

# **Problems and Prospects of Learning the Skills of Communication in English: A Study of the Higher Secondary Level in the Context of Mymensingh, Bangladesh**

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the challenges and prospects of learning four skills of language in English—listening, speaking, reading, and writing, related to communication, at the Higher Secondary Level in Mymensingh, Bangladesh. It attempts to explore the significance of communication skills to achieve communicative competence to have a good command of English. The research also aims to identify the challenges that the students face while learning English language skills both inside and outside the classroom and explore the potential of their skills development. It highlights the current practices of these skills as well as the teachers' effectiveness in applying them and motivating the students to acquire them successfully. It is a quantitative study where a questionnaire survey method is utilized to collect data from a sample of 200 second-year students from 8 different institutions of the Higher Secondary Level in Mymensingh. The findings reveal that students encounter various challenges in terms of learning English, including inadequate language proficiency, lack of motivation, and insufficient exposure to authentic English communication. However, the study also identifies some prospects for improving English language skills, such as providing more opportunities for communication practice, using modern technology, and creating a supportive learning environment. In the concluding section, the paper includes some comments and suggestions that can be taken into account as potential remedies for the challenges in line with the findings. The study recommends that policymakers and educators should take steps to address the challenges and capitalize on the prospects of improving the English communication skills among the students of the Higher Secondary Level in Mymensingh.

**Keywords:** Communication, language skills, classroom practices, learning, English

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## **I. Introduction**

The term “communication” has emerged from the Latin word “communis” which means common. Communication is a dynamic process in which a message is successfully transferred from the source/speaker through a proper channel using a particular medium to the destined receiver/s. Communication takes place whenever “someone sends a message and the other person receives it” (Petrie, 2011, p. 18). Effective communication is vital in the field of education as it helps the learners acquire the skills easily, strengthens the rapport between the teachers and the learners as well as creates a learning-friendly environment in the classroom. Al-Alawneh et al. (2019) address that “Communication skills are the qualities required for achieving goals that include personal and interpersonal qualities and social abilities” (p. 1). The basic skills that are closely associated with communication are known as communication skills. They are essential aspects of modern society, and mastering them in English is particularly crucial for individuals seeking success. There are four skills that are related to effective communication and these four skills include (1) listening (2) speaking (3) reading and (4) writing (Daranc1k, 2018, p. 166). Among these four skills, speaking and writing are known as productive skills whereas listening and reading are known as receptive skills (Das, 2013). These skills can be categorized as primary skills and secondary skills. Listening and speaking are the primary or basic skills of communication. Humans learn to listen to a language first and then speak it while communicating. On the contrary, reading and writing are regarded as secondary skills of communication. Ahmed (2018) expresses that all the skills of communication are equally important. That is why in order to achieve communicative competence in English, it is vital to acquire all these skills simultaneously. The ability to communicate effectively in English is a valuable asset for students. However, mastering English language skills can be a tough task, particularly in Bangladesh depending on the contextual realities, socio-cultural factors, and other related aspects (Ali, 2023; Huda, 2023).

English enjoys the status of a global language (Imam 2005, p. 471) as it is one of the most used languages in the world. In today’s world, English is the language of business, trade, diplomacy, international relations, and higher education (Mitul, 2019). Moreover, to get a good job, it is obligatory to have expertise in all four skills of effective communication (Akther, 2022). Although English is used as a foreign language in Bangladesh, it is taught as a mandatory subject at the secondary level and the higher secondary level of

education (Chowdhury and Kabir, 2014, p. 4; Barman, 2020, p. 113; Rasheed, 2012). Besides, the medium of instruction at the tertiary level in Bangladesh is English. Still, the students fail miserably to achieve communicative competence in English after completing twelve years of education (Yousuf, 2018; Mitul, 2019). They can hardly speak English and use it successfully for communicative purposes in different situations (Rahman, 2015). The lack of exposure to the English language and improper examination systems affect the development of the learners' effective communication skills and their ability to use English for performing communicative purposes appropriately in different contexts (Huda, 2013; Alam, 2017; Ahmed and Pawar, 2018). Huda (2013) conveys that in the contextual realities of Bangladesh, the students depend on their teachers as the teachers play an active and dominant role in the classroom in terms of instructing and encouraging them to achieve communicative competence in English. The current study on the challenges and prospects associated with learning English language skills for improving the competence of the students at the higher secondary level in Mymensingh is a key area of research given the increasing demand for English proficiency in today's global economy. In this context, developing English communication skills becomes a vital requirement for them to succeed in their academic pursuits and professional careers. Hasan and Wahid (2019) explain that it is a must to have proficiency in the English language in developing countries like Bangladesh as it is viewed as a decisive factor to calculate the social and economic standards of their people. However, several challenges exist that obstruct the acquisition of these skills. This study seeks to explore these challenges in detail and suggest potential solutions to improve the teaching and learning of English communication skills at the higher secondary level of education in Mymensingh. Additionally, it will examine the prospects for improving English language skills in this context by identifying the best practices, developing strategies for improvement, and evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions, considering the perspectives of the students. By understanding the challenges and prospects associated with learning these skills, the stakeholders can develop effective interventions that can help the students succeed academically and professionally. To delve deeper into the topic, the study would also explore the cultural and linguistic factors that may impact their English language learning.

## **II. Objectives of the Study**

The study is done with the intention to accomplish two basic objectives. They are as follows–

1. To identify the challenges encountered by the students of the Higher Secondary Level in Mymensingh while learning English communication skills.
2. To explore the prospects of learning and developing the students' four language skills in English in the contextual realities of Mymensingh at the HSC level.

### **III. Literature Review**

English is no longer confined to English speaking countries like Britain, Australia, and North America. It has crossed international borders and become the lingua franca for its appeal and worldwide use (Barman, 2020). In the context of Bangladesh, English is a foreign language now (Hossain, 2016; Alam, 2017; Siddique, 2017). "Bangladesh is basically a monolingual country" (Rasheed, 2012, p. 31) where Bengali is adopted as the official and state language since she came into being in 1971 to commemorate the language movement of 1952 and to harbor nationalist zeal, identity, and a sense of decolonization (Hamid and Erling, 2016; Roy, 2017). However, according to Faquire (2010), it was not the case in the past as this very part of the world used to be a multilingual one for centuries throughout its social and political evolution (p. 63). English enjoyed the status of a second language when Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan from 1947 to 1971 (Ara, 2020). Besides, English was the administrative language during the British colonial period (Islam, 2019) when Lord William Bentinck inserted it in the Indian subcontinent in 1835. They took the initiative to teach English by making it mandatory for all. Therefore, it is obvious that our great-grandparents used to be more competent and fluent in English as they were exposed to it for communicative purposes. Currently, there are four levels in the education system in Bangladesh. They are primary, secondary, higher secondary, and tertiary. Hossain (2016) points out that students from urban areas are more competent in English communication skills than those from rural areas. He outlines several factors such as lack of a good deal of content, weak base, large class, student size, and lack of students' participation in classroom activities as the crucial barriers behind their lack of competence in English at the higher secondary and secondary level in rural areas compared to urban localities (Hossain, 2016, p. 3). Yousuf (2018) writes that most of the students of the HSC level face challenges and so, do not have accuracy and fluency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. But the students of the English medium are promising in this regard.

The communicative language teaching (CLT) approach was adopted in Bangladesh in the late 1990s (Kabir et al., 2020) with the intention to make the students communicatively competent in English. It aims to improve learners' autonomy and gives a lot of emphasis on classroom activities like group work, pair work, etc (Huda, 2013; Paul, 2022). According to Sultana and Ali (2013), "Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced to develop students' four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in a communicative context in Bangladesh" (p. 114). However, the outcome of it was tissue rejection. The traditional teachers show indifference to teaching listening and speaking as they are much more difficult to teach than reading and writing in English. Selim and Tasneem (2011) have found, "When CLT came to Bangladesh, the traditional English teachers vehemently opposed it because they were not ready for something new" (p. 141). Moreover, the exam system and faulty curriculum are vital factors in this regard (Huda, 2013; Paul, 2022). Thus, CLT turns out to be a total failure in Bangladesh due to the contextual realities, large class size, lack of training for teachers, unqualified teachers, insufficient class time, teachers' reluctance to follow the CLT method instead of GTM, lack of motivation, and anxiety of the students and their lack of participation in classroom practices and activities, CLT related problems, cultural, socio-linguistic and psychological barriers, improper examination system and evaluation process, poor infrastructural facilities, and logistic support (Barman, et al., 2006, Huda, 2013; Rahman and Karim, 2015; Alam, 2017; Paul, 2022). According to Banu and Sussex (2001), English communication skills are essential for success in the academic and professional world. However, Huda (2013) opines that many students in Bangladesh face unique challenges when learning these skills due to cultural and linguistic differences. The students struggle with their use of idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and context-specific language. This is because their cultural and linguistic background differs significantly from that of English-speaking countries, making it challenging to understand the nuances of the language. Rahman and Pandian (2018) assert that the teaching methods used in classrooms may also contribute to the challenges faced by students. Besides, traditional teaching methods, such as rote memorization and repetition, are still prevalent in Bangladesh. These methods are hardly effective for teaching English communication skills, as they do not provide students with adequate opportunities to practice their speaking and listening skills (Huda, 2013; Rahman and Pandian, 2018). According to Uddin (2017), "Teaching and learning English in schools, colleges, and universities in Bangladesh have not been able to persuade the

aims and objectives neither in general nor in specific” (p. 2). He identifies four types of problems in respect of English teaching and learning as a foreign language in Bangladesh. They are teacher-oriented and learner-oriented problems, textbook-oriented problems, and teaching-method-oriented problems. The shortage of qualified and trained teachers is a major challenge in Bangladesh (Uddin, 2017, pp. 42–44)). Trained teachers are able to teach English effectively and provide necessary guidance to students in respect of developing their communication skills. According to Akbas (2016), most of the teachers of the SSC and HSC level in Bangladesh are not qualified at all and the only criteria for their recruitment is their completion of BA Honors or MA in English. They lack the necessary qualifications and training to teach the language effectively. They are also seriously underpaid for their services. This can result in poor teaching methodologies, which fail to engage students and thus, they fail to provide the proper guidance to develop their skills. In addition, traditional teaching methodologies in Bangladesh are often teacher-centered and do not encourage active participation and engagement from students and at times, asking questions to the teachers by the students is seen as arrogance, and disrespect (Huda, 2013). As a result, students do not develop the necessary confidence and communication skills to communicate effectively in English. Rahman and Pandian (2018) suggest that teachers stick to their teacher-centered classroom teaching where a good relationship is not built between the teachers and the students. They focus on the necessity of more interactive and student-centered teaching methodologies, strategies that will encourage students to actively participate in class practices and engage themselves with different language-related activities. Despite the challenges faced by students of the HSC level, there are prospects for improvement.

According to a study by Alqahtani Mofareh A (2019), using technology, such as online resources and language learning apps, can provide students with additional opportunities to practice their English language communication skills. It enables the teachers to deliver better performance and acts as a motivational tool for the students. Ahmadi (2018) writes that the use of modern technology and teaching aids surely facilitates learners’ abilities and accelerates the pace of their English possession. Additionally, Hossain (2018) suggests that English language clubs and other extracurricular activities such as public speaking, debate, and Olympiad can allow students to practice their English language communication skills in practical situations by engaging them in a wide variety of learning experiences. According to Elnadeef and Abdala (2017), language clubs enhance the teacher-student

relationship and provide students with a supportive environment to practice their communication skills, while workshops and competitions can provide opportunities for students to develop their public speaking and presentation skills. It makes the teaching and learning process easier and more practical. Collaboration and exchange programs with different schools and universities in English-speaking countries can also enhance students' exposure to the language and help them develop proficiency in communication. According to Ban et al. (2023), such programs as debate can provide students with the opportunity to immerse themselves in an English-speaking environment, practice their communication skills, and learn from native speakers of English. The current literature review forms the basis of the study by highlighting the challenges and prospects of learning communication skills in English at the higher secondary level in Bangladesh. The challenges include the lack of exposure to English outside the classroom, the shortage of qualified teachers, and the need for more interactive teaching methodologies and strategies. However, the increasing availability of digital resources, collaboration and exchange programs, and meaningful initiatives such as language clubs, workshops, seminars, and competitions can work to a great extent to improve the learning of communication skills in English. Therefore, it is crucial to address the challenges and prospects of English language skills development at the HSC level in Mymensingh. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of these initiatives and identify other strategies for enhancing the learning of communication skills in English.

#### **IV. Methodology**

The paper follows the quantitative research method where numerical data is collected through a questionnaire survey to determine the challenges and potentials of learning primary and secondary skills of language in English. To achieve this purpose, a sample of 200 second-year students from eight distinct higher secondary institutions in Mymensingh is selected as respondents to know about their acquaintance with English communication skills. 25 Students from each institution are chosen randomly by following a simple random sampling technique. The questionnaire contains 20 statements. In order to get the responses of the respondents, a Likert Scale having five options (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree) has been used to indicate the extent of their agreement and disagreement with the statements of the questionnaire. For every statement, a particular value or number is assigned. Therefore, in this regard, strongly agree=5, agree=4, undecided=3, disagree=2, and strongly disagree=1 point/points are counted as the value or number of responses. The mean

scores above 4 are considered as ‘very high’, above 3 but below 4 as ‘high’, above 2 but below 3 as ‘low’, and below 2 are seen as ‘very low’ in respect of the crucial factors associated with the students’ communication skills in English.

**V. Presentation of the Results**

**Table 1:** Statements of the Questionnaire, Percentages, and Means of Responses

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean Score
1. I have proficiency in English communication skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.	17.5%	42.5%	20%	15%	5%	3.53
2. I practice English with others both inside and outside the classroom spontaneously.	10%	29%	16%	35%	10%	2.34
3. I prefer reading and writing to listening and speaking in English.	17%	32%	12.5%	28.5%	10%	3.18
4. I have ample exposure to the English language at my Institution.	10%	22.5%	23.5%	28.5%	10%	2.85
5. I am involved in English language-related extra-curricular activities like debate, group presentation, participating in drama, and public speaking to improve my communication skills.	10%	23.5%	12.5%	38%	16%	2.74
6. I get enough support from my teachers and others in terms of learning communication skills in English.	21%	44%	10%	15.5%	9.5%	3.52
7. The teachers inform us about the significance of English for our academic and future career prospects.	26%	47%	10%	15.5%	1.5%	3.81
8. The classroom practices and teaching strategies are in favor of learning English.	15.5%	31%	17%	19%	17.5%	3.08

09. The examination system gives a lot of priority to English reading and writing over listening and speaking.	7.5%	40%	35%	7.5%	10%	3.28
10. I feel panic, fear, or anxiety while communicating with others in English.	30%	35%	15%	15%	5%	3.68
11. I do not want to look bad in front of others by making unconscious or subconscious mistakes in respect of my pronunciation, pitch, tone, spelling, and grammatical aspects.	7.5%	47.5%	20%	10%	15%	3.23
12. I face linguistic and cultural problems while learning and using English for communicative purposes.	10%	42.5%	12.5%	10%	25%	3.03
13. I encounter certain psychological barriers while learning communication skills in English.	12.5%	27.5%	20%	35%	5%	3.08
14. Our class size and infrastructural facilities are suitable for learning English communication skills.	6%	16%	24%	45%	9%	2.65
15. I have access to different means like mobile phones, the internet, online courses, language exchange programs, learning devices, etc. to learn and practice English.	6%	21%	19%	40%	14%	2.65
16. Our teachers deliver their lectures using Bangla instead of English.	31%	41.5%	2.5%	15%	10%	3.69
17. I can write accurately on any given topic using my critical thinking power and creativity, but I lack fluency in English.	4.5%	39%	21.5%	20%	15%	2.98

18. The government, local authorities, and policymakers can come to our aid in terms of acquiring communicative competence in English.	36%	42%	16%	2.5%	3.5%	4.05
19. The teachers continue to motivate us to learn the necessary skills of English even if we make errors.	25%	46%	2.5%	21.5%	5%	3.65
20. There is an English language club or magazine in our institution that encourages to practice and learn English communication skills.	6%	10%	19%	35%	30%	2.27

## **VI. Analysis of the Results and Findings**

Firstly, it is clear that a good number of students (42.5%) agree with the 1<sup>st</sup> statement that “I have proficiency in English communication skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing” demonstrating a moderately high level of confidence in their English abilities. In addition, 17.5% of students strongly agree, emphasizing their proficiency. Only 5% strongly disagree and 15% disagree, indicating that only a few students lack English proficiency. We might conclude with the Mean score of 3.53 that most students have a decent level of communication skills in English.

The results also show that only 10% of students strongly agree with the 2<sup>nd</sup> statement, “I practice English with other people both inside and outside of the classroom spontaneously.” Besides, 29% of students agree, illustrating that many actively participate in spontaneous English practice. However, with 35% of students disagreeing and 10% significantly differing, most students refrain from routinely exercising English in a natural context. As a result, the Mean score of 2.34 shows that the students’ spontaneous English usage is relatively low.

Again, 32% agree and 17% strongly agree with the 3<sup>rd</sup> statement, “I prefer reading and writing more to listening and speaking in English.” The results point out that students strongly prefer reading and writing. However, it is worth mentioning that 28.5% of students disagree and 10% strongly disagree, which shows that students have diverse choices. A conclusion that can be drawn from the Mean score of 3.18 is that students prefer reading and writing over speaking and listening skills.

The results show that only 10% of students strongly agree with the statement number 4, “I have ample exposure to the English language at my institution”. Besides, 22.5% of students agree, demonstrating that they have access to the English language in their institutions. However, 28.5% of students disagree and 10% significantly differ. As a result, the Mean score of 2.85 shows that the students’ spontaneous exposure is relatively low.

On the other hand, 10% of the students strongly agree and 23.5% of students agree with the 5<sup>th</sup> statement, “I am involved in English Language related extra-curricular activities like debate, group presentation, participating in drama and public speaking to improve my communication skills”. It points out that students are involved to some extent in such categories. However, it is worth mentioning that 38% of students disagree and 16% strongly disagree, which shows that students have diverse choices and the Mean score of 2.74 shows that students do not always prefer these activities very much.

Students admit that they get ample support, encouragement, and directives from their teachers and family members to master English communication skills in statement number 6. 21% strongly agree and 44% agree whereas 15.5% disagree, 9.5% completely disagree, and 10% neither agree nor disagree with it. Against this statement, the Mean score is 3.52 which belongs to the high category. It indicates that in spite of continuous support and encouragement to learn and use English for communicative purposes, many students ignore them and are reluctant to learn English giving effort and concentration.

In respect of statement number 7, 73% of students (strongly agree=26% and agree=47%) opine that their teachers inform them of the necessity of English language skills for their academic and future career prospects. The Mean score is 3.81 which is high. It is above expectations in the context of Mymensingh.

Against statement number 8, 46.5% of students (strongly agree=15.5% and agree=31%) view the classroom practices, teaching techniques, methods, and strategies in favor of learning English, 36.5% (disagree=19% and strongly disagree=17.5%) disregard it and 17% neither agree nor disagree with it. Here, the margin of the overall difference between those in favor and those against it is not too extensive. The Mean score is 3.08. Their responses assert that there might be some problems with classroom practices, teaching strategies, contextual scenarios, untrained teachers, students themselves, or other issues that obstruct their learning of English.

Statement number 9 is regarding the examination system of the college level in Mymensingh that focuses mainly on English reading and writing skills. 47.5% of respondents support this statement and out of them, 7.5% strongly agree and 40% agree with it. 35% remain undecided but 7.5% disagree and 10% strongly disagree with it. The Mean score here is 3.28 which highlights the common scenario of the examination system in Bangladeshi colleges. In exams, listening and speaking skills are not given as much priority as reading and writing. Stage fear or performance anxiety is a common problem experienced by students as they feel the fear of being looked at and laughed at.

For statement number 10, the calculated Mean score is 3.68 as 65% of students (strongly agree=30% and agree=35%) state that they feel panic, stress, or nervousness during their communication with others in English. On the contrary, 15% disagree and 5% strongly disagree with this claim. The students do not want to look bad in front of others by making conscious or subconscious errors in terms of their pronunciation, tone, pitch, sentence structure, and use of grammatical aspects.

Against statement number 11, 7.5% of students strongly agree and 47.5% agree, which results in a high Mean score of 3.23. It indicates the cause of the students' lack of competence in English. Therefore, they feel demotivated and show a strong sense of reluctance to use and learn English communication skills. The students experience linguistic problems and cultural barriers while learning English communication skills to a great extent.

In line with statement number 12, 10% of students strongly agree and 42.5% agree. Here, the Mean score is 3.03 suggesting that the students have to undergo language-based and culture-oriented problems while learning English. As a result, their proficiency and fluency levels in English are below average. Hossain (2016) outlines that the students from rural areas hardly use English for their daily communication. Besides, according to the opinion of Banu and Sussex (2001), the people of Bangladesh see Bengali as very dear to their hearts as they have shed blood for establishing Bengali as their state language during the Language Movement of 1952. English is completely different from Bengali in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, writing, and speaking (Islam, 2021). Besides, the religious background and socio-cultural context of Bangladesh play a significant role in learning English (Biswas, 2009; Huda, 2013; Khanum, 2014). They consider English as a colonial inheritance rather than something of their own (Chowdhury and

Kabir, 2014; Hasan and Wahid, 2019; Awal, 2022). So, they show indifference to learning English.

Again, in response to statement number 13, 40% of students (strongly agree=12.5% and agree=27.5%) confirm that they encounter psychological barriers like nervousness, lack of confidence, poor motivation, and negative past experiences in terms of English language learning whereas around 40% (disagree=35% and strongly disagree=5%) either do not face them or overcome psychological barriers successfully. It does not go in line with popular belief in the context of Bangladesh because most of the students face psychological barriers and performance anxiety while using English with others or in front of a crowd. In respect of this statement, the Mean score is 3.08 indicating that psychological or emotional barriers are a concern behind the students' low level of proficiency in English.

In most of the colleges in Mymensingh, there are far more students than they should have. The infrastructural facilities and seating arrangements are very poor. The colleges do not have sufficient teaching tools, a sound environment, adequate classrooms, proper lighting, benches, chairs, etc. Out of 200 students, 45% disagree and 9% strongly disagree with statement number 14 (Mean score 2.65) which indicates the contextual reality of the Bangladeshi colleges. The respondents have given their verdict in favor of large class sizes and lack of infrastructural facilities in the colleges in Mymensingh that hamper their learning of English. It is a major problem not only in Mymensingh but also in other divisions in Bangladesh.

Regarding statement number 15, around 54% of students claim that they do not have access to mobile phones, computers, the internet, learning devices, and online courses to learn and practice English. They are not involved in language exchange programs to facilitate their learning process. The Mean score against this segment is 2.65 which is low. Most of the students of Mymensingh have come from poor socio-economic backgrounds. They do not have the luxury to use these expensive devices and modern technology to learn English.

In the case of the 16th statement, 72.5% of students (strongly agree=31% and agree=41.5%) accept that their teachers use the Bengali language inside the classroom while delivering their English lectures instead of using English itself. The Mean score for this very segment is 3.69. It implies that the teachers lack communicative competence in English. They are not qualified and trained enough to use the English language to teach English to the

students. It also indicates the shortage of skilled English teachers in Mymensingh.

Regarding statement number 17, around 43.5% of students (strongly agree=4.5% and agree=39%) believe that they face problems only in terms of their fluency, not in accuracy in English. 21.5% neither agree nor disagree with this aspect whereas around 35% of students (disagree=30% and strongly disagree=15%) experience problems both in writing English appropriately and speaking very fluently. The Mean score against this statement is 2.98. It suggests that students lack creativity, critical thinking capability and cannot read, write, or speak properly in English.

On the contrary, for statement number 18, the Mean score is 4.05 which is very high. Against this statement, 78% of students (strongly agree=36% and agree=42%) feel that the government, local authorities, and policymakers can assist them in developing their English communication skills. They can sponsor students coming from poor families, and arrange language workshops, and seminars. They can inform them about the benefits of learning, and using English, and encourage those who perform well in listening, speaking, reading, and writing accurately.

On the other hand, 71% of students out of 200 (strongly agree=25% and agree=46%) in response to the 19th statement confirm that their teachers motivate them to master the essential skills in English. The Mean score against it is 3.65 which indicates that despite being continuously motivated by their teachers, maximum students do not abide by their teachers' advice and show indifference to learning English. Laziness, boredom, disinterest, and callousness of the students are responsible for their poor proficiency level in English.

Finally, statement number 20 is about the necessity of an English language club or English magazine in colleges that can help them to learn and practice English communication skills. Against the final statement, 65% of students comment that their colleges do not have any English language clubs and magazines. In respect of this statement, the Mean score is 3.65 which is high. It reveals that the dearth of language clubs, labs, or magazines is a significant barrier to acquiring communicative competence and practicing English.

## **VII. Suggestions and Recommendations**

The current study has shed light on the various challenges faced by students and potential avenues for improvement. The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for comprehensive measures to enhance English communication skills among students in order to equip them for the

globalized world and enhance their prospects for higher education and employment. Therefore, researchers have come up with the following suggestions and recommendations to improve learners' skills of communication in English based on the findings of the study.

1. The study has revealed several key problems that hindered the effective learning of English communication skills. It is evident that many students are afraid of making errors when they communicate with others. They suffer from performance anxiety, psychological barriers, linguistic and cultural problems while learning and developing their English language skills. The teachers as well as the guardians should come to their aid and motivate them to practice English and inform them of the ways to overcome such barriers. Furthermore, students should feel encouraged to employ English across various communicative contexts, seize every chance to engage in conversation, and progress through learning by embracing mistakes without reservation.

2. The curriculum and teaching methods employed in English language classrooms are found to be outdated and ineffective. The traditional approach of focusing solely on grammar and rote memorization hindered the development of practical communication skills. The curriculum should be revised to incorporate more interactive and communicative activities that promote speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Additionally, the use of modern teaching methodologies, such as audio-visual aids and technology, can greatly enhance the learning experience and make it more engaging for students.

3. Another significant obstacle identified in the study is the lack of exposure to English outside the classroom. Limited access to English-speaking environments, such as English-medium colleges, libraries, or language clubs, prevents students from practicing and applying their language skills in real-life situations. It is essential to create opportunities for students to interact with fluent English speakers, both native and non-native, through extracurricular activities, language exchange programs, or online platforms. Such exposure will boost their confidence, fluency, and overall communication skills.

4. The study has highlighted the importance of integrating digital technology into English language learning. The use of educational apps, online resources, and language learning platforms can provide students with additional avenues for self-study and practice. The availability of digital resources can also bridge the gap caused by limited access to quality English language materials. The government and educational institutions should

invest in providing students with access to digital devices and reliable internet connectivity to facilitate their language learning process.

5. The government should be committed to promoting English language proficiency in Bangladesh. It will be a positive step forward. Continued support and investment in English language education will contribute to the development of a skilled and globally competitive workforce. The government should provide sufficient logistic support and infrastructural facilities to every institution. Besides, class size should be reduced. It is also important to rectify the faulty syllabus and its materials. Besides, English textbook contents should be modified, updated, and objective-based.

6. The study has revealed the students' strong motivation and eagerness to learn English. This enthusiasm can be harnessed by implementing student-centered and activity-based teaching approaches that foster active participation and engagement. Encouraging students to take ownership of their learning process and providing them with a supportive and nurturing environment can significantly enhance their language skills.

7. Collaboration between educational institutions, government bodies, and relevant stakeholders is crucial for addressing the challenges faced in learning English communication skills. By fostering partnerships, sharing the best practices, and implementing joint initiatives, a comprehensive and sustainable framework can be established to improve English language education in Mymensingh.

8. Examination system and evaluation procedures should be readjusted giving equal priority to listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. For this purpose, an English language lab and language club can be set up in every college to improve listening and speaking skills. Besides, practical exams, presentations, and impromptu spoken and written tests should be made compulsory. Moreover, there should be an English magazine that will ask for creative writing from the students and publish them annually or bi-annually to motivate them. The colleges should focus on turning the students into active speakers and learners.

9. The government and the Ministry of Education should take the necessary steps to train the teachers regularly and monitor their progression in terms of classroom language teaching as most of them are hardly trained and qualified for teaching English. They deliver their English lectures in Bangla and barely give any effort to use English in the classroom. This issue needs to be addressed by the education authorities through the recruitment and training of skilled English teachers.

10. It is found from this study that a great deal of students are good at writing skills but they lack fluency in English. Their pronunciation skills are not up to the mark. Therefore, the teachers as well as the authority should concentrate on prioritizing their speaking skills over writing. They should take initiatives to improve their speaking skills. For this reason, the colleges should indulge in staging drama, debate competitions, and arranging group presentations where the participation of the students should be made compulsory to improve their English. Unless they are involved in these programs spontaneously, they cannot master the essential skills of English.

### **VIII. Limitations of the Study**

Researchers encountered multiple challenges while conducting this research. Firstly, it was done within 75 days owing to time constraints and other related aspects. A longer period of time would be much more productive to complete it. Secondly, the primary data were collected through a questionnaire survey from only 8 colleges in both rural and urban areas of Mymensingh randomly over a period of two weeks from a sample of 200 second-year students. There are around 324 registered colleges in Mymensingh. Thus, it would be effective if data were collected from at least 20 colleges to have a generalized ascertainment. Thirdly, from every college, 25 students were taken into account randomly as respondents to provide their genuine responses to the statements of the questionnaire. The researchers could not take more students as respondents because of limitations in terms of budget and time. Therefore, the findings may not be generalized for the students of the HSC level in Mymensingh. Fourthly, as it is a questionnaire-based quantitative work, there is a strong possibility that the statements were not responded to with due care and consideration. Reluctance, time management, lack of concentration, indifference, and respondents' bias may have influenced them to give inaccurate information while answering the statements. Researchers have done this study keeping all these issues in mind and addressed the barriers and potentials of learning English communication skills in the context of the Higher Secondary Level in Mymensingh.

### **IX. Conclusion**

To sum up, the study regarding the problems and prospects of learning communication skills in English at the higher secondary level in the context of Mymensingh, Bangladesh has highlighted a number of significant challenges and their potential solutions. Addressing the shortage of proficient English teachers, revising the curriculum and teaching methodologies, providing exposure to English-speaking environments, arranging training programs for teachers, setting up English language clubs or labs, publishing

English magazines regularly, integrating digital technology, and fostering collaboration are essential steps toward enhancing English language education. By overcoming these challenges and leveraging the prospects, students of Mymensingh can develop strong communication skills in English, enabling them to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world.

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## Appendix Questionnaire

**Dear students,**

Do not worry. It is a simple questionnaire survey with the intent to determine the problems and prospects of learning the essential skills of communication in English. It is not related to your examination. Please read the statements of the questionnaire very carefully and give your authentic and honest responses to them by putting a tick mark (√) inside the box.

**Name:**

**Class:**

**College:**

**Mobile Number (Optional):**

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I have proficiency in English communication skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.					
2. I practice English with others both inside and outside the classroom spontaneously.					
3. I prefer reading and writing to listening and speaking in English.					
4. I have ample exposure to the English language at my Institution.					
5. I am involved in English language-related extra-curricular activities like debate, group presentation, participating in drama, and public speaking to improve my communication skills.					
6. I get enough support from my teachers and others in terms of learning communication skills in English.					
7. The teachers inform us about the significance of English for our					

academic and future career prospects.					
8. The classroom practices and teaching strategies are in favor of learning English.					
09. The examination system gives a lot of priority to English reading and writing over listening and speaking.					
10. I feel panic, fear, or anxiety while communicating with others in English.					
11. I do not want to look bad in front of others by making unconscious or subconscious mistakes in respect of my pronunciation, pitch, tone, spelling, and grammatical aspects.					
12. I face linguistic and cultural problems while learning and using English for communicative purposes.					
13. I encounter certain psychological barriers while learning communication skills in English.					
14. Our class size and infrastructural facilities are suitable for learning English communication skills.					
15. I have access to different means like mobile phones, the internet, online courses, language exchange programs, learning devices, etc. to learn and practice English.					
16. Our teachers deliver their lectures using Bangla instead of English.					
17. I can write accurately on any given topic using my critical thinking power and creativity, but I lack fluency in English.					
18. The government, local authorities, and policymakers can come to our aid in terms of acquiring communicative competence in English.					
19. The teachers continue to motivate us to learn the necessary skills of English even if we make errors.					
20. There is an English language club or magazine in our institution that encourages us to practice and learn English communication skills.					