



RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Assessing English Language Proficiency: A Case Study of English Version Students of Higher Secondary Level of Bangladesh

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## ABSTRACT

Assessment is an integral part of language learning. Language proficiency can be judged by a well-organised evaluation procedure. A systematic assessment process paves the path of successful language learning. The main focus of this study is to explore the current English Language Assessment practice in Higher Secondary institutions located in Dhaka city. Five teachers and five students have been chosen for the investigation. Qualitative research method has been used to explore the assessment procedures the teachers use to assess class XI students' English language skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening and what type of challenges teachers and students encounter during assessment. Though these institutions follow national curriculum of Bangladesh, their mode of instruction is English. Since curriculum plays a vital role in learning outcome, it should be based on learners' needs and make them competent to cope up with the globalised world. The results of this study unveil the participants' attitude, opinion and interest regarding the challenges, problems and opportunities of English Version Institutions. However, a remarkable number of researches have been conducted to change the language assessment system, its impact and possibilities in developed countries but there is rarely any research that focuses on the impact of such assessment system in the developing countries like Bangladesh.

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## Keywords

English Version Institutions, English Language Proficiency, Language Assessment procedure, EMI



## 1 Introduction

Assessment refers to the methods and procedures that the teachers and educators use to evaluate learning progress, skill acquisition and the needs of the students. Since English is the most widely used language in the world, it has become the modern Lingua Franca. Considering the necessity of English, it has been a mandatory subject from class one to twelve in Bangladesh since early 1990s. From the general practice, it has been noticed that the assessment system, not teaching, influences the students most in their learning. Which is why, Islam et al. (2021) stated that assessment plays a critical role in the learning and teaching process in any domain of education.

In our educational system, managed by the national curriculum, assessment is regarded as an essential part. Learners' learning progress is meant to be evaluated through both formative and summative types of assessment. Formative assessment includes students assessing themselves, peers through writing, quizzes and conversation or group discussion. It can occur throughout the class or a course. On the other hand, summative assessment evaluates students' learning, proficiency and achievement at the end of a course or program. In our education system, classroom teaching and learning are mostly exam oriented. Among all the four skills of language learning, speaking and listening are ignored in summative assessment. Only reading and writing skills are emphasised while assessing the learners' proficiency level (Shamim,2022).

In spite of huge significance of assessment in measuring students' learning progress, an insignificant amount of the researches has been conducted on English language assessment in English Version institutions in Bangladesh. However, this study investigates how the assessment procedures influence English language

teaching and learning in English Version Institutions in Bangladesh. In this article, the researcher will review the main features of the assessment system, its limitations and possible solutions.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Education and Examination System in Bangladesh

Education system in Bangladesh is, mainly, divided into three major stages: primary, secondary and tertiary (Ali et al., 2018). The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has been formed and entrusted with the responsibility of developing the curricula and textbooks of the school and college levels. Technical Education Board is a state regulatory board that develops the curriculum, and learning materials for technical and vocational education and grants affiliation to technical and vocational institutions that prepare the students for diploma degrees and certificates. Madrasah Education Board, on the other hand, develops the curriculum on religious education and also integrates compulsory courses of general education. It awards degrees parallel to the degrees and certificates of general education such as Dakhil (SSC equivalent), Alim (HSC equivalent), Fazil (Bachelor equivalent), and Kamil (Masters equivalent) .

According to Asian Development Bank (ADB), education system in Bangladesh is, basically, a test-driven system (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018). Both external and internal examinations are administered by Education Board and by the institutions respectively.

### 2.2 Significance of Assessment in Education System

Successful implementation of the curriculum is based on the proper design, planning and outcome of an assessment procedure and the teachers are the main assessors of the students in classroom. The type or form

of assessment has a great impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Hence assessment needs to cope up with the goals and objectives of the curriculum and classroom practices. In all educational systems, at all levels, assessment is considered as a measuring tool to identify the learners' learning progress. These measures are the means to gather evidence to best meet the learner's needs for skills and knowledge development (Coombe & Barlow, 2009).

Assessing students is the most essential part of an educator's teaching profession. "An essential element of assessment literacy is the ability to connect student assessment to the learning and teaching process. An assessment-literate teacher is able to interpret data generated from a test to make useful modifications to teaching and to use assessments as a tool to improve student learning and he/she is able to discuss assessments with others in terms of key concepts in testing" (Rogier, 2014, P.3).

### 2.3 Assessment conducted in Higher Secondary Educational Institutions

Curriculum and assessment policy in Higher Secondary English focus on learning English as a skill-based subject so that the students can be competent to, successfully, communicate in real life situation. The assessment procedure in our educational institutions is mainly directed by the curriculum and it focuses mainly on learners memorization and comprehensive skills.

Through assessment teachers measure what learners learn or achieve their progress after teaching. However, actual practice suggests that there has been no significant change to the English language assessment practice: teachers do not use formative and diagnostic assessment but continue to test their students on grammar, spelling and vocabulary ((Ali et al., 2018). In general, it can be said that both classroom (formative) and terminal (summative) assessments are important for learners.

Through classroom assessment teachers teach them and also give possible suggestion based on their performance and additionally motivate them for further learning on their shortcomings.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

In this section, research methodology has been described with all bits and pieces that will be adopted to conduct the research. The aim of the study is to analyse the process of assessment in Higher Secondary English, its limitations and possible solutions. The qualitative research method has been used to explore the assessment procedures the EFL teachers use to assess class XI students' English language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) and what type of challenges EFL teachers and students face during assessment. To conduct this research, data were collected through interview, classroom observation and question paper analysis.

The following research questions focus on the challenges taken by the teachers and students during the assessment process in English Version Institutions at higher secondary level:

1. What type of assessment procedures the EFL teachers use to assess class XI students' English language skills?
2. What type of challenges do EFL teachers and students face during assessment?

### 3.2 Participants

The participants are taken from the Higher Secondary School of English Version Institution in Dhaka. The study has been conducted on 5 students from Class XI and 5 teachers from different colleges. This study adopts a qualitative multiple-case study method that focuses on the actual information collected from the participants' interview and their classroom performance. In case of teachers, data were collected through the observation of

their teaching techniques and questions set for assessing the students.

### 3.2.1 Participants' Profile

Sl.	Name	Gender	Status	Name of the Institution
1.	Mrs. Rehana	Female	Teacher	Private College
2.	Md. Rubel	Male	Teacher	Private College
3.	Mrs. Rebeca	Female	Teacher	Private College
4.	Mr. Sajjad	Male	Teacher	Private College
5.	Mrs. Taslima	Male	Teacher	Private College
6.	Farhan	Male	Class XI	Private College
7.	Tanjim	Female	Class XI	Private College
8.	Selina	Female	Class XI	Private College
9.	Rokhsana	Female	Class XI	Private College
10.	Tanisha	Female	Class XI	Private College

### 3.3 Data Collection

The participants were interviewed one by one and data were collected also through the classroom observation. During the interview, the researcher tried to find out the challenges that they encounter during assessment. During the interview, the questions were asked very frankly and comfortably so that the participants felt easy to answer. In this way, it is possible to collect authentic data. Both Bengali and English were used during the interviews to keep the conversations comfortable and casual for the participants in order to extract as much information as possible whilst lowering the risk of losing their motivations throughout the end of the interview. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed to be analysed and quoted from the finding. After analysing the answers of the interview questions, the basic problems and challenges that the students and teachers face regarding assessment in Higher Secondary English Version Institutions are going to be identified.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The researcher has chosen to follow the qualitative thematic analysis framework to compile and analyse the data collected in this study. The data collected from the interviews were analysed with the researcher's hypothesis and supported by recent studies reviewed in the literature.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensures that all the factors of ethical issues are properly maintained while conducting the research and collecting information. Participants were not forced to give interviews or give answers in a ready-made way. Moreover, to protect privacy issue pseudonyms of the participants are used and the names of the institutions are not mentioned at all.

### 4 Findings and Discussion

This study aims to investigate the challenges the students as well as the teachers encounter in English Version institutions while assessing English language proficiency in Higher Secondary level

The main focus of this section is to discuss and analyse the participant's point of views based on the data collected from the interviews and from the researcher's observation. This also includes researcher's own opinion and some possible solutions of the problem.

#### 4.1 *No separate assessment system to evaluate English language skills*

Assessment plays a vital role in both teaching and learning procedure. In Bangladesh, teaching and learning environment and technique have some changes but testing system remains the same. The term final. Year final examination, HSC or public examinations are all traditional tests. These tests are designed to assess mostly learners' grammatical knowledge (Eckes et al. 2005). Some composition parts are there but students are very much interested to memorise those ones rather than writing creatively. While the interview was going on, Tanisha was asked regarding their assessment procedure, she answered that there are reading and writing section in the question paper but "no evaluation for listening and speaking part" (DU TAN 16). Other students such as Farhan, Tanjim expressed same type of opinion.

#### 4.2 *Facing difficulties in answering creative questions*

After discussing some background questions, the researcher tried to be friendly with the participants so that they can feel comfortable in answering the questions. Since assessment is an integral part in teaching-learning procedure, it is essential to assess properly in case of answering creative questions. English Version Institutions follow the curriculum of NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board). Textbooks of English

Version are the translated copy of Bangla Version Textbooks. In answering creative questions, the participants vary in their opinion. Tanisha opined that due to vocabulary shortage, she faced difficulties in understanding and writing creative answers. Rather she prefers to "memorise the answers" as this is her habit from childhood (DU TAN 20). But Rokhsana, Selina remarked that they try to understand creative questions with the help of their teachers.

#### 4.3 *New strategies to be taken for assessing the learners' progress*

In Bangladesh, students' assessment system is based on class tests, monthly tests, oral presentation, year-end examination. Students' progress reports and decisions about their promotion to next class level are based only on their performance in examination conducted at the end of each year. However, new assessment system is needed to be introduced to assess the learners' progress in English Version Higher Secondary level. Besides examinations, a student can be assessed throughout the year in each subject by following the below criteria:

1. Presentation of speech/ individual and group discussion
2. Behaviour, values, honesty
3. Discipline
4. Participation in co-curricular activities
5. Performance in games and sports
6. Showing interest in learning

Teachers are requested to plan their assessment procedure and to keep their record properly so that students' achievement, their good and bad reports are not lost at any cost. At the same time, management and the teachers of the institution must be neutral in assessing the learners' progress.

#### 4.4 Teachers' view regarding assessment procedure

In higher secondary level, the time expansion is not enough to complete and revise the syllabus. Moreover, English version students come to know about the new curriculum and they face a lot of problems in understanding each subject. Regarding English, they think that as they are the students from English Version, they are good at English and they do not need to study or practice English any more. As a result, they fail to obtain expected result and day by day they become weak in English. Which is why, they don't feel interest in improving English language proficiency. From the teachers' interview, the researcher has come to point that lack of practice and interest in learning English, the students of English Version are not attaining satisfactory result. At the same time, teachers should be provided with training so that trained and efficient teachers can help the learners achieve their goal and objective.

### 5 Conclusion and Recommendation

This study mainly investigates the challenges the teachers and the students face in English Version institutions regarding evaluation and testing system to assess English language proficiency. The success of assessment depends on proper management and use of manpower. This study reveals some significant facts about students' and teachers' perspective regarding assessment system in English version institution.

The findings show that if the new strategies of assessment are implemented without taking proper measures by the management, the students will suffer and the outcome will be negative. In order to implement the strategies, we have to ensure proper evaluation of a student's performance. For this, some recommendations have been provided below:

1. Heads of the institutions have to call a meeting and check all teachers' record keeping in each

term.

2. Need to introduce separate assessment system in order to evaluate English language proficiency.
3. The impact of different kinds of assessment need to be explored in depth.
4. Teachers must explore some innovative assessment techniques and they have to integrate other aspects of students' behaviour, attitude into their assessments.
5. It is essential to know more about the ways or means in order to achieve targets and the success of the learners are assessed by teachers on a daily basis.
6. Further research is necessary on how parents' motivation, learners' socio-economic status and the test results affect the young learners' learning process.

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