

## **Challenges of Students with Speech-Language and Communication Needs in Classroom Interactions at Bilingual Schools**

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### **Abstract**

*An ideal classroom must ensure active students' participation, participative teaching methodologies, the use of technological resources, and teachers' positive attitudes towards disability. The National Education Policy 2010 attempted to address inclusive education and the implementation strategies of inclusion into the country's existing education system. Children with specific speech-language and communication needs (SLCN) are frequently placed in mainstream schools with varying degrees of support yet little or almost no attention is paid to the children's actual problems and their personal educational needs. Bangladesh is still considered a country where speech-language pathology services are not provided within schools, and many of the children's needs are not deemed to be severe enough to access other educational funding or support services. In this study, the authors explored some of the difficulties children with speech-language and communication needs face when learning language and interacting with peers in a classroom setting. The research applied a qualitative research method to investigate the learning and schooling experiences of the sample of children. Interviews were conducted with 36 participants including 10 selected*

*children, their parents, and teachers to highlight the challenges of these children in school and the challenges and frustrations the families and teachers faced. An inductive reflective thematic analysis of the data identified sympathetic attitudes of the teachers and peers, equal opportunities for performance in the classroom discussions, guidance from trained teachers and language therapists, and most importantly the introduction of a personal improvement plan are all needed to create a positive environment for students with SLCN to participate in classroom interaction.*

**Keywords:** *challenge. SLCN, bi-lingual mainstream school, classroom interaction*

## **1. Introduction**

Speech-language communication needs (SLCN) are a kind of disorder or difficulty in using and understanding language. Children with SLCN often lack skills necessary for learning in the mainstream classroom as they may struggle with literacy, numeracy, working memory, etc. (Dockrell et al., 2014; Snowling, & Hulme, 2012; Stothard et al., 1998; Harrison et al., 2009; Gathercole & Alloway, 2007). The research also shows that individuals with SLCN experience higher levels of emotional, behavioural, and social difficulties than their peers (Beitchman et al., 2001; Bishop et al., 2017). In the case of second and foreign language learning, classroom interaction has been found to play an invaluable role. This is because it assists the learners to assimilate and internalize the newly acquired knowledge of linguistic forms in the target language. This paper aims to investigate the challenges faced by Bangladeshi students with SLCN studying in bilingual mainstream schools. It also offers some suggestions that might help the parents and practitioners to understand the social behaviour of the children with SLCN better.

In this way, these specific types of learners can be assisted in classroom interaction and it can be ensured that they develop in the target language according to expected development patterns.

### **Research objectives and questions**

In Bangladesh in bilingual schools mainly Bangla and English are taught and for this study, we have chosen the English version schools that are following the curriculum provided by the National Curriculum Textbook Board (NCTB). In these schools, all subjects are taught in English except Bangla literature and Bangla Language and Bangla is not treated as only a subject but also used in building the skills of the students. For this purpose, they carry out most of their extracurricular activities in Bangla.

The objective of the study was to find out the major difficulties that students with speech-language and communication needs (SLCN) face during classroom interactions at bilingual schools in Bangladesh and offer recommendations to mitigate the difficulties. For this reason, the following research questions are pertinent -

- What are the main challenges that children with SLCN face in classroom interactions in mainstream Bangladeshi bilingual schools?
- What are the causes and the impacts of these challenges?

### **2.Literature Review**

Understanding and using language is a fundamental life skill that is partly innate and partly learned. Communication is a complex process consisting of receptive language (understanding) and productive language (delivering), whereas speech clarity is the

way that words are spoken and communication is how we interact with each other (Bates & Roe, 2001). According to Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological model, children's development is largely dependent on a range of social, cultural, and economic factors like a child's age, gender, home environment, family, childcare, educational setting, community, culture, etc. Children with SLCN may have difficulties developing literacy skills, which are essential to accessing most of the areas of the current curriculum. Similarly, if they have difficulties with receptive language skills, especially with listening and short-term memory, they may face problems in understanding and following spoken instructions, or they may need more time to process information (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). However, not all children who have language difficulties during childhood have speech-language, and communication needs. SLCN is an overarching term to include all children with communication difficulties, including -

- i) Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) indicates language difficulties that are unlikely to be resolved by five years of age and that create barriers to learning and day-to-day communication. However, these language difficulties are not associated with any known biomedical conditions
- ii) Late Language Emergence (LLE) is defined as children with language delay without any other disabilities or developmental delay on cognitive or motor levels. However, not all late talkers or children with LLE have language difficulties when they get older and follow a "typical" pattern of development by age
- iii) Speech and Hearing Disorders

But it is to be noted here that children with autism are more likely to have SLCN. Speech and language difficulties are typically identified by the incorrect pronunciation of sounds and longer words, difficulties in understanding spoken language, and constructing coherent narratives (Bishop et al., 2017). Children with communication problems may present many different symptoms, such as difficulty in receiving information, following directions, attending to a conversation, delivering information, pronouncing words, a stutter or a hoarse voice, etc. (Gillam & Marquardt, 2016). Brice (2001) also listed several challenges that children with SLCN may encounter, which include -

- difficulty expressing ideas coherently
- learning new vocabulary
- understanding questions
- following directions
- recalling information
- reading at a satisfactory pace
- comprehending texts
- learning alphabets
- identifying sounds that correspond to letters
- perceiving the correct order of letters in words and spelling

Brice (2001) also pointed out that sounding hoarse, breathy, or harsh may be caused by a voice problem, whereas stuttering affects speech intelligibility because the child's flow of speech is interrupted.

Studies on SLCN often examine whether or not learners with SLCN are exposed to bilingual education. 'Bi-lingual education' refers to the teaching of academic content in two languages. Therefore, in bi-lingual schools, both languages are taught and

used simultaneously, the amount of using each language varies depending on the curriculum's learning outcome. The appropriate time to start teaching a second language is a debatable subject and research shows that exposure to two languages from birth does not guarantee fluency or equal proficiency in both languages. Moreover, "bilingual children who are raised in predominantly monolingual societies tend to possess a dominant language" (La Morgia, 2015). Earlier it was also believed that children with SLCN and other language learning disabilities like dyslexia, dysgraphia, etc. should not be exposed to bilingualism, but recent studies show that bilingualism does not cause language and communication difficulties. Research shows that with appropriate support children with language difficulties can develop two languages successfully (Ijalba, 2015).

In their study of 7-year-old bilinguals with primary language impairment (PLI) and their peers without PLI, Paradis et al. (2003) found that morpho-syntactic features produced by both groups were similar in nature and severity in spontaneous language samples. The study also found no difference in the severity of producing morpho-syntactic features between 6 and 10-year-old monolingual participants and sequential Spanish-English bilingual participants with PLI (Windsor et al., 2009). There are, however, risk factors for delayed identification and inadequate clinical support among bilingual children (Kohnert, 2010) and children with PLI learn both languages much more slowly than their typically developing bilingual peers (Hakansson et al., 2003). This happens because children with SLCN demonstrate some cognitive processing weaknesses e. g., working memory, sustained/selective attention, speed of information processing, etc. (Kohnert et al., 2009).

Studies revealed that childhood education can be affected by speech and other language difficulties that are closely related to curricular access, interpersonal skills, or social interaction. Children with SLCN have a high risk of encountering negative behavioural and emotional situations in school, including bullying (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2001; Van den Bedem et al., 2016), which may negatively impact self-esteem (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2000). In addition, Beitchman et al. (2001) followed a group of children with language impairment from the age of 5-years up to the age of 12 and 19; they found that teachers generally rate these children as more reticent and that boys show higher levels of solitary-active withdrawal symptoms (Fujiki et al., 1999). In a later study, children's playground activities were videotaped and it was noted that children with SLI showed significantly higher levels of withdrawal and lower levels of interaction (Fujiki et al., 2001). Tomblin et al. (2000) studied the relationship between reading disability, behaviour difficulties, and language impairment and found that children with language impairment were at risk for both reading and behavioural problems. Their higher level of frustration, rate of misunderstanding, and inability to access the curriculum could result in subsequent aggressive behaviour. It has been suggested that to successfully incorporate students with SLCN into mainstream schools, all three stakeholders: children, parents, and teachers must be acknowledged and considered (Gwynn, 2004; Hess et al., 2006; Abed & Shackelford, 2021). Peers' acceptance is another factor that impacts the success of special needs children in inclusive schools. Experiences with peers stimulate a child's cognitive development, social skills, and social cognition. Children who are accepted by their peers show high learning results, whereas children who are not accepted are at risk of academic failure. Furthermore, children who are accepted are happy, enthusiastic, confident, and have good

interpersonal skills; they share and participate in social relationships, and take turns playing games with their classmates. On the other hand, the children who are not accepted have negative attitudes towards school, avoid school, feel uncomfortable in group interactions, and their school performance is less satisfactory (Bakker & Bosman, 2003; Ladd & Buhs, 1999).

In their research with 18 students with language disabilities (LD) from two specialized schools in the UK, Lloyd-Esenkaya et al. (2021) found that students with SLCN experience difficulties in expressing social knowledge, and coping strategies. Because of their lack of vocabulary, these children cannot express their emotions in the same manner as other children of the same age group. Moreover, children with LDs face challenges in academic lessons because of the language content and they distance themselves from language processing during playtime. Thus, children with LDs prefer staying alone, rejecting social interactions which require additional language demands. Here classroom interaction includes classroom talks, conversation during group work, pair work, interaction among students and between students and the teacher while performing a task, etc. For the purposes of second and foreign language learning, interaction plays at least two significant roles:

- i) as a medium through which learning is realised
- ii) as an object for pedagogical consideration (Yadav, 2014)

Most useful classroom interactions take place in task-based activities that require learners to negotiate with their peers to carry out and complete a task. These negotiations assist learners to identify gaps in their knowledge of essential linguistic structures and facilitate their eventual acquisition of more complex syntactic forms (Crookes & Gass, 1993; Pica et al., 1993; and Yule et al.,



1992). In his Spanish class, Hall (2008) noticed that discourse created during teacher-student and student-student interactions in the classroom led to learners' development of cognitive, linguistic, and socially complex communicative competence. However, findings from the studies of Takahashi et al. (2000) and Verplaetse (2000) revealed that teachers' actions and opportunities for students' class participation encouraged students to comprehend their responses, comment on the responses of others, and propose topics for discussion.

McCartney (1999), Ebbels et al. (2017), and Baxter et al. (2009) identified a lack of adequately trained educational staff and an inability to identify oral language markers of SLCN. Marlina (2018) in her study of 150 teachers of inclusive primary schools in Padang City, West Sumatra, found that female teachers have more positive attitude towards the inclusion of special needs children. And teachers with special education training have a more positive mindset than teachers who do not. She also found that special needs children are disliked by their peers. Since teachers are the critical determinants of children's success in peer relationships, she suggested that teachers be inclusive and not discriminatory.

Wellington and Wellington (2002) recommended using the multisensory approach to address the classroom participation issues of children with SLCN. The use of a range of communication methods, such as speech, images, graphs, charts, pictures, diagrams, pictograms, and symbols was recommended. Additionally, giving instructions using simple words and maintaining predictable classroom routines to avoid creating anxiety were suggested. Such as, integrating practical work to make students feel safe and confident, and presenting written or visual material in a blended manner to instil confidence. However, students with SLCN need to have clinical or pathological support

alongside their regular schooling. Dodge (2004), developed a classroom-based intervention program to facilitate partnership between classroom teachers and speech-language pathologists to work toward goals that will improve the classroom environment and facilitate students' academic and social success. He suggested that the student's speech or language impairment can be addressed systematically and thoughtfully within the context of the general education curriculum through the use of research-based strategies, collaboration with the teachers, curricular modifications, etc. Furthermore, Ahmed (2011) found in his small-scale study on teachers of inclusive schools in Dhaka, that teachers expect speech-language therapy (SLT) to be available for special needs children. The research also found that most of the participant teachers felt SLTs (Speech -Language Therapists) needed to work collaboratively with them (teachers). They noted that SLTs had to work in two sectors:

- i) providing diagnosis, assessment, individual and group therapy and
- ii) teachers and parents training to develop special needs children's speech-language and communications.

According to Ferdous et al. (2018), "Language problem in children with ASD is an underattended problem in Bangladesh". Based on the results of their study on 10 children with autism in Bangladesh, they attempted to draw a baseline observation concerning language problems in children with autism. In this study, using a neurolinguistic approach, they found that children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have speech delay (but not fluency disorders), are not able to respond to and participate in group activities, repeatedly repeat words, and use idiosyncratic/neologism words. A study of social communication revealed that all the children (100%) could not participate in rhymes/songs with other children, could not point out or look at

things along with others and nor could they respond to their names. In addition, 60% of the children did not try to attract the attention of others to their activity. The majority of children (70%) could not make eye contact or understand the facial expressions of others. Almost all the parents (90%) reported that their children smiled when they did an activity that they enjoyed.

Arif et al. (2018) in their study on the social participation of children with communication disabilities with 55, three-to-thirteen-year-old Bangladeshi children found that the children with communication disabilities participated in a variety of activities but with less intensity and in restricted societal and environmental contexts than their normally-developing peers. The research observed the children's social participation at home, in the neighbourhood, and at school and found that about 54.50% of the children's participation in communication with other children and adults at home was limited; 60% of the children's participation was very limited in communicating with other children and adults in the neighbourhood and community, and about 56.4% of the children's participation was somewhat limited to communicating with other children and adults at school.

According to studies, Bangladeshi English learners experience some challenges when it comes to learning, speaking, and communicating in English. The most common factors are class size (Sinha, 2001; Siddique, 2004; Basir and Ferdousy, 2011), the lack of vocabulary (Arju, 2011), lack of confidence, lack of support from peers and teachers, and lack of motivation (Chowdhury and Shaila, 2011). Creating an appropriate environment can enhance the rate of classroom interactions. However, according to Sinha (2001), in Bangladeshi English classrooms, teachers do not use any "energetic methods" to teach, so students are less motivated and "energetic" to learn and use English. Ahmed (2006) characterized the lack of opportunities to

use English outside the classroom as a “non-supportive environment”. “Most of the Bangladeshi students are very reluctant to speak in English irrespective of their proficiency in one or the other skill” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 4).

During the 1990s, the government of Bangladesh introduced the English version of education in cadet colleges. By early 2000, several English version schools were set up in the major cities of the country. However, they remain small in comparison to the number of Bangla language schools. Studies have been done on language policy, focusing on students’ deficiency in different skills and the future of English studies in the country, but there is no research directly focusing on the challenges of the students who study in the English version schools or bilingual schools in Bangladesh. However, in general the challenges of bilingual education are characterized by three main domains: assessment, teacher training, and curriculum and materials development (Bricks & Proctor, n.d.). Billah (2011) also provided a similar observation while he was mentioning parents’ and students’ comments regarding the limitations of the English version of schools. For him the lack of teachers’ English language fluency, non-effective teaching and sub-standard quality of teaching manuals are the most common problem areas that the respondent parents and students mentioned.

### **3. Method**

The present exploratory, qualitative study investigated the perceptions of 10 school students with SLCN, 12 parents and 14 teachers. In this study, a qualitative approach was used to develop a holistic understanding of the classroom interactions of students with SLCN at Bangladeshi bilingual schools. Through the study, the researchers were able to ascertain a comprehensive picture of the salient features of the communication and interaction patterns

in classrooms. This helped in assessing several challenges that students with SLCN face in classroom interactions.

The subjects (students) studied in the present research were all diagnosed as having SLCN by either a registered psychologist or a physician. The snowball sampling method was used to reach the subjects for the study. Data was collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and the study of documents such as students' work, homework, etc. Interviews were conducted at participants' homes and school premises during break time, thus keeping the participants in their natural environment. Every time, the researchers assured the participants that their responses were valued and appreciated. Interviews took place between March 2019 and February 2020. During this time, each student was interviewed three-time, with a gap of at least two months between each interview session.

During the semi-structured interviews, the respondents were asked about their personal experiences in classroom participation, their perceptions regarding classroom interactions, challenges faced during classroom interaction and factors influencing their class participation. The interviews lasted about 15 minutes on average.

A qualitative content analysis of responses was conducted to identify emergent themes across the interviews. This method involved the identification of connections within and between themes (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). To identify different issues, the transcribed texts were reviewed three times by the interviewers. An inductive coding approach was utilised in this stage to derive codes from the data. Free coding was used to determine differences and consistency, which means that if there were connections between themes, they were noted and

interpreted. Reading and re-reading the data revealed recurring patterns of the information displayed by the participants. The final categories were formed from the identification of similar themes. Any exceptional remarks made by the respondents were also noted. The emerging patterns were simply categories of behaviour that reflected students' perceptions of what motivates them to participate more in class and their involvement patterns.

### ***Participants***

Children between the ages of nine and sixteen were surveyed. All of the participants were studying in different English version schools in Dhaka city. Among the participants, there were both male and female children.

### **Sample children's details with individual problem areas**

#### *Sample-1:*

A thirteen-year-old boy who spoke in three-word sentences at five years of age. Over the years, he has improved a lot, but he still takes time to organise sentences. He cannot remember more than three or four commands at a time and cannot recall information from a phone call correctly. He is very enthusiastic and wants to communicate with others, but he is frequently laughed at and bullied by his peers because of his mispronunciation and faulty grammar. In class, he does not respond unless the teacher asks him any questions. He spends the most of his school hours sleeping and going to the restroom frequently. He has severe reading problems, losing lines, inability to express things precisely, and inability to remember letters during dictation.

*Sample 2:*

An eleven-year-old boy, a late bloomer according to his mother. His voice is unclear and has severe problem with utterances. He has a weak memory and finds it difficult to memorise anything and fails to pronounce long words. He makes a lot of spelling mistakes. When he is questioned in class, he generally responds by nodding his head or saying "yes" or "no".

*Sample-3:*

A fourteen-year-old boy with terrible stuttering and disfluency problem. While speaking he takes time and frequently repeats himself; while writing, he makes many spelling mistakes and leaves sentences incomplete. By nature, he is very enthusiastic and tries to answer all questions in the class.

*Sample-4:*

A fourteen-year-old girl started talking later than other children of her age according to her parents. She faces difficulty in articulating two back-to-back consonant sounds and her vocabulary is limited. She has problems pronouncing joint words while reading in Bangla. She takes time to understand commands and explain things. While writing, she gets confused with letters and capitalisation.

*Sample 5:*

A sixteen-year-old boy with an unclear voice and frequent repetition while speaking. Generally, he cannot produce long sentences; and stops after every four or five words. He cannot produce long-written texts or narratives. He has attention disorder and short-term memory problems. He cannot make friends or enjoy being in a group.

*Sample 6:*

A fourteen-year-old girl with an extreme stuttering problem. She cannot read long words (five letters or more) either in Bangla or English. She cannot follow two or more commands at a time. She has limited vocabulary and cannot produce grammatically correct sentences in speaking or writing.

*Sample-7:*

A fifteen-year-old boy has disfluency in speaking because he cannot find the right words. This causes severe depression. While reading, he loses lines and cannot comprehend the text. When questioned, he is unable to respond immediately because he is at a loss for words. While writing, he veers off -topic.

*Sample 8:*

A nine-year-old boy with stammering and pronunciation problems. He cannot differentiate between letters like L and R, T and D, B and V, etc. Because he cannot recall letters immediately, he is confused in spelling, e.g., if someone asks him to write 'M', he needs to utter all the letters from 'A' to 'M' and then write. He rarely converses with people.

*Sample 9:*

A thirteen-year-old girl uttered her first meaningful word at the age of three according to her parents. Her language growth is still behind that of the other children of her age. She is very slow in conversation. She has a problem with reading and faces difficulties in pronunciation and spelling words containing five letters or more. She cannot arrange sentences, does not understand line spacing or punctuation marks, and especially does not understand where to put a full stop.

*Sample 10:*

A fifteen-year-old girl with a loud but unclear voice. She loses track of class lectures and repeatedly asks the same questions. She



rarely converses with her peers. She cannot complete long narrative writing tasks and frequently leaves her writing assignments incomplete. She has a short-term memory.

#### **4 Results**

From the interview data the following key themes were revealed:

- 1) the typical attitude of learners with SLCN during classroom activities
- 2) learners' self-reported challenges during classroom interactions
- 3) real difficulties encountered during classroom interactions
- 4) participation in classroom interactions
- 5) exclusionary practices in the classrooms and
- 6) inclusionary practices in the classrooms

##### ***The typical attitudes of learners with SLCN during classroom activities***

It was found that students with SLCN applied several strategies such as drinking water, going to the washroom, scribbling, giggling, sitting silently, etc., to avoid classroom interactions. SLCN students reported that they faced trouble understanding instructions, got confused, felt depressed, etc., which meant that they had a difficult time getting engaged in classroom activities.

##### ***Learners' self-reported challenges with classroom interactions***

In response to the question, "Why aren't you participating in classroom activities?" the respondent students and their parents described several challenges that they could not overcome, like former experiences of being bullied, feeling inferior, feeling scared to speak out or being involved in their studies, fear of being misunderstood or being laughed at; a noisy classroom; language

problems; overlapping thoughts; slow writing, etc. The children experienced both social and emotional barriers to being able to fully participate in classroom discussions rather than their academic difficulties.

***Real difficulties during classroom interactions***

According to the respondent teachers', children with SLCN could not participate fully in classroom interactions mainly because of their linguistic, academic, and attention-related problems, which included limited vocabulary, text organization, reading fluency, pronunciation and spelling problems, comprehension problems, poor academic results, slow performance, disorganised thoughts, etc.

***The frequency of their participation in classroom interaction***

From class observations, it has been found that children with SLCN rarely participated in classroom interactions because of the unequal participatory opportunities (a limited number of students always control classroom conversation) and students' inhibition (unwillingness to talk in front of others, fear of being mocked, laughed at, etc.). A summary of the findings from class observations is presented in the following table:

*Table -1: Summary of findings from class observations*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Typical attitude during classroom activities</b>	<b>Self-reported challenges about the classroom interactions</b>	<b>Real difficulties during the classroom interactions</b>	<b>How often they participate in the classroom discussions</b>
S-1	Spends lots of time in the wash room, drinks lots of water, seems very restless struggles to understand the meaning of any questions	Feeling inferior, being mocked, feeling afraid	Low self-esteem, limited vocabulary, text organisation	Rarely
S-2	Uses all possible options to avoid class participation, avoids writing elaborative answers	Previous experience of being bullied, nobody understands	Always confused, uses body language more than oral expressions, limited vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling	Rarely

S-3	Feels sad , found crossing the written answers, hugely confused about spelling, writes incomplete answers	Lack of chance to participate and share views, language problem	Short memory, reading fluency, pronunciation, forming sentence	Often
S-4	Can never finish classwork, suffers from short term memory and forgets everything and struggles to recall ideas,	Overlap of ideas, feeling stressed	Short answers, unclear voice	Rarely
S-5	Forgets everything, gets punishment, remains worried	Noisy classroom, slow in writing	Distinguishing letters and words, pronunciation, spelling	Rarely

	about mistakes and avoids elaborative writing			
S-6	Less attentive, tries to avoid written submission, doesn't want to read out in the class	Problem with utterances, motivation	Slow, pronunciation, spelling, disorganised presentation	Regularly
S-7	Speaks in a loud voice, enthusiastic to participate in everything, keeps on talking all the time	Being mocked, bullied, stigmatized	Comprehension problem	Quite often
S-8	Speaks in a funny way, uses incomplete sentences or produces	Being mocked, bullied,	Reading and decoding, incomplete thought	Often

	meaningless sentences, cannot follow class work			
S-9	Too silent does not want to talk with others, sits quietly at the corner	No friends, lessons are hard, stigmatised	Slow, incomplete work, too short answers	Rarely
S-10	Keeps on asking the same questions, asks silly questions, takes time to understand anything	Laughed at by others	Disorganized thoughts, too wordy	Regularly

***Exclusionary approaches in the classrooms***

Interviews revealed that all the three groups of respondents (students, parents, and teachers) acknowledged that students with SLCN remain excluded from classroom discussions. When asked about the reasons why they felt excluded from class, students stated, "Teachers talk fast, I can't understand when the teacher

talks fast" ( $N=6$ ); "The children talk and the teacher talks, I can't hear anything?" ( $N=8$ ). This is indicating that children with SLCN take more time in comprehending the information and besides reading and speaking they also face problems with listening. Some of the respondents commented about the unequal participation opportunities in class, such as "I raise my hands but the teacher doesn't call my name" ( $N=2$ ). Nevertheless, there are students with SLCN ( $N=3$ ) who felt scared to speak in the class. One student said, "I feel scared... She shouts... she always talks about the mistakes... what wrong". Moreover, if they need help to complete a task they prefer to pause and sit silently rather than seek assistance from the teacher. In response to a similar question "what do you do when you can't solve any problem or find the task difficult or do not know the answer?" One of the respondents replied, "I don't say anything." ( $N=5$ ) When the interviewers questioned, "when all students participate in language games what is the role you perform?", most of the respondents replied that they only observed what the other children did because they thought the games were difficult.

Teachers identified several issues that hindered inclusion, including the disability itself ( $N=5$ ). For instance, one teacher stated, "His presence among students causes many problems for him, especially with his peers. He does not get along with his peers, does not join in the conversation, never asks new questions, which makes him feel lonely" (T-6) Another teacher while talking about a student commented, "He is too lazy, he never completes his classwork – he is always doing the tasks of the previous class" (T-9). Teachers are also aware of the need for specialised training which they do not have for handling children with special needs ( $N=12$ ) and one of them said, "I don't have any specialised training on special children. It's really difficult to understand their

demands and way of learning” (T-12) In addition, teachers reported a lack of coordination between parents and school as a hindrance to inclusive education ( $N=8$ ). For example, in a complaining tone, a teacher stated, “They only expect that the school will do everything but they need to do something at home also” (T-9).

In response to the question, “Are you informed about the fact that your child finds himself excluded from the class and is not involved properly in classroom interactions?” The parents ( $N=12$ ) responded that they were aware about the fact. They also said that they talked of it with the teachers but, “They (teachers) listen but don’t take any steps or offer any solution” (P-4). All of the parents seemed somewhat dissatisfied with the support that they were getting from the schools. They mentioned that teachers occasionally called them but it was only to inform them about their children’s poor school performances or any problematic behaviour made. One of the parents said, “They call us frequently but with complaints” (P-6). Parents also assumed that in the class the teachers prefer keeping children with SLCN isolated. In this regard, one of the parents said, “ I requested the teacher to let my son sit beside his friend but she changed his seat, he got upset and for a few days he did not do any classwork, then she kept my son working for a long time after the school hours” (P-1). Some of the parents ( $N=3$ ) wanted additional support, such as a shorter syllabus, less homework, alternative assessment methods, speech-language therapists’ support, etc. One of the parents shared, “ I requested them for a shorter syllabus, but they refused”(P-5). Parents also complained about the psychological environment of the classroom. They mentioned classroom practices of bullying ( $N=3$ ), mockery ( $N=6$ ), misbehaviour from peers ( $N=4$ ), teachers’ ignoring the students, etc. which negatively affected



their child's learning. One of the parents said, "the academic work my daughter learns at home is much more than what she learns from school. We send her to school so that she can mix with children of her age and learn social behaviour, but the school is too concerned about the syllabus and results" (P-8). Another parent demanded, "The school must arrange speech therapy or similar kinds of expert support in school. They take payments for additional teachers to care for special children but those teachers do not have any training in special education" (P-2).

### *Inclusionary approaches in the classrooms*

The learners also shared their recommendations for facilitating inclusion in the classroom. They expected teachers' support to minimize the social challenges in the class which would help them engage and participate more actively in the classroom discussions. They also reported that other students made fun of them when they stuttered or made mistakes. A student said, "If the teacher punishes me... they either mimic or giggle all the time (S-2)." The learners ( $N=6$ ) said that they had difficulties with speaking and reading due to their SLCN, but if they were supported by teachers during class activities, that would help them a lot; for example, one of the learners said, "If the teacher supports me in classwork...." (S-10). Students felt that the teachers were quite unhappy with their poor academic performance, and those class teachers concentrated mainly on the more talented students, which led to unequal class participation. Another learner commented, "the teacher always asks questions, but we also have something to say" (S-5). Responding to the question, "How can your teacher help you participate in the class?", the learners ( $N=10$ ) mentioned that the teachers should be more sympathetic towards them, and one learner mentioned, "One of my teachers is always smiling and

letting me speak in class...if all my teachers were like her" (S-9). To know about the difficulties faced by students with SLCN in following classroom instructions the interviewer asked the learners, "How do you feel when you are not able to carry out the instructions given by your teacher?". In response, the students wanted to have someone who would help them ( $N=6$ ) and all the instructions could be arrived being typed or written ( $N=2$ ). The students also mentioned that they felt happy when other children invited them to play in the playground which indicates that if they were welcomed and got support from their classmates, these children would also enjoy group activities as their classmates.

On the other hand, most of the respondents (Teachers) ( $N=7$ ) reported that students with SLCN seemed unwilling to communicate with their peers. They showed no interest in participating in group or pair work. For instance, one of the teachers said, "I recommend that students, during pair and group work, make their groups so they can feel motivated to work collaboratively. But with this child, what should I do? I need to engage him in group work and supervise the group in which he is participating ... he can't join any group" (T-5). In reply to the interviewers' question, "Do you use any special strategy so that the children with SLCN receive more or learn more from the classroom discussions?", only five teachers replied that they used visual materials (through multimedia and PowerPoint) to make the class more interesting. Some teachers ( $N=3$ ) did not support inclusive education and they seemed to be more concerned with the children without SLCN who were the majority of the class. One of the teachers stated, "She asks questions continuously... the same question again and again.... other students get disturbed" (T-5). In addition, teachers identified two limitations in the current schooling system: one was the lack of additional support to help

these students ( $N=4$ ), and the other was the lack of teacher training opportunities ( $N=6$ ) in special education. In this regard, one teacher said, "We need additional teachers/mentors, I mean---trained people, to support and guide them. We have to take care of the regular students and they all have board exams" (T-8). The teachers were asked a supplementary question by the interviewer, "Do you use individual improvement plans for students with SLCN?" All the teachers answered negatively. According to one of them, "We don't prepare any individual improvement plans for them. I have no idea how to prepare them." (T-8).

However, in order to enhance the possibility of inclusion of children with SLCN in classroom activities, the respondent parents of this study gave importance to a few issues like: empathy from teachers and peers ( $N=10$ ), in-class support and after-school teaching ( $N=5$ ), more extracurricular activities should be organized both inside and outside school, and equal opportunities should be given to all children, etc.

## 5. Findings

Previous studies on inclusive education suggest that successful inclusion may depend on acknowledging and considering the views of each of the three affected groups (children, parents, and teachers) (see Gwynn, 2004; Hess et al., 2006). In Bangladesh, two main barriers to the timely identification of speech-language, and communication needs are:

- i) lack of knowledge about this special need and
- ii) lack of tools that can fairly evaluate the child's language problems.

Unless their children have severe social and academic difficulties, Bangladeshi parents are hesitant to submit their children to diagnostic tests to determine whether they have speech-language communication difficulties or autism-related deficiencies. Most Bangladeshi parents believe that stammering is not a problem. Although it is a genetically inherited condition, parents do not provide their children with any clinical treatment. In reality, it was difficult to find real cases, so the researchers worked with a small number of samples. More insightful findings might be derived from this study if a large group of samples could be explored. Additionally, there have been very few studies conducted in Bangladesh in this field, and all those studies have been geared towards speech-language pathology and speech-language therapy. It is worth mentioning that some of the findings of the study seem universal in nature. However, they reveal facts about Bangladesh that may add evidence from a population that has not yet been studied. From this research, the following findings were derived from the data gathered from the respondent students, parents, and teachers:

- The students with SLCN, their parents, and the teachers agreed that the class participation rate of students with SLCN is low. Though the parents valued class participation as a social outcome, the teachers emphasised academic issues more.
- Students with SLCN felt excluded from the class and demanded that the teachers be less judgmental, more empathetic; and that their task load needed to be minimized. In contrast, the teachers assumed completing the classwork was an influential parameter for parents' satisfaction. For this reason, students with SLCN were

frequently separated from the class and kept involved with incomplete tasks. However, according to Dockrell et al. (2017) to promote language learning, language teachers must create motivating and challenging interactions and ensure learners' involvement as early as possible in instructional sessions. When students interact, regardless of whether the goal is academic or social, students must be provided with assistance. Moreover, they must be provided with the social strategies they need to participate in interactions and develop and extend interpersonal bonds.

- Students with SLCN identified inhibition and low or unequal opportunities in classroom participation as common issues that made them feel excluded from the class, but the teachers found them (students with SLCN) less cooperative during group work.
- Schools did not have enough experienced and trained staff to support the students with SLCN. Evidence from international studies shows that children with SLCN, who are learning an additional language, are disadvantaged because of the lack of educators who can address both their needs as language learners and their special educational needs (McCray & Garcia, 2002).
- Schools need to be more supportive of students with SLCN by appointing healthcare professionals, especially speech-language therapists, along with teachers.
- No individual improvement plan is followed to support the students with SLCN.

## **6. Recommendations**

In this section, the following recommendations are made to promote interactive classroom involvement and to facilitate the successful inclusion of learners with SLCN in the Bangladeshi bilingual school context:

- Speech-Language Communication Needs (SLCN) is not a disease, it is a language condition. So, during class activities, if anyone stammers, gets stuck, or pronounces something incorrectly, their classmates should not mock them, but rather give them space to share and converse. Collaborative efforts from teachers and peers and their sensitive and empathetic behaviour towards children with SLCN should be encouraged (McCartney & Ellis, 2011).
- In most Bangladeshi language classes, importance is given mainly to reading and writing skills, but students with SLCN also find listening to a difficult task. So, more practice on listening skills needs to be included in the daily lesson plan. Besides, language practices should be offered as in-class activities without separating the children with SLCN from the rest of the class. Integrated classroom-based services that incorporate listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing activities in the curriculum positively impact children's communication skills (Elksnin, 1994). Learning outcomes can be promoted through this type of service delivery model, which can even be accommodated in the general education curriculum, and thus learners' academic, social, emotional, and vocational growth can be promoted (Ehren, 2000).

- More opportunities should be created to involve students with SLCN in group and pair work. Collaborative activities should be included in the assessment process.
- An individual improvement plan for each student needs to be implemented.
- More trained staff needs to be employed in schools to support such students.
- Schools should arrange for speech-language therapists.

### **Significance and Conclusion**

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2003), at the entry level of schools, about 50% of children have some level of communication difficulty which, with the right support, can be successfully resolved, enabling them to catch up with their peers, but an estimated 10% of all children have long-term and persistent speech, language, and communication needs. Speech and Language therapy which involves assessment, assistance with diagnosis, and treatment is an integral part of speech, language and communication (SLC) development. The current study has provided insights into successful inclusive education for children with SLCN in Bangladesh. For most Bangladeshi teachers, the term SLCN is quite unfamiliar, but to bring all children into the mainstream it is anticipated that the educational staff should have a better awareness of the range of educational and behavioural problems that are often experienced by children with SLCN. For this study

as sample respondents, we chose only those learners who had been diagnosed as students with SLCN and due to this, the sample number of this study is limited. But it would be useful to research on a larger sample of learners with SLCN and their parents and teachers from different cities in Bangladesh, to investigate the generalisation of the current findings. Nonetheless, this study is a starting point for doing further research and improving school services for children with SLCN and other learning disorders. Conclusively, this research is a step forward in terms of thinking about minimizing the educational and social isolation of these special groups of learners.

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