

English Education at the Higher Secondary Level in Bangladesh: Challenges and Considerations

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ABSTRACT : English is taught as a mandatory subject at the higher secondary level in Bangladesh though the outcome is not up to the mark yet. The current study aimed at investigating the present scenario of English education at the higher secondary level in Bangladesh. Mixed method approach was used as the avenue of this study that included teachers' in-depth interview, teachers questionnaire and classroom observation. It was found that though the core aim of the English education at the higher secondary level is to make the students efficient in using four language skills, the assessment system only focuses on reading and writing skills. So, it is a common scenario that the teachers does not make students' practice English speaking and listening skills in the classroom. Findings of the study also showed that there are a number of challenges that both the teachers and students face regarding effective English education at this level including teaching method, class size, class duration, contents of the textbook, assessment system, classroom activities and so on. It was suggested that through ensuring proper methodology and classroom activities, assessment system, friendly classroom environment, sufficient teachers training and finally through the proper procedure of students' need analysis the present situation of English education in Bangladesh could get improved.

Keywords- English Education, Higher Secondary Level, Challenges

I. INTRODUCTION

English has been being taught as a second language at the higher secondary level in Bangladesh with the goal of making students skilled in four basic skills, but the level of competency is very low (Chowdhury & Kamal, 2014). To improve the condition of English education at each level of Bangladesh, a number of initiatives was taken by the government and different foreign institutions since 1997 to recent time to have an efficient and skilled workforce but the outcome is not up to the mark (Hamid, 2011). Therefore, bearing the economic interest in mind,

improvement in English language teaching and learning has become the prior concern. To illustrate, multifaceted problems such as the politically motivated decision in lowering the status and use of English in Bangladesh since the independence (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014), inconsistent language in education policies (Rahman & Pandian, 2018), implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) curriculum, teaching method and instructional materials in practice (Rahman, Pandian, 2018), implementation of assessment reform and language teachers' professional development (Karim & Mohamed, 2019) are the most significant drawbacks that preclude ELT to meet national expectation in Bangladesh. National Education Policy (2010) of Bangladesh focused on the English education for authentic communication purpose so that the learners can grow themselves as the global citizen and the learners can communicate in English. Though CLT has been implemented at the higher secondary level of education with a great number of merits, it is not being followed properly in every case for the lack of materials, friendly classroom environment and sufficient teachers training (Rahman & Pandian 2018). So, the current study dealt with the existing research works in the same arena and tried to add some new but significance dimensions that might be helpful for both the English teachers and learners.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Sultana (2018), assessment system can motivate the learners to achieve different skills, but the higher secondary assessment system does not focus on assessing listening and speaking skills. According to the study of Karim (2015), though the authorities related to English education in Bangladesh adopted different policies time to time, none of the initiate was completely successful to achieve the communicative objectives of English education at the higher secondary level in Bangladesh. In the view of Haque (2014) and Ahmed (2014) mentioned that a great number of teachers do not have sufficient training on the curriculum prescribed teaching method yet. Ansarey (2012) explored that there is a deficiency of the necessary tools for EFL teaching in Bangladesh. According to (Farooqui, 2014; Khan, 2011), teachers should have proper training on classroom management, conducting effective classroom activities and using authentic materials (Ahmed, 2018; Jahan, 2008; Khan, 2011).

According to Kirkwood (2011), as the assessment system does not include assessing listening and speaking skills, there is a big conflict between the curriculum objectives and the outcomes. According to Das et al. (2014), assessment system play a vital role to fulfill the goal of a curriculum. In the view of (Khan, 2010; Rahman et al., 2018), EFL teaching and learning is closely connected to the proper application of curriculum and assessment policy that Bangladesh fails to execute. According to Maniruzzaman & Hoque (2010), there is a tendency of EFL teacher of Bangladesh to focus on only examination related topics of the textbook and in some cases, they only focus on guide books. So, the current study tends to deal with some of the unsolved issues of the previous related studies and to provoke materials for further studies.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To investigate the applicability of curriculum prescribed method for EFL teaching at the HSC level in Bangladesh
2. To examine the applicability of the Textbook prescribed classroom activities
3. To find out the positive washback impact of the assessment system
4. To know the suitability of the Textbook for developing four language skills
5. To explore the appropriateness of the classroom environment
6. To examine the availability of technological tool in EFL teaching

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant from a number of perspectives. This study unfolded the real situation regarding teaching-learning of EFL reading, EFL writing, EFL listening and EFL Speaking skills at the higher secondary level in Bangladesh including the challenges both the teachers and the students face at this level. So, the respective authorities and the teachers as well as the future ranchers and policy makers can have important guidelines from this study to improve the current scenario of English education at the HSC level in Bangladesh.

V. METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research design was chosen as the avenue for the present study. This avenue of research basically focus on numerical data based on the aims of the study (Anderson, & Arsenault, 1998). In the field of English education, quantitative research method plays a very vital role as this kind of research assist the researchers collect and analyze real data very scientifically as well as objectively (Rasinger, 2013). To conduct the current study, researchers chose 4 HSC level college and from each college two EFL teachers teaching English at this level and 10 students were selected randomly. So total number of respondents from teachers was 8 and the total number of student respondent was 40. They were given questionnaire to have their opinion regarding some set statements related to some core issues of English education at the respective level. Questionnaire was developed based on the issues related to the challenges regarding the applicability of curriculum prescribed method for EFL teaching at the HSC level in Bangladesh, the applicability of the Textbook prescribed classroom activities, positive washback impact of the assessment system, suitability of the Textbook for developing four language skills, appropriateness of the classroom environment and the availability of technological tool in EFL teaching. It is very clear to the researchers that well developed questionnaire is the prime tool to collect quantitative data in a scientific way (Podder, 2019). So, all the items were developed to investigate the overall challenges of English education at the Higher Secondary level in Bangladesh. Popular model of Cheng (2005) and Shohamy (2005) were chosen to develop the questionnaire and applied a five-grade Likert Scale (1932) from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' and blended 'strongly agree' and 'agree' to agree. Besides, the researchers blended 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' to disagree. Obtained data were analyzed through computer statistical package SPSS 26.0.

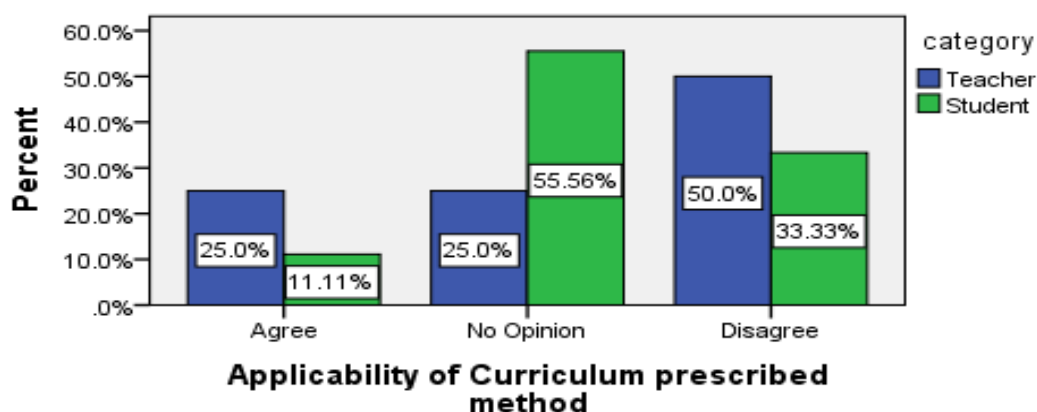
VI. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The researchers analyzed the data obtained from the questionnaire survey using the Statistical Computer Software SPSS 26.0. Based on the results of the analysis, the researchers have elaborated findings in the following sections. They have also discussed the findings in details.

Applicability of Curriculum Prescribed Method

The first statement of the questionnaire was related to the applicability of curriculum prescribed method. The NCTB developed new curriculum for teaching English to the students at the higher secondary level in Bangladesh. The curriculum suggested teaching pedagogical methods briefly for the benefit of the teachers and students. The researchers tended to find out the teachers' and the students' view regarding the applicability of curriculum in Bangladesh context.

Graph 1: Applicability of Curriculum Prescribed Method

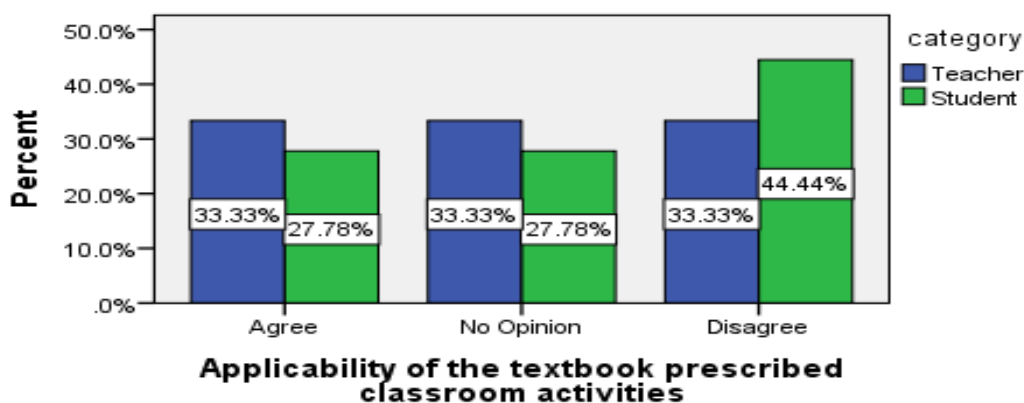


In response to the question regarding the applicability of curriculum prescribed method, 25% of the participants from teachers opined that the curriculum prescribed methodology was applicable though in response to the same issue, only 11.11% of the student respondents agreed. Here, 25% of the participants from the teacher group remained neutral and a notable number (55.56%) of participants from the student group also remained neutral. Half of the teacher respondents disagreed regarding this statement and 33% of the student respondents also disagreed in the same statements. So, it can be said that most of the teachers thought that this curriculum prescribed method was not completely applicable and a large number of the students did not have proper idea about this phenomenon as well as a number of teachers were not aware of this issue as well.

Applicability of the Textbook Prescribed Classroom Activities

The second statement of the questionnaire was regarding the applicability of the textbook prescribed classroom activities. The new Textbook was equipped with lots of classroom activities for the four skills development of the EFL students at the HSC level. So, one of the core aims of this study was to find out if the classroom activities like pair work, group work, simulation, role play etc. are applicable in the real context according to the guidelines of the prescribed NCTB Textbook. Here, the researchers tried to examine the teachers' and the students' view regarding the applicability of the textbook prescribed classroom activities in the respective context of education.

Graph 2: Applicability of the Textbook Prescribed Classroom Activities

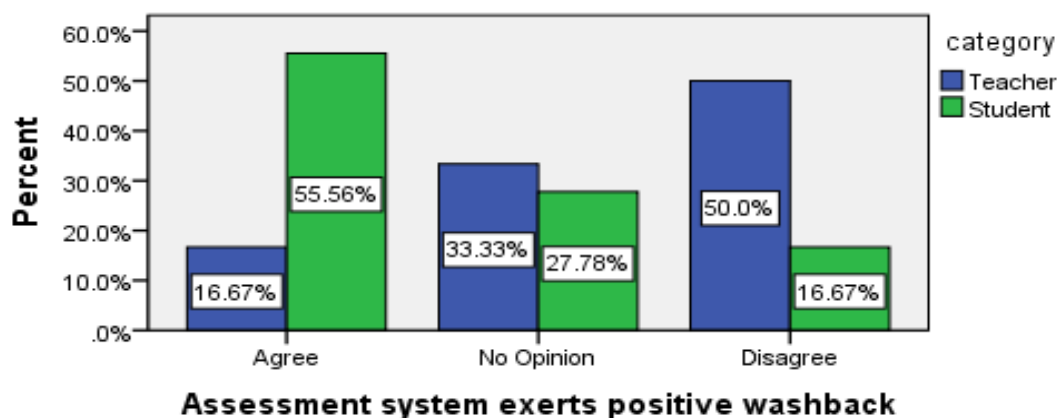


While answering the question related to the applicability of the Textbook prescribed classroom activities, 33.33% of the participants from teachers opined that textbook prescribed classroom activities are applicable and in response to the same issue, 27.78% of the student respondents agreed. Again, a notable number (33.33%) of the participants from the teacher group remained neutral and a notable number (27.78%) of participants from the student group also remained neutral. And, 33.33% of the teacher respondents disagreed regarding this statement and a big number (44.44%) of the student respondents also disagreed in the same statements. It is very clear from the findings of this statement that most of the teachers thought that textbook prescribed classroom activities were not effectively applicable in the respective context and a large number of both of teachers and the students did not have sufficient knowledge of the respective matters.

Assessment System to Exert Positive Washback

The third statement of the questionnaire was initiated to examine the assessment system and to know how it assisted to exert positive washback. Basically, this statement of the questionnaire investigated the influence of assessment system while assessing listen, speaking, reading and writing skills. Present researchers focused on the view of the teachers and students regarding the effect of the assessment system on the teaching and learning process. Finally, this item of the questionnaire was concerned to know the role of assessment system in developing four language skills.

Graph 3: Assessment System to Exert Positive Washback

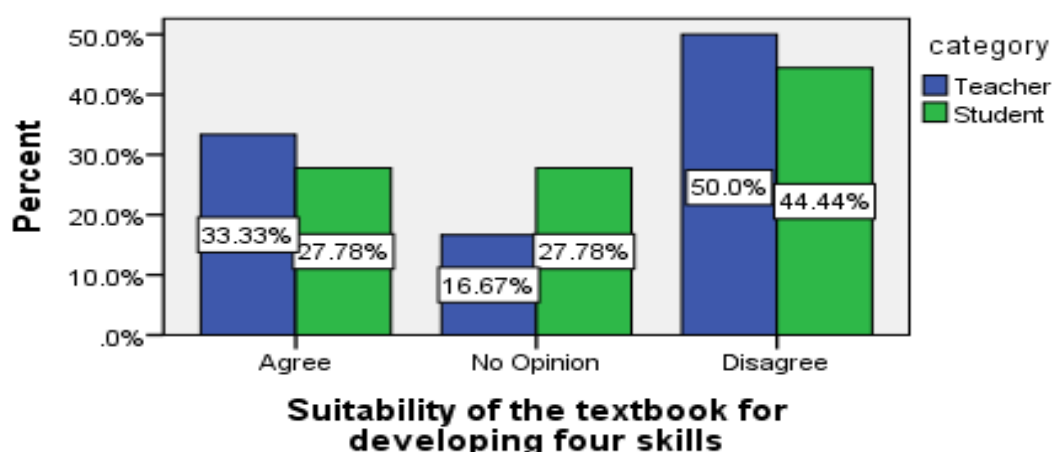


In response to the question regarding the assessment system, only 16.67% of the participants from teachers agreed that assessment system of HSC English exerted positive washback though in response to the same issue, most of the student respondents (55.56%) agreed. Here, 33.33% of the participants from the teacher group remained neutral and 27.78% of participants from the student group also remained neutral. Half of the teacher respondents (50.0%) disagreed regarding this statement and 16.67% of the student respondents also disagreed in the same statements. So, it can be said that most of the teachers reckon that assessment system of HSC English did not exert positive washback and a large number of the teachers and the students did not have proper idea about this issue as well as a notable number of the teachers were not aware of this issue as well.

Suitability of the Textbook for Developing Four Skills

This statement of the questionnaire was related to the suitability of the textbook for developing four skills. There are so many lessons in the textbook with different practice sections to develop the students reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. So, it was a major concern of this statement to examine if the items of the textbook suitable for the students to develop their four language skills. Finally, the researchers tended to find out the teachers' and the students' view regarding the suitability of the textbook for developing four skills at the HSC level in Bangladesh context.

Graph 4: Suitability of the Textbook for Developing Four Skills

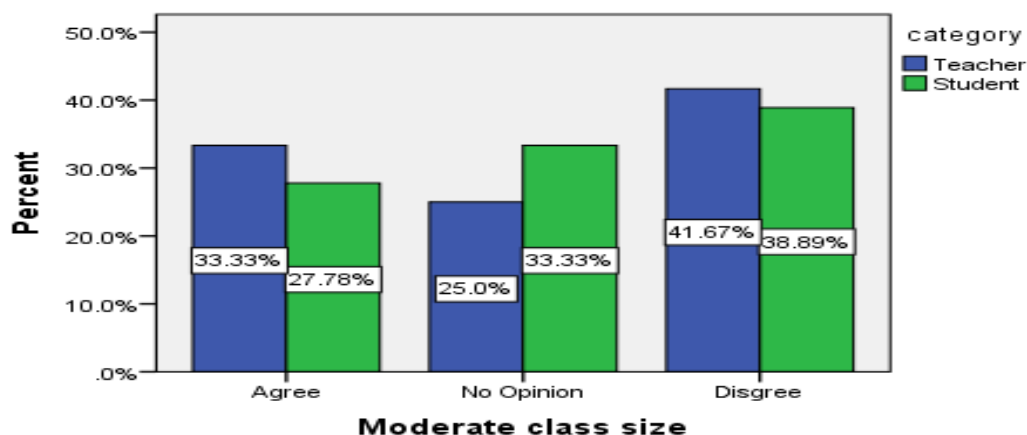


To answer to the question about the suitability of the HSC English Textbook for the development of the students' four language skills, 33.33% of the participants from teachers opined that SSC English Textbook was suitable for the development of the students' four language skills and in response to the same question, 27.78% of the student respondents also agreed. Here, 16.67% of the participants from the teacher group remained neutral and 27.78% of participants from the student group also remained neutral. Half of the teacher respondents (50.0%) disagreed regarding this statement and almost similarly, 44.44% of the student respondents also disagreed in the same statements. Based on the respective findings, it can be said the prescribed textbook of English at the SSC level was not completely suitable to make the students competent in four language skills. Besides, a number of the teachers and the students might not have sufficient study about their textbook as well.

Class Size

The fifth statement of the questionnaire was connected to the investigation of the issues related to the class size. Class size is a very significant phenomena in the arena of teaching and learning because based on the size of the class, teacher has to plan of teaching and management procedures. When the size of a class is really big, it is tough to reach every single learner and in case of English education, it is quite difficult to conduct the classroom activities effectively and to provide sufficient feedback to their delivery. So, in this section of the questionnaire the researchers attempted to find out the teachers' and the students' view regarding the class size.

Graph 5: Class Size

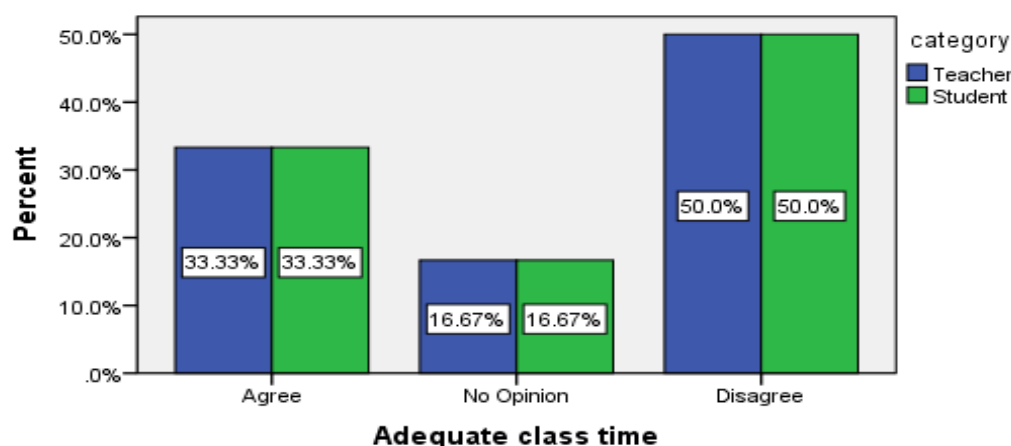


While answering the question related to the class size, 33.33% of the participants from teachers agreed that the class size was moderate, so they could somehow manage the class while teaching English and in response to the same issue, 27.78% of the student respondents also agreed. Again, 25.0% of the participants from the teacher group remained neutral and a notable number (33.33%) of the participants from the student group also remained neutral. Again, a big number (41.67%) of the teacher respondents disagreed regarding this statement and a great number (38.89%) of the student respondents also disagreed in the same statements. So, it can be commented that most of the class size were really too large to conduct the classroom activities, providing feedback to the students' activities as well as managing the classroom properly.

Adequacy of Class Duration

The sixth statement of the questionnaire was related to adequacy of class duration. In case of English education, there should be minimum standard duration for each class to conduct some respective classroom activities and provide related feedback. As there are four English language skills to be taught at classroom, it really demands sufficient class time. So, the researchers tended to find out the teachers' and the students' opinion regarding the class duration.

Graph 6: Adequacy of Class Duration

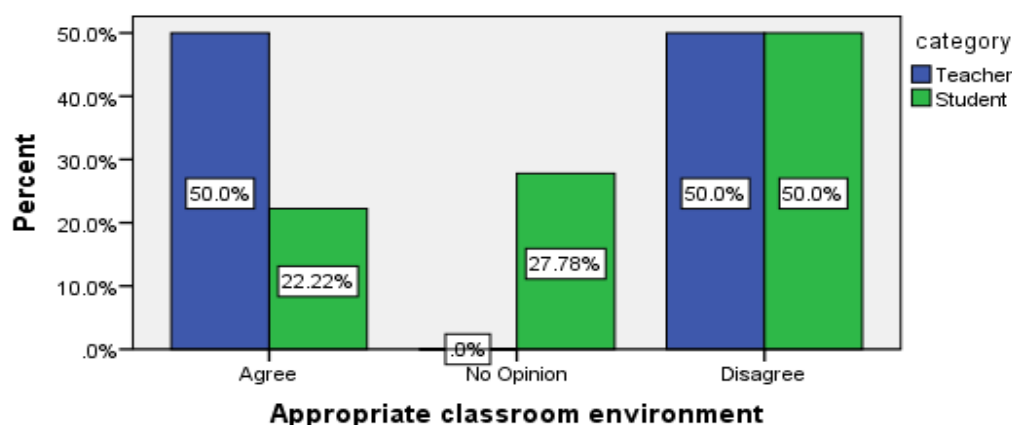


To answer to the question about the class duration to teach English at the HSC level, only one third (33.33%) of the participants from both the teachers and students opined that class time was sufficient to teach English at the SSC level. Here, 16.67% of the participants from the teacher and student groups remained neutral. Half of the teacher and student respondents (50.0%) disagreed regarding this statement. Based on the respective findings, it can be said that class time was insufficient for teaching four language skills.

Appropriateness of Classroom Environment

This statement of the questionnaire was related to the appropriateness of classroom environment. Classroom environment includes a number of issues including setting arrangement, cleanness, calmness, temperature, equipment etc. As classroom environment plays a vital role in the field of teaching and learning, the researchers tended to find out the teachers' and the students' view regarding the appropriateness of classroom environment in Bangladesh context.

Graph 7: Appropriateness of Classroom Environment

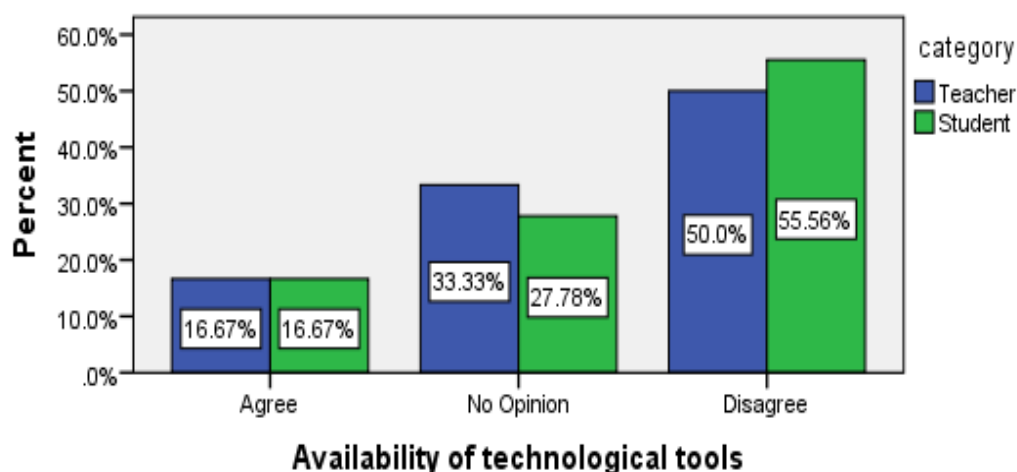


In response to the question regarding the classroom environment, 50.0% of the participants from teachers agreed that classroom environment was suitable for teaching and learning English though only 22.22% of the student respondents agreed in this regard. Here, 0.0% of the participants from the teacher group remained neutral and 27.78% of participants from the student group also remained neutral. Half of the teacher and student respondents (50.0%) disagreed regarding this statement. So, it can be said that classroom environment was not appropriate to teach English as half of the teachers and students reckon this as well as a notable number of the students did not have proper idea about the factors related to the classroom environment.

Availability of Technological Tools

The last statement of the questionnaire was related to the availability of technological tools. A smart classroom needs different technological tools to smooth the teaching-learning process. It includes computer, sound box, projector, good quality screen etc. Here, the researchers tended to find out the teachers' and the students' view regarding the availability of technological tools in the classroom.

Graph 8: Availability of Technological Tools



While answering the question related to the availability of technological tools, only 16.67% of the participants from both the teachers and students groups agreed that the class was equipped with sufficient necessary technological tools for teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. Again, a notable number (33.33%) of the participants from the teacher group remained neutral and a great number (27.78%) of the participants from the student group also remained neutral. Again, half (50.0%) of the teacher respondents and a large number (55.56%) of the student participants disagreed regarding this statement. So, it can be commented that teachers and students did not have minimum technological support for effective English education at the HSC level in Bangladesh.

VII. DISCUSSION

Based on the above findings, it can be commented that HSC Textbook is not completely suitable for teaching four language skills as well as most of the teachers do not follow the prescribed teaching method and they do not have proper facilities to arrange authentic classroom activities. Again, assessment system cannot motivate the student properly because it does not include assessing listening and speaking skills and the overall system does not have enough positive washback impact. Similar finding also came out from the Sultana (2018). She mentioned that assessment system can motivate the learners to achieve different skills, but the higher secondary assessment system does not focus on assessing listening and speaking skills. Again, according to Maniruzzaman & Hoque (2010), there is a tendency of EFL teacher of Bangladesh to focus on only examination related topics of the textbook and in some cases, they only focus on guide books. Classroom environment including class size and duration is not also suitable for both of the teachers and the students to ensure effective EFL teaching and learning. Besides, there is a big lack of proper technological tools for English education at this level as Ansarey (2012) explored that there is a deficiency of the necessary tools for EFL teaching in Bangladesh. Again, though the view of the students and the teachers are almost similar regarding most of the phenomena but there are some dissimilarities as well and those issues need to get more attention by the respective stakeholders.

VIII. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Every study may have some limitations and the current study is not an exception. Based on the area and topic of the study, it could be a large level study though the researcher could not do this for the shortage of time as well as for having no funding. Besides, more data collection

tools could be applied to the study like classroom observation to have more reliable and valid data.

IX. CONCLUSION

It can be said that the overall scenario of English education at the higher secondary level in Bangladesh is improving day by day but the growth is not up to the mark for a number of challenges that both the teachers and learners face. Specially, students and the teachers are still facing a lot of real challenges regarding the teaching and learning methods, contents of the textbook in the context, classroom environment, assessment system, classroom activities and the use of technological tools. So, true research based initiatives should be taken to overcome the challenges and to implement necessary actions.

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