

# English Language Learning and Prospect of Secondary Schools in Bangladesh

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## Abstract

In Bangladesh, English as an international language is taught in primary and secondary schools to build a strong foundation for English learning for children from childhood. The necessity to determine the current situation of English-language learning among secondary school students in Bangladesh and the future of this phase is the sole purpose of this study. For this study, data were collected from ten different secondary schools in Bangladesh where the Class 8—*English for Today* book was used to teach English. Concisely, the objectives of the study are to gather information and discuss learning the vibrant international languages of the present and future. In this research, data collected from 200 students from ten secondary high schools in ten upazilas [sub-districts] is used to analyze prospective English language learning. The results of the analysis revealed that the textbook is not effective for English learning and has not met people's expectations. Measures must be taken to overcome the problem.

**Keywords:** English language learning, learners' attitudes, parents' attitudes in secondary school, teachers' attitudes

## 1. Introduction

Bangladeshi students have gone through a wide range of changes in English learning after their independence. Teachers have also faced difficulties due to various policy changes in teaching. The grammar-translation method (GTM) was previously used, but in 2001, communicative language teaching (CLT) was introduced in *English for Today* (EFT), which was specifically designed for students to introduce this method. From 1997 to 1999, CLT was experimentally introduced to Classes 7, 8, and 9, respectively. After that, in 2001, this method was included in the EFT textbook for the secondary level. Despite these changes, no exceptional capacity for understanding or using English was developed in secondary school students. The preface stated that the main purpose of EFT is to develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills among students. Unfortunately, it did not work out in the real situation. The purpose was not served by providing only one or two passages in each lesson. In addition, several of the contents were irrelevant to the study. Furthermore, in the exam, only the reading and writing abilities of the students were tested, and the listening and speaking skills were completely ignored (Nayeen, 2020), so students at the secondary school level do not learn proper English and as a result hinder their future study. The EFT should be studied again by experts and organized again to make it a better learning instrument for students by covering all four areas of English learning.

### 1.1 Review of the Literature

Larsen-Freeman (2000) said that the focus of language learning should be on a communicative approach in which language use must be taught in appropriate situations as well as the ability to establish a bridge between expression and full competence. According to Richards' (2006) definition, communicative teaching involves a series of activities, including the effective promotion of class learning with the help of students and teachers. Savignon (2007) disagreed with the above theory and considered the communicative teaching approach to understanding language deeply without customization from the social or individual point of view. Shurovi (2014) and Rahman and Karim (2015) agreed on the specific objective of the teaching method, which is to improve the communication skills of learners. Furthermore, according to Ahmed (2019), conversing knowledge should be completed with individualized exercises for students. Textbook evaluation is directly related to curriculum

implementation (Fullan, 2007), and it is an essential component of language policy and planning (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003). Lee and Collins (2009) address the importance of the English textbook as an integral part of English teaching by arguing that textbooks do more than just transmit facts, figures, and linguistic skills in English. According to Khan and Rahman (2019), the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook have been identified by the critical evaluation conducted by the researchers, although the textbook has strengths, such as diverse content and the writer's awareness of "glocal subjectivity". It has some drawbacks, such as the marginalization of listening skills, insufficient communicative activities and tasks, excessive use of conventional evaluation methods. According to Islam et al. (2021) and Khan and Rahaman (2019), the NCTB launched the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) in 1997, which was funded by the United Kingdom's Department of International Development (DFID). Following the initial survey, the project suggested that a board of local experts be formed to create English textbooks for grades IX, X, XI, and XII using the CLT approach. These textbooks were first used in 2001 and were still in use in 2014. However, the current textbook under review, *English For Today: Classes XI-XII* and *English For Today: Class Alim* (Saha, 2017), was introduced in 2015 at the higher secondary level. Kabir (2013) evaluates the *English for Today Class X* English textbook in Bangladesh, taking into account teachers' perceptions. Based on the responses of the teachers who participated in the study, he concludes that the textbook's components totally ignore speaking and listening skills.

### *1.2 Objectives of the Study*

The main objective of the study is to find out the current situation of the use of *English for Today* (EFT) for class VIII students in Bangladesh for learning purposes and the prospects for it. To achieve this objective, three specific objectives also have to be achieved. The study found out the teacher's evaluation of the textbook, the students' understanding of the learning, and the guardians of the learners' expectations from the textbook.

## **2. Research Methodology**

Although a few articles were reviewed qualitatively at the beginning, this study relied heavily on quantitative methodology. Questionnaires, observations of students and teachers in the classroom, and interviews with the parents of students were used as multiple triangulation approaches to perform the study. The complete study is divided into four divisions: the design and evaluation of textbooks by experts, the analysis of student learning through questionnaires, interview questions for teachers, and a questionnaire for parents of the selected schools. Data were collected from Bangladeshi schools that have followed the EFT textbook. The study's target population included students in class VIII, teachers, and students' parents. The participants are 10 girls and 10 boys from every 10 secondary schools in two different Upazilas [subdistricts], 10 English teachers who teach class VIII students in those schools, and the parents of 200 students who have been interviewed. The collected data were presented in table and graph formats and discussed in percentages to find data to fulfill the study objectives.

### *2.1 Current Approaches of Teachers to Teaching EFT*

The EFT was designed for teachers to help learners with the functional aspects of language learning. The textbook should be used as an opportunity for students to learn English and apply it in various situations for diversified purposes. To have expertise in the four areas of English, it is essential to do group work, pair work, role-play, etc. in the classroom. However, teachers do not follow this rule. They just read the textbook and translate it for the students to memorize the writings in the textbook. They never encourage students to speak or converse with each other in the English language. Furthermore, they communicate with students in Bangla, ignoring the purpose of the EFT textbook. The EFT textbooks also lack interactive conversation examples for students. Teachers focus only on the students' reading and writing abilities, simply ignoring their learning and speaking abilities. Students do not learn English properly due to these limitations. The lack of experienced teachers, the lack of enough interactive sessions, the lack of logistical support, and poor infrastructure harden English learning for Bangladeshi students (Nayeen, 2020).

### *2.2 Assessment of Expert's View on the Textbook*

From Table 1, it can be inferred that of the five experts, only two agree that the textbook is effective enough to build communication skills among students. Four experts said that effectiveness does not imply enough without speaking and listening tests for students on final exams. Except for one, all experts said that the textbook is not interesting to students. Irrelevant examples, ignoring listening and speaking skills, are the weaknesses of the book, whereas the representation of global culture, life situations, and many others are strengths. Some of the content is the strength of the book. To make the book suitable for the standard exclusion of irrelevant items, a reduction in size, including language materials for exercise, is essential.

Table 1. Experts view themselves as respondents

Questions	Yes	No	Partially agree
Is the textbook effective enough to build communicative ability among students?	2	3	0
Is the effectiveness implying without speaking and listening test for the students in the final exams?	1	4	0
Is the textbook interesting to students?	0	4	1
Weakness of the Book	Irrelevant examples, ignoring listening and speaking skills		
Strength of the book	Some contents represent global culture, life situation, and many others.		
Suggestions to make it better	Exclusion of irrelevant items, reduction of size, including language materials with exercise.		

Source: Survey Report.

### 2.3 Assessment of English Language Learning from Teachers View

Table 2 represents the opinions of 10 English teachers from the ten selected schools. Among them, 66% said that the textbook is not effective enough to build communication skills among students. Almost all teachers (90%) agree that effectiveness is not implied enough without speaking and listening tests for students in final exams. 10% of teachers partially support the point that the textbook is interesting to students, while 90% disagree with the statement. Irrelevant examples, ignoring listening and speaking skills, content that does not meet learners' expectations, and lengthy and boring texts are the weaknesses of the book, while lessons related to writing letters, reports, global culture, and many others are the strengths of the book. To place the book in a standard position, evaluate listening and speaking skills, select lessons based on students' needs and interests, include dialogues on real-life situations, exclude irrelevant and unnecessary passages, and introduce effective exercises for students' practice after each lesson.

Table 2. View of teachers as respondents

Questions	Yes	No	Partially agree
Is the textbook effective enough to build communicative ability among students?	34%	66%	0
Is the effectiveness implying without speaking and listening test for the students in the final exams?	10%	90%	0
Is the textbook interesting to students?	0%	90%	10%
Weakness of the Book	Irrelevant examples, ignoring listening and speaking skills, content that does not meet learners' expectations, lengthy and boring texts		
Strength of the book	Lessons related to writing letters, reports, global culture, etc.		
Suggestions to make it better	Evaluation of listening and speaking skills, organisation of lessons based on students' needs and interests, including dialogue with the real-life situation, exclusion of irrelevant and unnecessary passages, and effective exercises to be introduced after every lesson to practise.		

Source: Survey Report.

### 2.4 Assessment of English Language Learning from Students' Views on the Textbook

Table 3 represents the opinions of 200 students from the ten selected schools. Half of the students agree that English is used in the classroom. Only 5% of students said that they had never used it for communication in the classroom. 10% of the students said that most of the time English is used, and double this number of students stated that English is always used to communicate during their English subject class. In their classroom, only one out of every five students works in pairs, does group work, and participates in discussions. One in four students sometimes works in a group or in a pair or takes part in a discussion. The percentage of students who participate in group work is three times higher than that of those who have not participated in group work at all in their classroom. Only 25 out of 100 students have interactive classes, while only five never have this type of class. The percentage of students who have interactive classes most of the time (30%) is double that of students who have them only occasionally (15%). Approximately half of the total number of students (40%) have interest in reading the textbook. Fortunately, all students are interested in the textbook: 30% most of the time, 20% sometimes, and 10% rarely. Therefore, the number of students who do not have interest in textbooks is zero.

Half of the total number of students (50%) think the textbook has no effect on the learners. 5% said that sometimes, and the same percentage of total learners stated that the textbook rarely has effectiveness for students. Only 15% agree that the book affects students most of the time, but not always. Reading and translating passages from the textbook into Bengali, practicing grammatical rules and vocabulary, answering various questions, and using free handwriting to improve grammatical errors were all observed in the classroom. The strength of the textbook is that it provides cultural information, communicative methods, a good vocabulary, reflections on our culture, global concerns, and ideas about different aspects. Ignoring grammar, giving boring lessons with zero effectiveness for communication, and describing lessons in a difficult language are the weaknesses of the book. To make the textbook more effective and standardized for learners, a few steps are needed, such as including literary pieces by native Bangladeshi writers, evaluating listening and speaking skills, changing the question pattern, and selecting good content considering learners' needs and interests, including the topic of the real-life situation.

Table 3. View of the students as respondents

Question	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
English use in class room	20%	10%	50%	15%	5%
Engagement of students in pair work, group work, or discussion	20%	30%	25%	15%	10%
Interactive Classes	25%	30%	25%	15%	5%
Interest in reading the textbook	40%	30%	20%	10%	0%
Effectiveness of the Book for Learners to Communicate in English	25%	15%	5%	5%	50%
Language activities in the classroom	Reading and translating passages from the textbook into Bengali, practising grammatical rules, vocabulary, various question items, and free handwriting to enhance grammatical error				
Weakness of the Book	Ignoring grammar, boring lessons with zero effectiveness for communication, lessons are described in difficult language.				
Strength of the book	Other cultural information, communication methods, good vocabulary, reflecting our culture, global concerns, ideas about different aspects, and many others.				
Suggestions to make it better	Include literary pieces by native Bangladeshi writers, evaluation of listening and speaking skills, change of question pattern, selection of good content considering learners' needs and interests, including topics of real-life situations.				

Source: Survey Report.

Table 4 represents the opinions of 20 parents of students from the ten selected schools. Among them, 56% said that the textbook is not effective enough to build communicative ability among students, while only 24% agreed that it is effective. Almost 4 out of 5 parents agree that the effectiveness is not implied enough without speaking and listening tests for the students in the final exams. Only 15% stated that the textbook is interesting for children, while 65% disagreed. According to parents, the strengths of the EFT textbook are lessons related to writing letters, reports, global culture, and many others. The weaknesses are irrelevant examples, ignored listening and speaking skills, contents that do not connect with real-life examples, and lengthy and boring contents. They have suggested that to make the textbook more standard, a few things should be done, for example, adding lessons to improve listening and speaking skills, including dialogues on real-life situations, excluding irrelevant and unnecessary passages, and providing effective exercises for students to practice after every lesson.

Table 4. Parents view as respondents

Questions	Yes	No	Partially agree
Is the textbook effective enough to build communicative ability among children?	24%	56%	0
Is the effectiveness implying without speaking and listening test for your children in the final exams?	20%	80%	0
Is the textbook interesting to children?	15%	65%	20%
Weakness of the Book	Irrelevant examples, listening and speaking skills are ignored, content does not connect with real life examples, lengthy and boring contents		
Strength of the book	Lessons related to writing letters, reports, global culture, and many others, children learn to write, and their reading skills also develop.		
Suggestions to make it better	The addition of lessons to improve listening and speaking skills, including dialogue with the real-life situation, the exclusion of irrelevant and unnecessary passages, and effective exercises are essential for the practise of students after every lesson.		

Source: Survey Report.

### 3. Findings & Recommendations

From the above article, it can be seen that the EFT textbook is not effective for students. Students, teachers, and parents mostly agree that because of various reasons, such as fewer interactive sessions, difficult language, ignorance of speaking and listening areas, and many others in the textbook, it is less appealing and less accepted by learners, teachers, and parents. To overcome the constraints, a few steps must be taken. The size of the texts should be minimized, along with small dialogues for conversation practice. In addition, active participation is essential to learning the English language. Furthermore, adequate training should be provided to teachers who are not experienced in this area to make learning enjoyable for students. Finally, all the proper measures and accurate coordination are needed to make EFT understandable and effective in teaching and learning English for both teachers and students, respectively. The appropriate changes will also make parents happy when they see that their children are learning English correctly.

### 4. Conclusion

The EFT textbook has, unfortunately, failed to fulfill its intended function for students in Bangladeshi secondary schools. The design of the book and the way it was actually written are misaligned. EFT is not seen as an efficient method of learning good English by the vast majority of instructors, parents, and students. In order to make the book more acceptable, not only will the teaching approach need to be modified, but students will also need to be more accepting of the change. Students are vital to successfully navigating the educational system. It is hoped that issues can be resolved and that EFT will prove to be an effective English learning methods for high school students by taking the appropriate measures.

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