

A Pedagogical Appraisal of the Higher Secondary Textbook of Bangladesh for Teaching Listening and Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

Textbook evaluation is essential to determine whether the text is standard enough to achieve the teaching objectives. The researcher used the qualitative research method to collect data for this study to investigate the suitability of the textbook of Higher Secondary Level in Bangladesh for teaching listening and speaking skills. Based on the internal evaluation criteria (MacDonough & Shaw, 2013) of the text and semi-structured interviews with eight teachers, the findings reveal that the book includes inadequate lessons and inappropriate activities for improving learners' listening skills. However, the study finds the book satisfactory for teaching speaking skills with suitable lessons and activities, although there is still room for improvement in the text by including more diverse speaking activities.

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1. Introduction

Researchers on textbook evaluation emphasize the significance of textbooks for English instruction in general (Pasaribu, 2022; Nazim, 2021; Mavaddat & Akbarpour, 2021). Some of them argue that an appropriate book is integral for any learning and teaching context (Qian, 2022; Samoudi, & Mohammadi, 2021; Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). Sheldon (1988, p. 238) considers the textbook "the route map of any ELT program." That is why, it is essential to appraise the suitability and relevance of a textbook. McGrath (2002) argues that a language program's progress largely depends on the text, because textbook not only serves as "a guide to teachers" but also "presents necessary inputs through various explanations and activities" (Ayu & Inderawati, 2019, p. 21). Hence, the evaluation of the textbook carries a substantial value as it helps the policy makers and authors of the future textbook writers reflect and improve based on the suggestions given by the researchers (Alkhaldi & Kayapinar, 2022; Rahmany & Khan, 2022; Pirzad, Abadikhah, & Khonamri, 2021).

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In the context of Bangladesh, textbooks are essential materials for teaching the English language, especially to use in the language classrooms (Ali, 2014). English teachers of all educational institutions across the country use the same textbook entitled *English for Today for classes XI-XII*, published by National Curriculum & Textbook Board. It aims to develop the general communicative skills of all higher secondary level learners of Bangladesh. However, it is observed that students do not develop the desired communicative competence (Uddin, 2021).

Regarding the teaching method, the traditional Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was adopted for a long time in Bangladesh. The communicative Approach (CA) to teaching the English language was introduced in Bangladesh in the late 1990s (Ullah, 2015). Yet, many of the features of GTM are still in practice in the teaching context of Bangladesh (Mariyam, Kabir & Ullah, 2015). Where GTM focuses on improving the reading and writing skills of the learners, the Communicative Approach to teaching language focuses on developing all four skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Ullah & Fatema, 2013). CA puts emphasis on developing the fluency and communicative skills of the learners. Instead of teaching grammar deductively, the Communicative approach teaches grammar inductively based on context. In line with the changed approach to teaching English, English textbooks were redesigned and introduced for the students in Bangladesh. And the current textbook written for the students of H.S.C. level was introduced in 2015 to support communicative language teaching (NCTB).

Islam, Stapa & Rahman (2021) in their research investigated “higher secondary curriculum, the textbook itself, and other relevant documents.... The layout of the textbook, its contents, language level, organisation, skills covered, classroom activities, methods of assessment, illustrations, and quality of print were considered.” Hani & Siddika (2018) also conducted a survey “among the students and the teachers of H.S.C. level to analyse the application of the English textbook and to find out the gap between the text contents of H.S.C English textbook and the assessment system at H.S.C. level of Bangladesh.” However, in these studies, the specific attention to four skills, the listening and speaking skills in particular has remained under focused. Thus, studies investigating the suitability or the appropriateness of the textbook to teach four skills, especially listening and speaking skills, appear hardly available.

This study attempts to evaluate the textbook titled *English for Today for Class XI-XII*, specifically it tries to find out how far the book is appropriate for teaching listening and speaking skills at the H.S.C. level in the context of Bangladesh.

1.1. Research Questions

To evaluate the textbook titled *English for Today for Class XI-XII*, the researcher explored research questions stated below:

1. How suitable is the textbook for teaching listening skills?
2. How appropriate is the textbook for teaching speaking skills?

2. Literature Review

Textbooks are in the form of printed instructional materials, and they are designed to help teachers and learners. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000) mentioned, "a 'textbook' is a book that is used to teach any particular subject, especially in schools and colleges..." (2000: 1343). The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2006) states that the British synonym for the textbook is a 'coursebook'. In a broader sense, textbook covers course books, supplementary materials, self-access materials, and workbooks (Tomlinson, 1998). A textbook's scope is extensive and can be in the form of in-house materials.

The standard of the process of learning and teaching is determined by the materials chosen for teaching language. In any given context, the textbook plays a vital role in learners' success or failure. That is why, a particular focus needs to be given to evaluate the materials of the learners based on reliable and valid instruments. Cunningsworth (1984) mentions that the published materials might have multiple roles in teaching the English language. A textbook can serve the purpose of materials for presentation and grammar. It can also support learners as a facilitator for self-paced and self-directed learning. McGrath (2002, p. 4) holds that textbooks should not be considered a complete course. It is instead viewed as "an aid to fulfilling the aims and objectives which they have themselves formulated."

Evaluation is a kind of procedure that requires examining a thing or object. After examination, evaluation tends to form judgements that are subjective. There are different reasons for which the evaluation process is done. One of the main objectives of evaluating a textbook is determining its value or worth. Nunan (1992) argued that evaluation does not mean merely the gathering of information but instead the interpretation of the information, "making value judgment" (1992, p.185). According to Tomlinson (2003), materials evaluation is done to assess the value of teaching materials, one or more than one textbook. In this process, evaluators need to follow a course of action. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 97) opined that the evaluation of a textbook is a straightforward, analytical matching process leading to available solutions.

Tomlinson, et al (2001) argued that text evaluation is vital for the stakeholders, for it gives them ideas about the impact of textbooks upon the learners who use them. Salehi and Amini (2016) emphasize the significance of textbook evaluation to check whether the text meets the need of the learners and whether it is aligned with the aims and objectives of the curriculum. Tomlinson (2003, p 5) upholds that it is a "thorough, rigorous, systematic and principled" evaluation of the ministries, educational institutions, teachers, writers, and publishers to prepare and select materials effective for the benefit of the learners. In understanding language learning and teaching, he asserts that the evaluation of the teaching materials plays a vital role. Most linguists (Cunningsworth, 1984 to Tomlinson, 2003) emphasized the need for textbook evaluation to select the appropriate textbook for the learners. More importantly, it is crucial to comprehensively assess the existing text to understand its strengths and

weaknesses so that planning and policies can be developed for new suitable course books to benefit the learners.

Cunningsworth (1995) holds that crucial to effective evaluation is asking the right questions and explaining the answers. The evaluation checklist created by the reputed experts gives the evaluators different criteria for textbook analysis. For example, there are 45 questions for evaluation of the course book in the checklist provided by Cunningsworth. They cover various criteria such as methodology, skills, language content, design, and aims. The checklist also includes criteria such as availability and cost. In the comprehensive checklist of Sheldon (1988), 53 questions are divided into 17 different criteria. The criteria aim to evaluate content issues such as the authenticity of the materials, layout, content, and accessibility. Sheldon (1988) expresses that a wide range of E.L.T. materials is available in the world market. But there is a lack of a standardized checklist to check the materials globally.

For the comprehensive materials evaluation, McDonough and Shaw (1993) offer a lenient two-phase mode- the first is the external evaluation, while the other is the internal evaluation. The external evaluations will stress assessing the organisational foundation of the textbook. For example, this external evaluation will determine the quality of the textbook cover, its preamble, and statements of the table of contents. Next, the in-depth internal evaluations of the materials judge if there is a good match between the claims of the author and the mentioned aims and objectives of the program taught (McDonough and Shaw, 1993).

3. Research Methodology

The qualitative research method was used to conduct this study. Qualitative research is undertaken when there is a need for "exploring a problem" or issue (Creswell, 2013, p.16). Moreover, Fraenkel & Wallen, (2011) points out qualitative method explores "the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials" (p. 422). As this study explored the issue of quality of the textbook with regards to its suitability for teaching and speaking, qualitative research suits the purpose. In different phases of sampling, collecting data, and interpreting them, the features of the qualitative method were employed. The researcher conducted the study in public and private colleges to collect data from purposefully selected teachers of different educational institutions.

This study used internal evaluation criteria (McDonough and Shaw, 1993) and semi-structured interviews as the research instruments to collect data. From the different checklists available, the elements relevant to listening and speaking skills were used to adapt to this study. Because using checklist helps evaluate textbooks because it is 'systematic', 'cost effective', 'convenient', and 'explicit' (McGrath, 2002). Besides, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data for this study because it allowed the participants to reflect on what to say and how to say (Dearnley, 2005; Valentine, 2013) and explore the aspects necessary for the participants (Fylan, 2005). While conducting the semi-structured interviews, both Bengali and English were used so that the participants could express their opinions and thoughts comfortably. This study used thematic coding and content analysis as

they help “by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1969, p.14)

The participants of the study were one of the authors of the textbook, who is also an expert teacher, and seven experienced college-level (Grade 11-12) teachers. Each participant had a minimum of twelve years of teaching experience hailing from four different districts of the country. I used purposeful sampling to collect data for this study because the participants in this type of sampling could provide better data in research (Suri, 2011). Instead of novice teachers, experienced teachers were selected purposefully for interview because they were considered information-rich. Because of the practical experience of using the textbook for a long time, the participants had a good idea of the textbook, its content, tasks, and activities. They knew the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook to teach different skills. The teacher-author was reached out to get a semi-structured interview so that this study could figure out the rationale behind writing and designing the textbook as it is now.

Table 1: Demographic information of the participants

Participants	Age	Gender	Education	Teaching experience
P1	55	Male	MA in E.L.T.	25 years
P2	49	Female	MA in TESOL	21 Years
P3	45	Male	Ph.D. in TESOL	18 years
P4	40	Male	MA in Education	12 years
P5	42	Female	MA in E.L.L.	14 years
P6	45	Female	MA in E.L.T.	16
P7	41	Male	MA in TESOL	13
P8	37	Male	MA in E.L.T.	12 years

4. Findings

In the first portion of this part, the results of a general evaluation of the textbook are provided. Following that, a discussion has been made about the organisation of the skills in this textbook. The results about the suitability of the textbook for teaching listening and speaking skills have been reported in the following sections of the article.

4.1 Findings based on internal evaluations

The textbook titled *English for Today* for Class XI-XII is used to teach English to the learners of Higher Secondary Level in Bangladesh. The findings from the content information revealed that the book was published by National Curriculum and Textbook Board Bangladesh (NCTB) according to the National Curriculum 2012. And it was introduced for teaching English in 2015 in Bangladesh. A group of textbook authors, Quazi Mustain Billah, Fakrul Alam, M Shahidullah, Shamsad Mortuza, Zulfequar Haider, and Goutham Roy, wrote this book, and it was edited by Syed Manzoorul Islam and Shaheen M. Kabir. As authors and editors, they are

experienced and eminent in the field of English studies in Bangladesh and, thus, considered experts for textbook writing and editing.

The internal evaluation further revealed that the first edition of the existing textbook was introduced for the Higher Secondary Level in Bangladesh in 2015. The aim of designing this textbook was to teach communicative competence to learners of the Higher Secondary Level. The textbook contains 57 lessons under 15 units, each containing 3 to 5 lessons. The units have been developed under different themes incorporating issues from home and abroad about national and international interests. Most lessons include relevant images, warm-up activities, reading passages, and follow-up activities. Besides developing content knowledge, the warm-up and follow-up activities aim to develop the learners' communicative skills.

The textbook's authors have presented the language skills in different lessons of units. Besides local issues, the textbook materials focus on foreign cultures, so they suit the interest of the learners and teachers. The book incorporated lessons describing different world cultures, and it could be stated that it was not culturally biased. Most of the lessons include reading passages with varying types of tasks. The findings of this research show that speaking and listening skills have not been given proper attention while presenting the four skills. Besides, there is no pronunciation exercise or lessons, which is crucial to designing any standard textbook. The internal evaluation further reveals that the images and visual materials presented in this textbook are not colorful and so not much interesting to learners.

4.2. The Presentation of Skills in the Textbook

Modern coursebook design tends to integrate receptive and productive skills (Brown, 1994; White, 1988; Stern, 1992; Cunningsworth, 1995, McDonough and Shaw, 1993). It is evident that different lessons of each unit of *English for Today for Class 11-12* include sections to teach speaking, reading, and writing skills. The authors have attempted to incorporate activities that are helpful for the learners to develop the mentioned skills, but the listening skill has remained much neglected. Even though the *Preface* states that the textbook has been designed to develop learners' communicative competence in different circumstances, all skills have not been equally emphasized. There is hardly any activity or tasks to teach and practice listening skills. The relevant findings about these shortcomings have been shown in the table and figures in the following section.

4.3 On Listening Skills

The findings of the study reveal that there is little scope for practicing listening based on the lessons presented in *English for Today for Class 11-12*. No listening comprehension with recording to practice listening skills in class is there in the book. Some of the lessons with listening tasks or activities available in the textbook have been presented below:

Table 2: Units, Lessons and activities on listening

S.L. No.	Unit	Lesson	Activity
1.	3	1	E
2.	9	3	F & G
3.	10	3	E

Analyzing the text's lessons, I found that the three listening lessons presented above do not include any audio. One of the lessons (unit 3, lesson 1) includes a transcription of the audio, but the audio file of the transcription has not been shared anywhere.

E. Listen to Ms. Antara Gomes, an English teacher in a college. She is telling her students about table manners.

(Audio recording)

Transcript:

Hello guys

Hope you all are well. You know manners and etiquette are so vital in our life.

We cannot claim ourselves civilized when we lack them. Every society has particular manners and etiquettes to follow. Etiquette is also very important

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nowadays when you are online or surf in the virtual world. Netizens i.e. habitual or keen users of the Internet, call it netiquette (etiquette you show on the net).

Anyway, today I'm going to share with you something related to manners – table manners. Have you heard of Kyle Ingham? Kyle Ingham is the Founder and Editor of The Distilled Man, an online channel that helps young people become well-rounded gentle persons. Read what he says about table manners and see whether you maintain any of these manners.

Why Table Manners Matter

Often the reason someone might be concerned about your table manners isn't because your lack of manners bothers them. Instead, they might be worried it bothers *someone else*.

For instance, when you eat dinner with your friend's family for the first time, s/he may not care that you behave like a total buffoon at the table when you're just around him/her but s/he may worry that the parents will be bothered by your poor dining etiquette, because good manners are a sign of respect.

You may not practice perfect table manners at home but these are needed when you eat out or have a dinner in somebody's house.

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That's also why nowadays employers will often take you out to dinner as part of the interview process. Again, maybe the hiring manager doesn't care if you have bad table manners, but they may worry that your potential clients will be bothered that you eat like an absent-minded caveman.

So, my thought is, even if you don't practice perfect table manners at home, you should know how to behave for those important occasions.

- What is your opinion about table manners?
- Do you agree with Mr. Ingham's explanation on the importance of table manners? Why/Why not?

Figure 1: Unit 3, Lesson 1

In this lesson, Ms. Antara Gomes, a college lecturer, told her students about table manners. After the initial information, “audio recording” has been written in brackets though in reality, it’s missing. Following that, the transcription of the audio is available. Interestingly enough, the questions given after the transcription are on speaking skills, not to practice listening skills. The first question asks for an opinion about table manners, and the second one asks whether the students agree or disagree with the explanation, why or why not.

Lesson 3, *Eco-tourism*, under Unit 9 of the H.S.C. textbook also includes listening exercises which are shared below:

G. Listen to the audio file again and do the following exercises:

- II a. Find out what a ‘booming business’ is and briefly describe one such business in Bangladesh.
- b. Look up another meaning of the word ‘booming’ and make a sentence with it.
- II a. Search the Internet for Costa Rica (you can also use an atlas). Collect some information about the country such as location, population, economy, agriculture and education and make a country profile in 150 words.
- b. Draw either the map or the flag of the country.



- III With a partner make a one page ecotourism plan for a protected forest in Bangladesh (for example Lauachhara in Moulvi Bazar).
- IV Write five synonyms for ‘danger’.
- V Do you know about any species of animals, birds or reptiles in Bangladesh that is endangered? Do you think elephants will disappear from our country in the near future? Why?

Figure 2: Unit 9, Lesson 3; Instruction for listening tasks

The image shows that learners have been asked to listen to the audio file again though no audio file is available to do the following exercises. Analyzing the image, the researcher found that the exercises include five tasks. There is a mistake in the numbering: In place of I, II has been used. The content of the exercises reveals that the tasks and activities are more aligned with practicing vocabulary, speaking, and writing skills rather than listening skills. Even though finding out and searching for particular information can be used as listening tasks after listening to an audio, activities such as describing something briefly, drawing a map, writing synonyms, etc. more importantly go with the speaking and writing tasks.

Lesson 3, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, under Unit 10 also contains a listening task. The image of the task is presented below:

C. Listen to the poem once again. Then match the words in Column A with the contextual meanings given in Column B.

Words	Meanings
glimmer	the sound of a liquid gently flowing or splashing against something
cricket	home for bees
glade	stakes or poles interwoven with branches and twigs, used for walls, fences, and roofs
linnet	an area in a wood or forest without trees or bushes
lapping	leaping chirping insect
hive	to emit a faint or intermittent light
wattle	a small brownish songbird
arise	room
cabin	stand up

Figure 3: Lesson 3 under unit 10

The task in image 3 asks learners to listen to the audio again and to match words and meanings given in columns A and B. Unfortunately, the audio file is also missing in this lesson.

In the semi-structured interviews, the research participants shared that the audio file to teach listening skills had not been shared anywhere for the teachers and students to listen and do the exercises, activities, or tasks. One of the teachers stated, "Though we have just a few lessons on listening in the whole textbook. But we don't have any clue about the audio of them. Where the audio is available for the listening items have not been mentioned anywhere." [P3] Another teacher commented,

Except for lesson 1 under Unit 3 and lesson 3 under unit 10, there is no other transcription in the whole book. There are hardly any listening tasks or activities in the book to instruct learners on listening skills. All tasks and activities in other lessons have been designed in a way that we can teach reading, writing, and speaking skills with them. [P5]

The participants stated that the text is not at all a good resource or material to teach listening. One of them said,

In no way teachers can depend on this text for teaching listening skills as it does not include any item for that purpose. The only way a teacher can facilitate listening practice is to read out comprehension in class and provide a prepared practice sheet, which is next to impossible in a large class. So, it is hardly done by teachers. [P4]

In the 21st century, teaching materials should be a combination of text, image, audio, and video so that the quality of the resources can be ensured, and more importantly, the teachers and learners feel at home and get attracted to use the materials for study purposes. One of the participants mentioned,

The textbook is missing technology-assisted listening activities. The course book should have incorporated materials that may support computers, mobile, and other technology-assisted listening practices. The use of music is another helpful way of teaching listening, which the textbook should have incorporated. [P8]

One of the textbook's authors has shared several reasons for not including listening tasks and activities in the text. He argued that students in Bangladesh study mainly to secure good grades. In his words,

Here in Bangladesh, the study is assessment-driven. When a skill is not tested, teachers and students do not tend to use it for teaching and learning purposes. As listening skills are not tested. Evidently, they are not learnt or taught in our educational institutions. Hence, we did not include too many lessons and activities in the textbook. [P1]

He further stated,

In the textbook, more focus has been given to teaching writing skills because our students are weak in writing. Moreover, students will enter tertiary-level education after H.S.C. So, they need to develop writing skills to be a good writer so that these skills help them write academic papers at the tertiary level effectively. [P1]

In his interview, he added that there are listening audios for the textbook from grades 6 to 10. So, the writers felt not much urge to include more listening audios in the text and activities based on them. He further added that teachers themselves will take some responsibility to teach listening if they feel it. Another reason he mentioned for not including listening audio and activities in the text was, “One of the editors did not want to include listening audio and tasks in the textbook as there is no logistic support in colleges”. [P1]

4.4. On Speaking Skills

The results of this study on speaking indicate that the textbook contains a number of exercises that can be utilized to teach learners speaking abilities pretty effectively. Almost in every lesson of the book, there are speaking activities such as warm-up activities, tasks for describing pictures, group discussions, pair-works, project works, and so on. The activities have been presented sequentially in a well-organized way for the teachers and learners to practice speaking skills.

The very first lesson of unit 1 titled *The Unforgettable History* starts with a warm-up activity.

Unit One: People or Institutions Making History

Lesson 1

The Unforgettable History

A. Warm up activity:

Look at the photograph of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman giving the 7 March 1971 historic speech. Ask and answer the questions in pairs.



- What do you know about Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman?
- Where is he giving the speech? What was the time?
- What is the significance of the speech?
- Have you ever heard the speech? Where?

Figure 4: Lesson 1 under Unit 1

Figure 4 shows that in the warm-up activity, students are asked to look at the photograph of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and participate in a question-answer activity in pairs. Some questions have also been included to support the speaking activity of the learners.

The image in lesson 1, *Manners Around the World*, is another example of an activity helpful for teaching speaking skills.

Unit Three: Lifestyle

Lesson 1

Manners Around the World

- A. Look at the pictures. Where are the people from? What is common among them? Do you notice any difference? What difference is most obvious here?**



Figure 5: Lesson 1 under Unit 3

Figure 5 asks learners to describe pictures. It includes people from three different cultures. Learners are asked to describe the photos with some prompts, i.e. their country, the common features and differences among them, and the obvious differences. The prompts are helpful for the learners to guide them to practice speaking.

Also, group discussion as a speaking activity has been included in different lessons of the textbook. In lesson 3, *Two Women*, under Unit 1 also includes one such group discussion.

D. Work in two groups.

Group A: Read about Valentina Tereshkova

Group B: Read about Kalpana Chawla

Now tell each other what you have learnt.

Figure 6: Lesson 3 under Unit 1 on group discussion

The lesson consists of the life, works, and success stories of two women, Valentina Tereshkova and Kalpana Chawla. In activity D, the learners are asked to read the passages on Valentina Tereshkova and Kalpana Chawla and tell each other what they have learnt.

The textbook written for the learners at the Higher Secondary Level contains a lot of pair work in different lessons that are helpful for the teachers to teach speaking skills. The following image is from lesson 2, *Arriving in the Orient*, under Unit 9, which is included to facilitate the practice of speaking.

E. Discuss the following questions in pairs :

- a. What picture of the sea do you find here?
- b. The narrator is rather critical of the local people. What evidence do you find of the narrator's disapproval of the local people?
- c. Describe the competition between the sampan-wallahs.

Figure 7: Unit 9 lesson 2

The lesson mentioned above consists of the narration of the seas where the colonizers' mindsets about the oriental aspects and the native culture have been featured. The pair work asks the students to talk about sea, evidence of the narrator's disapproval of the local people, and the competition between sampan-wallahs. The speaking task aims at developing learners' critical insights and facilitating speaking practice.

Many of the lessons in the textbook includes project works to enhance learners' teamwork and develop their communication skills. Some of these project works can be used simultaneously for speaking and writing. One such project work is included in lesson 3 under unit 2, which is given below:

I. Project work:

In groups, prepare a list of your dreams for your country or the community you belong to and then present it in the class.

Figure 8: Lesson 3, Unit 2

The project work in Figure 8 asks learners to prepare a list of dreams for their country or community they belong to and then present. The task can be adapted for teaching both writing (to prepare) and speaking (to present).

Findings from the semi-structured interviews show that participants have shared mixed opinions, both positive and negative, about the suitability of the text for teaching speaking skills. Some participants opined that the text could be used to teach speaking effectively. In contrast, others opined that it would have to include more diverse activities to further improve the book to make it a suitable one to teach speaking.

Of the participants who opined that the text is a suitable one to teach speaking skills, one shared,

In my view, teachers can use the book effectively to teach learners speaking skills. There are warm-up activities in every lesson. Also, after reading the passage, there are activities to facilitate practice for speaking such as question-answer, opinion sharing in groups, discussion in pairs, group presentations, etc. [P2]

Of the same group, another one said that the book was good for teaching speaking skills, but teachers could not manage time for the learners to practice speaking. In his word,

The textbook is quite satisfactory in teaching speaking skills, in my opinion. There are several activities that can be used to practice speaking in class and out of class. Nevertheless, teachers cannot or do not manage time to teach speaking skills because there is always a kind of pressure from the stakeholders, i.e., college authority, guardians, and learners to complete the syllabus and prepare learners for the public exams so that they can secure good grades. So, when teachers rush to complete syllabus and do the tasks and activities that will help learners cut good figures in the exams, the issue of practicing speaking skills remains ignored. [P6]

Another teacher of the same side argues, “As the teachers do not focus on improving learners' speaking skills, the text should not be held responsible. It holds a good number of exercises to improve learners speaking skills.” [P7] On the contrary, one of the teachers who believed that the text was not suitable for teaching speaking skills mentioned,

The book is not satisfactory in facilitating speaking practices. Well, it includes many tasks and activities on speaking; but there is no clear instruction to accomplish the tasks. Moreover, the book has no rubrics to measure learners' speaking performance. It seems giving some activities without guidelines just to introduce

some speaking tasks. These hinder the actualization of the speaking practice in class. [P2]

To make the book a suitable one, one of the participants stated, “The text should include one line statement to elaborate, diagram or map, one- or two minutes’ oral presentation on one topic, five minutes’ extempore speech, role-play, day to day conversation or dialogue to teach speaking effectively.” [P5]

5. Discussion

Listening is an important receptive skill that plays a vital role in developing learners’ communicative competence. Compared with other skills, people use listening nearly twice as much as speaking and four to five times in comparison to reading and writing (Duzer, 1997: webpage). Yet, in secondary and higher secondary levels, the textbooks have always neglected listening skills. They do not include proper guidelines, suggestions, audio files, practice tasks, etc., to teach listening skills (Islam, Stapa & Rahman, 2021; Uddin, 2021; Ali, 2014). So, keeping aside the arguments of not teaching listening skills as they are not tested or other reasons mentioned above, the textbook should have included more units and lessons on listening tasks and activities.

As learning is not only for securing good grades, instead, it is to use the gained knowledge and skills in real-life situations; it is crucial to involve learners in various activities related to their lives or the situations they live in to develop their listening comprehension capabilities. Besides, students should be exposed to listening to diverse subject matters and practice with varied strategies to develop their listening skills (Hill and Tomlinson, 2003). Hill and Tomlinson also suggested listening transcriptions for the learners, including teachers’ lectures, small talks, airport announcements, advertisements, weather forecasts, etc. Moving forward, Tickoo (2003) has also emphasized critical listening skills. He argued that in an age of media, there is an overflow of information, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate between truth and false. Hence, “critical listening has therefore become a basic need of our time” (2003, p.138).

However, Bygate (1987) states some observations about the activities speaking should incorporate. He argues that speaking involves a minimum of two participants, a listener, and a speaker. Also, he states flexibility is an essential criterion for speaking. So, speaking activities in a textbook should be presented to facilitate communication involving two learners, and ensure conversation and dialogue practice flexibility. Wilkins (1975) advocates for freedom in language production instead of being controlled from the outside. He argues that if there is much control, then a learner cannot ‘transfer his knowledge from a language learning situation to a language-using situation (Wilkins, 1975, p.76, cited in Bygate, 1987, p. 6).

Moreover, speaking materials should include activities and tasks that involve learners to adapt, anticipate, and make choices as they are required to do so under pressure with limited vocabulary in real-life situations (Dat, 2003). He adds that the speaking topics should not be unfamiliar or irrelevant because that

might cause disinterest among the learner. Still, they should not be so familiar that they cannot provide new information. It is important to note that the speaking tasks make students “feel emotionally involved and enjoy what is going on” (2003, p. 386).

The Preface of the textbook titled *English for Today for Class 11-12* states that the book was prepared for Higher Secondary level learners with the principle of learning a language by practicing it, and a sequence has been maintained in line with the textbooks from classes 6 to 10. Contrary to these facts, it is observed that there are few listening tasks or activities to practice in this text. And the book includes few listening and speaking activities, which are insufficient and inappropriate to facilitate learners' listening skills. Also, the text does not have any rating scale though “rating or scoring procedure is one of the most important aspects” in teaching and learning (Mariyam & Ullah, 2015). More noticeably, although the audio files for class 6-10 textbooks have been uploaded to the National Curriculum and Textbook Board website, no audio file of HSC-level text is available anywhere.

6. Conclusion

In an EFL context, a standard textbook is an incentive for the learners and the teachers. The evaluation of *English for Today for Class 11-12* shows that the textbook is suitable for teaching speaking skills. However, it requires rigorous improvement to develop the learners' listening skills. To promote effective teaching of listening, the authors should incorporate specific lessons on listening as it has very few lessons on this skill. Moreover, to facilitate the students' listening practice, the textbook writers must include audio files and transcription in the text. Based on the audio files, practical tasks and activities such as fill-in-the-blanks, multiple choice, information transfer, short answer questions, map, plan labeling, etc., should also be included (Chang & Read, 2006; Renandya & Farrell, 2010). Though the textbook consists of worthy speaking activities to facilitate the speaking practice of the learners, it still has room for improvement. It can include more meaningful speaking activities such as simulations, role play, jigsaw activities, interviews, reporting, and so on to help learners improve their speaking skills (Harmer, 2007; Losi & Nasution, 2022).

The findings of this study might help the textbook authors and teachers to understand the current state of the textbook in terms of teaching listening and speaking skills crucial to developing communicative competence of the learners. This study may help the textbook authors to incorporate the missing tasks and activities in the textbook to be written in future. More importantly, it may help the teachers to redesign their lesson plans and include some of the tasks and activities missing in the textbook for effectively teaching listening and speaking skills.

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Appendix A: Internal Criteria

Listening Skills

Emphasis on listening skills; Lessons and tasks on listening skills such as images, pre-listening questions-answers, audio/video recordings of the listening activities, tasks based on audio/video recordings, and post-listening follow-up tasks and so on.

Speaking Skills

Emphasis on speaking skills; Lessons and activities on speaking skills such as types of tasks for speaking skills available in the text book such as images and cues for pre-speaking tasks; dialogues; dialogue acting out; conversations; pair or group works; Information transfer; presentation and so on.