interview questions so that they can provide descriptive information of the questions. I would like to have a preliminary discussion with students so that I can clarify and respond to any of their questions.

The interview will be audio-taped so that I can listen several times in order to transcribe the interviews accurately. After completing the transcripts I will send them to the students so that they can check and give me feedback.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. Pseudonyms of the school, teachers and students will be used. The data will be stored in a secure place and will be destroyed after five years.

Participation in the project is voluntary and any participant can withdraw at any time during the project. If you agree that your child can take part in the research, please sign the consent form below.

My study has been approved by the Educational research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

If you have any complaints, you can contact Mr Md. Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary & Project Director, TQI-SEP (Phone: 9562228, Email: nazrul@tqi-sep.org) or the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch; email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz.

Yours sincerely

Mohammad Ali

Telephone: +643-3411500 Ext-52030, 0088-01552-393119

Email: mal144@uclive.ac.nz

Date-

Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on English Language Assessment: Reading and Writing Skills in the Secondary English Language Teaching Curriculum in Bangladesh.

A letter of Information to the students

Dear Students

I am Mohammad Ali and currently studying Masters of Education, at the College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand. As a part of my study I am undertaking my thesis that focuses on 'English language assessment in the secondary schools in Bangladesh'. I will be working under the supervision of Dr Ronnie Davey, Principal Lecturer, and Faye Parkhill, Senior Lecturer, College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

The aim of the project is to find out the current level of understanding of teachers and students. I will conduct a group interview with you to investigate how you feel about English language assessment.

You will be provided with interview questions in order to obtain information from the questions. I would like to have a preliminary discussion with you so that I can clarify everything to you and respond to any of your questions.

The interview will be audio-taped so that I can listen several times to prepare a written copy of the interviews. After completing written copies of the interviews I will send them to all the students so that they can check and give me correct information.

Your name will not be used in the interview rather you will be given a different name, and information from the interview will be stored in a secure place and destroyed after five years.

Participation in the project is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

If you have any complaints, you can contact Mr Md. Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary & Project Director, TQI-SEP (Phone: 9562228, Email: nazrul@tqi-sep.org) or the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch; email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz.

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the envelop provided by 30/11/2010

I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contribution

Thank you

Mohammad Ali

Appendix-E

Consent for the Head Teacher/Teachers/Students/Parents

Telephone: +643-3411500 Ext-52030, 0088-01552-393119

Email: mal144@uclive.ac.nz



Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on English Language Assessment: Reading and Writing Skills in the Secondary English Language Teaching Curriculum in Bangladesh.

Consent Form for Head Teacher

I have been given a full explanation of the project and had an opportunity to ask questions about the project. I understand what will be required of me and of my English teachers and students. I also know that the participation of the teachers and students is voluntary and that they can withdraw themselves from the research at any stage without penalty.

I understand that any information or opinions, my colleagues and students will provide, will be kept confidential to the researcher. My school, and colleagues and students will not be identified in any published writing; and data collected for this study will be stored in a secure place and destroyed after five years.

I also understand that I will be sent a report on the findings of the study to my Email/postal address given below.

If I require further information, I can contact the researcher Mr Mohammad Ali; and if I have any complaints, I can contact Mr Md. Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary & Project Director, TQI-

SEP (Phone: 9562228, Email: nazrul@tqi-sep.org) or the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch; email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz.

By signing below, I agree that this research can be conducted in my school.

Name :

Date :

Signature :

Cell/ Phone Number :

Email/Postal Address :

Please return this completed consent form to _____ in the envelope provided by 30/11/2010

Telephone: +643-3411500 Ext-52030, 0088-01552-393119

Email: mal144@uclive.ac.nz

Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on English Language Assessment: Reading and Writing Skills in the Secondary English Language Teaching Curriculum in Bangladesh.

Consent Form for Teacher

I have been given a full explanation of the project and had an opportunity to ask questions about it. I understand what will be required of me if I agree to take part in the project and I also know that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw myself at any stage without penalty.

I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher in a way that I will not be identified in any report of the research. Data collected for this study will be stored in a secure and destroyed after five years.

I understand that I will be sent a report on the findings of the study to my Email address given below.

If I require further information, I can contact the researcher Mr Mohammad Ali, and if I have any complaints, I can contact Mr Md. Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary & Project Director, TQI-SEP (Phone: 9562228, Email: nazrul@tqi-sep.org) or the Chair of the University of

Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch;
email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz.

By signing below, I agree to take part in this research project.

Name :

Date :

Signature & Date :

Cell Phone Number :

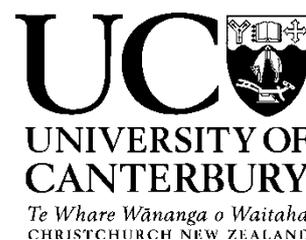
Email Address :

Please return this completed consent form to Mr _____ in the envelope
provided by 30/11/2010

Telephone: +643-3411500 Ext-52030, 0088-01552-393119

Email: mal144@uclive.ac.nz

Date-



Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on English Language Assessment: Reading and Writing Skills in the Secondary English Language Teaching Curriculum in Bangladesh.

Consent Form for Students

I consent/agree to participate in the research project, "Teachers' and students' perspectives on English language assessment; Reading and Writing skills in the secondary ELT curriculum in Bangladesh".

I have clearly understood the aims and objectives of the research project and my role in the research if I participate.

I understand that my name will not be used and the information will be confidential.

I understand that my participation in the project is voluntary and I may withdraw any time.

If I have any complaints, I can contact Mr Md. Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary & Project Director, TQI-SEP (Phone: 9562228, Email: nazrul@tqi-sep.org) or the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch; email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz.

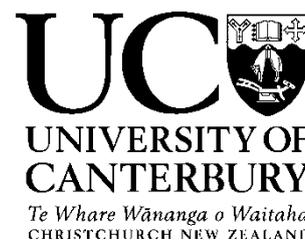
By signing below, I agree to participate in this project.

Name _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Please return this completed consent form to _____ in the envelope
provided by 30/11/2010



Telephone: +643-3411500 Ext-52030, 0088-01552-393119

Email: mal144@uclive.ac.nz

Date-

Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on English Language Assessment: Reading and Writing Skills in the Secondary English Language Teaching Curriculum in Bangladesh.

Consent Form for the Parents/Guardians

I am giving permission for _____ to participate in the research project, Teachers' and students' perspectives on English language assessment; Reading and Writing skills in the secondary ELT curriculum in Bangladesh.

I have understood the information given to me regarding the research project and the expected roles of my child.

I understand that the information provided by the children will be kept confidential and researcher will use pseudonyms of the school and participants. Data collected for this study will be stored in a secure place and destroyed after five years.

I understand participation is voluntary and that either myself or my child may choose to withdraw any time without any penalty.

If I have any complaints, I can contact Mr Md. Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary & Project Director, TQI-SEP (Phone: 9562228, Email: nazrul@tqi-sep.org) or the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch; email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this project.

Name _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Please return this completed consent form to _____ in the envelope provided by 30/11/2010

Appendix-F

Ethical approval letter of University of Canterbury, NZ to conduct the research study

Ref: 2010/60/ERHEC

18 October 2010

Mohammad Ali
6/32 Ilam Apartments
Homestead Lane
CHRISTCHURCH

Dear Mohammad

Thank you for providing the revised documents in support of your application to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. I am very pleased to inform you that your research proposal "Teachers' and students' perspectives on English language assessment; reading and writing skills in the secondary ELT curriculum in Bangladesh" has been granted ethical approval.

Please note that should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval please let me know.

We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Surtees
Chair
Educational Research HEC

"Please note that Ethical Approval relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval or clearance by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research."

Appendix-G

The Bangladesh government's approval to conduct the study

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education
Shikkha Bhaban, Dhaka-1000

The Chair
Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC)
University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

Subject: Permission for the Bangladeshi Teacher Educators studying for Master of Education at the University of Canterbury to conduct research on Bangladesh Education.

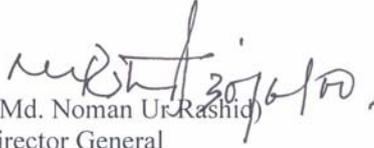
Dear Sir/Madam

The following 14 Bangladeshi Teacher Educators studying Master of Education at the University of Canterbury are hereby given permission to conduct research in the education sector of Bangladesh as a part of their Master of Education program.

Sl.No	Name and Designation
1	Mollah Mohammed Haroon- Ar-Rasheed, OSD (Lecturer, English), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
2	Tania Afreen Khan, OSD (Lecturer, Guidance & Counselling), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
3	Niger Sultana, OSD (Lecturer, Bangla), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
4	Md. Ariful Haq Kabir (Lecturer, Sociology), IER, Dhaka University (on Education Leave)
5	Mohammad Ali, OSD (Assistant Professor, English), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
6	Md. Ahasanul Arefin Chowdhury, OSD (Lecturer, Education), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
7	Md. Safayet Alam, OSD (Assistant Professor, Physics), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
8	Nazma Purvin, OSD (Lecturer, Mental Hygiene), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
9	Muhammed Mahbubur Rahman, OSD (Lecturer, Education), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
10	Abu Nayeem Mohammad Salauddin (Lecturer, Educational Administration), , IER, Dhaka University (on Education Leave)
11	Ranjit Podder, OSD (Assistant Professor, English), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
12	Sanjoy Kumar Mazumder, OSD (Lecturer, English), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
13	Mst. Shaila Banu, OSD (Lecturer, Physics), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
14	Sheikh Mohammad Ali, OSD (Lecturer, Education), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh

It will be ensured that the researchers have their consent of participation before they start their research; guarantee confidentiality of data and individuals; avoid unnecessary deception; pose no risk to any participants; and their behaviour consistent with the Treaty of Waitangi obligations.

If any complications arise at any stage of the research, the ERHEC is advised to contact Mr. Md. Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary & Project Director, TQI-SEP (Phone: 9562228, Email:nazrul@tqi-sep.org).


(Professor Md. Noman Ur Rashid)
Director General

Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education
Shikkha Bhaban. Dhaka-1000

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education
Shikkha Bhaban, Dhaka-1000

The Chair

Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC)

University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

Subject: Permission for the Bangladeshi Teacher Educators studying for Master of Education at the University of Canterbury to conduct research on Bangladesh Education.

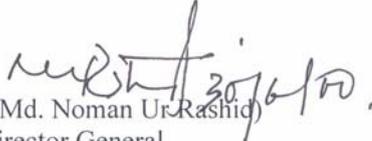
Dear Sir/Madam

The following 14 Bangladeshi Teacher Educators studying Master of Education at the University of Canterbury are hereby given permission to conduct research in the education sector of Bangladesh as a part of their Master of Education program.

Sl.No	Name and Designation
1	Mollah Mohammed Haroon- Ar-Rasheed, OSD (Lecturer, English), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
2	Tania Afreen Khan, OSD (Lecturer, Guidance & Counselling), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
3	Niger Sultana, OSD (Lecturer, Bangla), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
4	Md. Ariful Haq Kabir (Lecturer, Sociology), IER, Dhaka University (on Education Leave)
5	Mohammad Ali, OSD (Assistant Professor, English), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
6	Md. Ahasanul Arefin Chowdhury, OSD (Lecturer, Education), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
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If any complications arise at any stage of the research, the ERHEC is advised to contact Mr. Md. Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary & Project Director, TQI-SEP (Phone: 9562228, Email:nazrul@tqi-sep.org).


 (Professor Md. Noman Ur Rashid)
 Director General

Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education
Shikkha Bhaban. Dhaka-1000

