

A Critical Analysis of the English Language Questions of BCS Examination

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By

Nishat Salsabill Ayonti

17103050

A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

Student's Full Name & Signature:

Nishat Salsabill Ayonti

17103050

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Approval

The thesis titled “**A Critical Analysis of the English Language Questions of BCS Examination**” submitted by

1. Nishat Salsabill Ayonti (Student ID:171030)

of Summer, 2022 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of B.A. in English on September, 2022.

Examining Committee

Nazah Farhat

Senior Lecturer

Department of English and Humanities

BRAC University

Departmental Head:

Professor Firdous Azim, PhD

Professor and Chairperson,

Department of English and Humanities

BRAC University

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Abstract:

Job examinations are a valuable part of a person's career. It shows his/her knowledge and skill and helps the examiners to select the best candidates. As a result, numerous researches have been done to improve the quality of this crucial examination all over the world. Bangladesh is a developing country with lots of possibilities and manpower. It is obvious that the job examination of our country will be highly competitive and tricky. As English is our second language, we see inclusion of this sector in the question paper. Examiners included English in the question to judge candidates' knowledge and skill over this language. But the question does not seem to fulfill the goals it is supposed to. Most of the questions are memory and grammar based which only shows us the memorizing power of a candidate. Clearly the English language part of the question is not fulfilling its aim properly. In this paper, I will review one of the most demanding job examination English questions of Bangladesh which is known as BCS examination and analyze them on the basis of characteristics of the test. I will review the English language part of the question paper only. I will also conduct research on a few participants and who will be sharing their thoughts on the quality of our job examination and how it can be improved.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this paper to my beloved parents who have given immense support and respected my decision.

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Acknowledgement

First of all, I would like to thank Almighty Allah for bestowing me with knowledge and strength to complete this crucial part of my academic life. Then comes my parents who never lost their faith on me. After that, I would like to thank my partner who motivated me and helped me.

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Keywords:

BCS Examination, MCQ, High-stake test, English question

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze English questions of the BCS job examination on the basis of characteristics of a good test. The study consists of ample amounts of BCS examination questions of the last 10 years and also interview sessions with participants who are currently active or have experience in the BCS examination field. This research aims to find out whether English questions of BCS examination can assess candidates' English proficiency and can it be considered as a good test in terms of evaluating language proficiency. The study can also be an eye-opener for the authorities who design and evaluate candidates' English proficiency based on the result of these questions. Authorities can come up with possible solutions to solve the problems which will be beneficial for our nation and also the government job sector. As the data is collected from reliable sources and also the participants are already familiar with the recruitment process the study can be considered as an authentic study.

BCS examination is one of the high-stakes exams of Bangladesh. High-stake examination, “refers to an examination that determines a person’s future academic career and job opportunities” (Spring, 2004, p.36). The BCS examination is held every year and selected candidates join various important and prestigious sectors of our country. The Civil Service jobs have a high demand in our country. The holders of a civil job receive immense respect in the society as well as enjoy various securities and facilities. It is said that, “Aspiration to exercise power, prestige and social status, job security, personal security, opportunities of the state, personal dream, and family influence were the primary motivating factors” (*Craze for the Government Jobs*, 2020) for the young graduates. Thus, every year millions of young graduates take part in this job examination.

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Job examination is a critical stage for both organizations and employees. If an organization fails to properly monitor the recruitment process “it could harm the quality of the employees who would work in your organization” (*What is the significance of a pre-employment test?*, 2016). The BCS job examination is not a mere test that can easily be passed. The competition rate is high and the examination also has an age limit. According to an article of *The Financial Express*, around 400,000 candidates took part in 43rd BCS examination (*400,000 job seekers take 43rd BCS preliminary exam*, 2021). Therefore, we can get a glimpse of the level of competition that candidates’ face in this examination. The test is taken into three phases and they are 1) preliminary exam, 2) written exam and 3) viva. Candidates who aim for BCS jobs start taking preparation from a very early time and in some cases from the first year of their undergraduate life. The examination is taken on various subjects and English language is one of them. Like every other non-native English-speaking country, it is obvious that in every high-stake test of our country there will be an English language section. In a survey of Cambridge English Language Assessment, it is shown that, “English language skills are important for over 95% of employers in many non-native English-speaking countries” (*English at Work: global analysis of language skills in the workplace*, 2016). The main purpose of this English language section is to evaluate candidates’ English proficiency. As English is not our mother tongue, we need to be extra cautious while designing the English questions specially during designing high-stake tests like BCS job examination. According to Lyle F. Bachman (2004), “The most important consideration in designing and developing a language test is the use for which it is intended, so that the most important quality of a test is its usefulness” (p.17). We need to make sure that the questions can evaluate candidates properly otherwise the English language proficiency examination will not be fruitful. As English is the medium for global communication, the importance of being proficient

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in this language is increasing day by day. It is important for any type of organization (Government or private) to make sure that their employees have good command over English. Clement and Murugavel (2018) point out that, “Due to the global market, the requirements of English language is likely to increase every year and employees without adequate English language skills may find it very challenging to grow professionally” (p.02). Therefore, recruiters of BCS examination need to provide extra caution while designing the English examination test, so that our nation can get the best candidates for important roles.

Context of the research

According to a survey of BIGD (BRAC Institute of Governance and Development) and BRAC University; around 57% female and 42% male prefer government jobs (‘BRAC Youth Survey’, 2018). The number alone is proof that a large number of young people are choosing government jobs as their career plan. BCS examination is the largest job examination of Bangladesh. This examination has the capacity to change one’s whole life and social status. Recruiters try their best to choose the most suitable candidate for each position. Many young graduates from different educational backgrounds sit in this exam and try their best to overcome all the phases. The competition rate is high and candidates have to take at least for one year in order to do well in the examination.

For a successful examination, the questions need to be fruitful so that examiners can evaluate candidates properly and equally. However, the English questions of the BCS job examination do not go by the rules of a well-designed question. The purpose of adding English language in the question is to assess candidates’ English proficiency. But the English questions that come in the BCS preliminary examination are far behind from fulfilling its goal. First of all, the English

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question comes in the MCQ form which is extremely controversial in terms of effectiveness. Riabtseva, Gvozdeva and Tsilenko in their paper mention that, “Answering MCItems is an unreal task, as in real life one is rarely given four alternatives from which to make a choice to signal understanding” (2004, p.1146). Then, the examination does not cover all the features of the English language. Moreover, it is disappointing that in the preliminary phase they eliminate a huge number of candidates on the basis of these MCQ questions. The questions also do not follow any contexts and there are questions which are not needed in job sectors. Besides, the examination also does not cover any native like tasks of the English language. As a result, candidates are not getting equal opportunity and the recruiters also cannot evaluate candidates’ English proficiency.

Overview of English questions in BCS job examination

The examination is taken into three phases. There are various sections in the question paper. In the preliminary examination, 35 marks are allocated for the English language. For this research, I have analyzed the last 10 years of English questions on BCS. The questions come in MCQ format. There are questions from grammar, literature, phrases and idioms, synonyms/antonyms, use of appropriate words and sentences, spelling, word meaning, linguistic, IQ test/word puzzle. There is a written examination after the preliminary round. Candidates who get selected in the preliminary examination will be eligible to sit for the written exam. The examination does not hold any assessment on reading, speaking and listening.

Significance of the study

While researching, I surprisingly found out that not much research is done on this topic, especially on the topic of the BCS examination English question. Therefore, I sincerely hope this

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paper can help our educators and most importantly the BCS examination recruiters to think about re-designing the English questions especially for high-stake tests. I also wish candidates and young graduates who are thinking about attending the BCS examination can be aware of the effectiveness of the English questions that come in the examination and take proper measures to be proficient in English. They need to understand that memorizing for an examination cannot give them proficiency in a language and if they really wish to acquire the language, they need to take further steps and not rely on their memory based English knowledge. Memorized knowledge may help them to pass the BCS examination but it cannot guarantee their English proficiency.

Focus of the study

The main focus of my research is to show the ineffectiveness of BCS English questions. Every year an immense number of candidates get selected on the basis of these MCQ tests. These questions do not have any native like tasks and also do not fulfill features of English language proficiency. Yet, every year examiners recruit a high number of young graduates who appear to be “proficient in English” on the basis of this MCQ test. Moreover, after taking interviews of various participants; I discovered that most of the participants are memorizing answers from different guide books and sheets that are available in the market. Therefore, the whole process of MCQ based English questions and also evaluating candidates on the basis of the result, appears faulty as the test is not fulfilling its goal properly.

I particularly chose the BCS examination question for my research because it is the largest and most challenging high-stake examination of our country. The candidates chosen for the position will be working at various important positions thus it is important to make sure every part of the

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questions fulfills its duty. In this study, I also interviewed various participants who shared their struggles and perspectives on the matter. Thus, it may open a new research field for the educators of our country.

Limitations of the study

The study has certain limitations. First of all, the research is done on a short number of people. Therefore, I get the opinion of a small number of candidates which is not ideal for broad research like this one. Secondly, I had to continue the interview online due to the current state of our country. However, I transcribed the interviews properly and used them to support my point. Thirdly, I faced difficulties in finding resources. As I mentioned earlier, no research is done on this topic therefore, it was challenging to find proper resources and use them for my claims.

Literature Review

With the increasing number of graduates every year, Bangladeshi job market is now flooded with an immense number of young, valuable graduates. However, due to limited job opportunities most of these graduates cannot find a job according to their choice and skills. Therefore, not only unemployment but also graduates state dissatisfaction towards their current job. In the most recent survey of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), it is shown that around 34% graduates who have excelled in their academic life are unemployed ('34% Unemployed instead of having First Class', 2019). In this current situation, BCS has become one of the top choices for graduates. The job not only secures the future but also gives a prestigious position in the society. In this chapter, I will talk about current research and findings on the topic which will further help me to support my claims. I have categorized literature review into four sections.

Definition

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The BCS or Bangladesh Civil Service examination is a competitive public examination of Bangladesh which is held to recruit skilled manpower in various important and prestigious positions of our country such as admin, audit, taxation, foreign affairs, customs, teacher, doctor and engineer etc. The test is conducted by Bangladesh Public Service Commission and it is held every year. The test is conducted into three phases and candidates have to overcome all the three barriers to attain their desired position. According to an article of Dhaka Tribune, the BCS exam is considered as “The most powerful profession” of Bangladesh (‘What is Wrong with BCS Exam?’ 2022). Therefore, it is clear why “more than 80% of undergraduate students begin preparing for the BCS examination from their 1st year” (‘Why do all job seekers want to be BCS cadres?’ 2021). As the competition is higher than any normal job examination; candidates have to start preparing themselves from a very early time.

Main objectives of BCS examination

The main objectives of the BCS examination can be categorized into three sections.

- 1) **Recruiter’s Objective:** Recruitment is an important process for any job examination. It is the procedure by which various organizations select and attract individuals to fill job vacancies (Kleiman, 2005). Therefore, recruiters play a vital role in any job examination. Recruiter’s objective is the main reason why the exam is held. As BCS is an examination to ensure a government job; the main recruiter of the examination is BPSC (Bangladesh Public Service Commission). The commission works under the direct influence of the Bangladesh Government and takes necessary decisions and steps regarding the BCS examination. The main objective of BPSC is to recruit skilled and qualified candidates in several government sectors.

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- 2) **Candidate's Objective:** Candidate's objective to take part in the exam is mainly to secure a government job. In our South Asia region, a government job plays a great role in terms of receiving a prestigious social position. A person with a government job can lead a secure life and also receives power. Ferdous Ara in this regard states that, "Considering the socioeconomic context of Bangladesh, a job in the cadre service is considered as one of the most prestigious as one enjoys a high salary along with various facilities here that other service holders usually are not entitled to." (2021, p.01). This is the main attraction point for most of the candidates however some exceptional cases can always be seen.
- 3) **Examination's Objective:** As I have discussed the objective of both recruiter's and participant's objective; it is now time to discuss the objectives behind the examination. As I mentioned before, the examination is taken to ensure qualified candidates in every government sector. Therefore, it is clearly a high-stake test and these types of tests attempt to use assessments on their own to take actions with major educational, financial or social consequences (Genesee & Upshur, 1997, p.6). Currently there are 27 cadre sectors in Bangladesh which are directly linked to the government. To ensure equality and transparency the test is conducted in three stages. First stage is a preliminary test, where candidates have to answer MCQ on various topics. The questions for MCQ are invariant for every candidate no matter which sector they belong or have chosen. Then there is a written test which is held after the preliminary test. And thirdly, there is viva for each position and sector. To maintain equality and stability, all candidates have to go through the three stages and after a long process of selection and elimination, a suitable candidate is chosen. As my research focuses on English questions from the preliminary round, I will solely talk about the mark distribution, categorization of English questions

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only. In the preliminary round, 35 marks are allocated for the English sector. Candidates no matter which background he/she is from have to answer these questions. The reason why English is included as a part of the examination to examine candidates' English proficiency. Thus, it is an important part of the question and also for the recruiters to evaluate candidates.

Characteristics of a good test

Bachman and Clark in their article stated that the constant need for measurement of English proficiency is increasing. It is useful for determining candidates' proficiency level in terms of giving jobs and educational purposes. However, the purpose is often unfulfilled as "they are based on a model of language proficiency that does not include the full range of abilities required for communicative language use" and secondly the test "only permit interpretation of ability levels relative to the performance of specific groups of language users" (1987, p.21). The main reason behind adding English in the BCS preliminary exam is to check participants' proficiency over English. However, to evaluate a participant's English proficiency, the examination should be performance based not MCQ based. Stetcher mentioned MCQ as a test that is "easier target for generalization" and added that these types of tests do not reflect the nature of performance in the real world, which rarely present people with structured choices' ' (2010, p.02). Though there is a written exam after the preliminary round however, the multiple-choice questions that come in the preliminary test do not fulfill its goal also. The questions are made for all the participants no matter which subject background they are from; the questions however fail to evaluate participants' English proficiency. For example, in the MCQ there are many questions which are from literature. A person who is not from an English literature background will have to

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memorize the answers from different guide books. Besides, a doctor or an engineer does not have to know about literature as their subject interest is different. In addition, Thanyapa and Currie also state that, “There was some evidence that higher numbers of distractors may have induced some test takers to select incorrect options even though in the short answer test they were able to offer a correct response” (2014, p.19). There are many other examples which prove that English questions of BCS are not up to the mark. As it is a high-stake test, recruiters should evaluate examinees intensely and MCQ cannot be a good choice to assess someone’s English proficiency.

A good test has five characteristics. They are validity, reliability, authenticity, practicality and washback. If any of these characteristics is missing, the test cannot be held as a good test.

- 1) **Validity:** To validate a test, the test should measure what it is supposed to measure. In an article of *Cambridge English*, it is stated that “Validity refers to whether a test measures what it aims to measure” (1st paragraph). In BCS preliminary examination, English is added to assess candidates’ English proficiency.
- 2) **Reliability:** A test can be addressed as reliable if the items of the test are well-calibrated, acceptably designed and fairly distributed. Nicholson stated reliability as “same test to the same subjects or matched subjects on two different occasions would yield the same result” (2015, p.223).
- 3) **Authenticity:** A test can be called authentic if the given language test task corresponds to the target language task. For a test to be authentic, the materials have to be related with real life situations. Otherwise, it “weakens the generalizability of result” (Spolsky, 1985, Abstract).

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- 4) **Practicality:** In *Studying Speaking to Inform Second Language Learning*, Bachman and Palmer (1996) stated practicality as “the ratio between the resources available and the resources needed” (as cited in Boxer and Cohen, p. 285). If a test is equal for all its candidates in terms of questions, expenses then the test can be held as practical.
- 5) **Washback:** Washback can be considered as the impact of a test. Messick defined washback as “to the extent to which the introduction and use of a test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning” (1996, Abstract). Washback has two effects, which are positive and negative. If the result is beneficial then it can be considered as positive washback and if it is the opposite then it is negative washback.

The gap in the literature:

In this paper, I will inspect the areas that are not studied and underexplored. In our country, much research is done on standardized English tests as well as on English tests in general. However, not much research is done on English questions for the job examination, especially English questions on the BCS preliminary test.

However, this does not mean that no research is done on the BCS examination. Momtaz Jahan (2012) explored the recruitment and selection process of BCS. In this paper, she elaborately talks about the recruitment and selection process including eligibility for recruitment, method of recruitment, existing position, quota system, fault in the current recruitment process etc. Nevertheless, the paper does not talk about test questions, more importantly English test questions. Md. Rezaul Karim (2007) in his paper talked about major factors that cause irregularities in BCS examination and how BPSC has lost credibility. The paper examined

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various faults and controversies regarding BCS examination and diagnosed the factors that are causing loss of credibility of the commission. In the paper, he talked about leakage of BCS questions due to corruption but it does not represent any discussions on the quality of English questions or the BCS question in general. In another paper by Md. Harunur Rashid (2019) studied the “motivating and demotivating factors with gender orientation to choose Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) as career among prospective university candidates”. The paper focuses on the factors that can motivate or demotivate a candidate. It also talked about different perspectives between men and women in terms of choosing a career in BCS. However, the paper does not cover anything about the English question system of BCS or if the candidates face any difficulties to answer or take preparation for the English questions. Md. Abdullah Al Zobair (2017) in his paper talked about quota system in BCS examination and how it is currently creating huge discrimination in the examination and selection process. Although the paper criticizes the recruitment process of the BCS examination, it does not provide any comment on the English question of the BCS examination.

Therefore, it can be said that no proper research is done on English questions of the BCS examination. In this paper, I will study the quality of English questions in the BCS preliminary examination and how it can affect the future of the candidates. Additionally, I will also talk about candidates’ way of preparing for the English part of the examination.

Methodology:

For my research, I used a qualitative method to gather data. A qualitative method is used in research to provide in-depth understanding on a topic. It barely works with numerical data rather it works upon given information of the participants, primary and secondary data. As it is an

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analytical paper, my purpose was to explore the whole research area rather than prove or disprove any statement. The main motive of this research is to explore the mentioned area and “describe, collect and tell stories” (Creswell, 2012, p.22) rather than defining a certain point. Hence, the qualitative method was the suitable option for my research. It helped me to concentrate on the participants’ point of view as well as on the existing literature on this topic. The research was conducted on a limited group of people. I collected data from various resources and also by conducting interviews. My primary data was the last 10 years' question papers of the BCS job examination. I collected my primary data from websites. All of my data was non-numerical and therefore I did not need any technological help to analyze them. Furthermore, I used my own observation and experience in this research which helped me to establish the research questions. I also collected various secondary resources from different websites which supported me to prove my claims.

i) Data Collection Procedures:

At the very beginning of my research, I started collecting several job examination questions. To make the research more up to date, I analyzed and collected questions from the last 10 years. After gathering all the desired questions, I chose the part I was willing to analyze (English) and then started differentiating the type of questions (Vocabulary, Grammar, Literature, Linguistic, History, Synonyms/Antonyms etc.). After analyzing the questions, I started working on my questionnaire which later on were asked to my participants’ during interviews. My primary interview method was to ask participants' questions directly and then record them. However, if any participant was not comfortable with this process; I asked them to write down the answers. As the worldwide Covid situation did not allow many participants to engage in a face-to-face

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interview; I arranged virtual meetings and communication ways to make them feel comfortable. I used media like zoom, messenger etc. to conduct the interview session. Instruments that were used to collect data were laptops with internet connection, smart phones. No software was used to analyze the data. After gathering all the interviews, I marked the important parts from the given answers and included them in the paper. Then I started searching for relevant secondary resources. I searched for similar papers or articles that were done before on various trusted websites like JSTOR, Google scholar etc. All the articles I used in this paper are available on scholarly databases. I had gone through every possible article I found on this topic and finally chose a few for my paper. At last, I cross checked my secondary resources with my topic to make sure that I found the relevant secondary sources for my paper.

ii) Collecting Questions

My primary data were questions about job examinations in our country. I went for the BCS and Bank examination questions for this research. My focused subject was English as the main goal of this paper was to analyze the quality of English questions in a job examination. I gathered questions from various websites and categorized them into several sections such as literature, history, grammar etc. After categorizing the questions, I marked important questions which were related to my research and later analyzed them.

iii) Participants

I collected my data from interviewing my participants. It was one of the crucial parts of this research. I made questionnaires which were helpful for me to get my desired information and also for my participants as they were able to think about the answers more precisely. The questions were open ended as there are rooms for more information in this research. The

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questions were asked in both Bangla and English as all of my participants were Bengali.

Participants had the full freedom to speak in any language they wanted. As my research severely focused on English questions in job examinations of our country; my focused participants were also the ones who had participated in a job examination or were doing jobs. I interviewed them about their experience, if they were satisfied with the English questions and could the English questions interpret a candidate's proficiency over the language. Furthermore, I asked them about the question's ability to predict a candidate's future performance. In the end, I was also asked about their suggestions regarding this matter. I additionally interviewed non-job holders to get their point of view on the subject matter. Their opinions were also analyzed with similar importance as the opinions of the job holders.

iv) Maintained Ethical Issues

The topic of this research was approved by my supervisor. The research was held ensuring the utmost comfort of the participants. Participants had the absolute right to choose not to answer any question that may impose a threat upon them and also could withdraw any time they wanted. Participants could also request not to disclose their identity and I maintained their confidentiality. Before the interview a consent form had been sent to them stating all the criteria, purpose, and possible harms (if there was any). As much as I believed, there were no risks that participants may face in this research. However, if there were any possible factors that may cause harm to participants, I tried to avoid it at any cost to ensure the security of my participants. The participants had a clear idea about the use of data they had given. If any participant was under aged, I got in touch with the legal guardian of the participant to receive consent. I had taken permission from the ethics committee of my university and avoided any sort of plagiarism.

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Data Analysis

My primary data which are questions from the BCS job examination are collected from various websites that provide questions and also solutions of previous years. After collecting the questions, I have divided the questions in various sectors such as literature, grammar history etc. Then I reviewed the questions again in order to determine which ones are necessary for the paper and which ones are not. After the collection of primary data, I have prepared questions for interviews. I have interviewed eight people. I have given them questions via online meeting and messenger and they are asked to write down the answers as all of them mentioned that they are uncomfortable if I record the interviews. Every one of them has at least practiced BCS English examination questions. Three of the participants are taking beginner level preparation for the BCS. Three have already given exams and one of them got selected in the preliminary exam. One has given the exam before but did not get selected and is currently preparing for next year's BCS examination. Last two participants have already given the BCS exam. They have successfully completed all the other exam rounds and are currently doing government jobs. Among the participants four are female and the rest of them are male. All of them are legal aged and the interview is conducted after getting their consent. All of the participants asked to remain anonymous. The interviews are conducted in English as all the participants are informed that they are comfortable to speak in English. Some of the direct speeches from the interviews are used in the paper. After the interview session, I transcribed them in a word file and marked important information that will be used in the paper. After that, I have started looking for secondary resources. I have chosen the ones that are relevant to my research. With the help of secondary resources, I strongly hold a ground for my claims in the paper. To make data analysis easy and also for easy understanding, I have used codes to indicate the participants. It will help

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the readers to easily identify the participants. It will also help me as I do not need to mention the name of the participants over and over throughout the paper. I also have used some short terms for some of the contents. The codes I used for this paper is given below:

Participant 1= P1

Participant 2= P2

Participant 3= P3

Participant 4= P4

Participant 5= P5

Participant 6= P6

Participant 7= P7

Participant 8= P8

Multiple Choice Question= MCQ

Bangladesh Civil Service= BCS

Findings:

I have divided this part into different sections. It will help me to focus on each subject that I want to discuss. It will also help the readers to understand my findings.

Question type

In the BCS preliminary exam all the questions are MCQ based. Therefore, it is obvious that the English part of the question will also be MCQ based. In the question paper, they provide

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questions from various sectors of English like grammar, literature, spelling, linguistics, synonyms/antonyms, word meaning, appropriate words/sentences, phrases and idioms and puzzles. A huge number of questions are from grammar. In this part they ask participants to put the correct preposition, verb, tense etc. to evaluate their grammar knowledge. But these questions can actually measure the grammar proficiency of a candidate, let alone his/her proficiency over the language. Three of my interview participants dismissed the idea of MCQ being a proper measure to evaluate candidates. P2 mentions that MCQ questions can also be answered through “pure luck”. She mentions that during her first time giving the BCS examination she answered some of the questions by guessing their answers and miraculously some of them were even correct. P1 mentions that through MCQ it is even hard to evaluate candidates’ ‘genuine’ proficiency over the grammar also. He stated that “I don't even know why they put MCQ English questions in order to assess someone’s English proficiency. I think they just put it just because they had to without thinking about the results' '. P3 mentioned the whole MCQ based question system as “bizarre” as some MCQ based question systems cannot evaluate language proficiency.

Memory based

As I was going through my primary data which are BCS questions, I realized almost all of the questions are memory based. For example, in the synonyms/antonyms part of the question they give questions like “Choose the correct synonym for the word Sporadic”. A person who has a great vocabulary stock or graduated from English may easily answer this question however a person who for example is graduated from Bangla subject or Economics will face difficulty to answer questions like this. Therefore, during the preparation period most candidates choose to memorize. During my interview session six of my participants agreed to the point that English

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questions that come in the BCS examination are memory based. However, P7 mentioned the questions are a mixture of “memory based and trick based”. She further explains that a certain part needs to be memorized where one can ace the English exam if he/she can apply “certain tricks”. P3 mentions that questions are memory based as well as need prior knowledge to answer. For instance, if someone has a good grammar knowledge, he/she does not have to memorize grammar parts but, for other parts memorization is needed. Prior knowledge can reduce the memorization pressure a bit but eventually candidates’ have to memorize certain sections. Therefore, it can be said that English questions are memory based.

Efficiency of memory based English proficiency questions in high-stake exam

Nowadays, almost every job sector seeks candidates’ who are proficient in English language. In every job examination question, we can see an English segment. This part of the question is added to evaluate candidates’ English proficiency. In the BCS examination, there is also a segment for English language. However, the effectiveness of the questions as well as the design of the questions is itself questionable. The questions are asked in MCQ pattern and they consist of various parts of the English language like grammar, literature, appropriate words/sentences, synonyms/antonyms etc. The questions do not fulfill all the features of English language evaluation and candidates’ have to memorize the materials in order to answer the questions. But the question still remains, can we accept the result of memory-based questions and can memory-based English proficiency hold any value in the job sector? According to P8, with memory based knowledge you may get help for a certain period but in order to perform well in the job sector, one must need proficiency over English. P7 mentions that in the job sector “practical application” of English is needed rather than the memorized knowledge that they

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acquired during their preparation period. P2 criticizes the entire language evaluation process of BCS and states, “if someone appoints an employee just by judging his/her parrot like memory; I don’t think it will bring any good for the post or organization”. By memorizing answers one may do well in exams that have MCQ, however in a real world task where candidates’ need to communicate and write scripts in English; the use of memory is extremely low.

Mental condition of the candidates

It is usual for candidates to feel pressure during preparation and examination period. However, the level of stress increases if candidates not only have to take preparation but also have to make sure to memorize bits and pieces of every section. Many studies show that the pressure that examinees feel during high stake exams can affect their mental health also. And somehow if the candidate fails in a high-stake exam like BCS, it can lead to severe depression and anxiety. Not only that, during the preparation period candidates of the BCS examination feel tremendous stress as they have to memorize everything. Memorizing study materials can be hectic as they are only going through the tough phase just to get a government job and unfortunately some candidates fail even after giving their best. During my interview session, I asked the participants if they had to put any extra effort into attending the English part and surprisingly all of them replied affirmatively. Each one of them has to memorize English questions from guide books or sheets provided by the coaching center. P7 mentions that he/she had to take preparation for more than one year before sitting for the examination. She mentions that he/she has to fully “devote” himself/herself during the preparation period. P8 mentions that he/she has to practice questions of previous years in order to get a hold on the English questions. P3 mentions that he does not have to put extra effort on grammar parts but for other parts like word meaning, literature etc. he has to memorize from guide books. Rest of the participants stated that they are memorizing from

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guide books and sheets provided by the coaching center. Some of them even practice previous years questions in order to get a grasp on the English part.

Tasks given in the English language question

To evaluate proficiency over a language, examiners need to make sure to design language questions close to native like with the purpose to evaluate candidates' proficiency over the language as well as to show them the use of the language in the real world. It is a crucial part for the non-native countries like Bangladesh to evaluate candidates' English proficiency during a high-stake test like BCS examination. However, in the BCS examination no real world-based task of the English language is provided. To ensure real world-based tasks, one has to evaluate all four features of the English language which are reading, writing, speaking and listening. Unfortunately, in the preliminary round examination; we fail to examine all of these features. There is a written exam part after the preliminary examination however even counting that in rest three of the features still remain untouched. Speaking and listening play a vital role in proficiency of an English language as these two are used in the communication process of English. In the interview session, all of my participants agreed to the point that no real world-based task is provided in the BCS examination. P7 mentions the English test as a "nerve test" rather than a language proficiency test. It is no secret that the majority of students of our country greatly suffer from English phobia due to English not being the native language of Bangladesh. Therefore, it is understandable why candidates' feel immense pressure while taking preparation and also during the examination. Though there are questions on grammar, they are not sufficient to even evaluate grammar proficiency properly. For example, there is a question like "Which one of the following words is in singular form?" and then they give options (a) agenda (b) oases (c)

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radius (d) formulae. The question cannot prove a candidate's proficiency over singular number plural number let alone evaluate grammar proficiency. The candidate may or may not answer the question correctly but it can neither prove he/she knows all the singular/plural forms of various words nor it can predict the English proficiency candidates' who somehow do not know the singular form of this particular word. P5 believes that in the professional world one simply does not need to know the meaning of very advanced words, rather candidates' need communication proficiency and public speaking proficiency. P1 mentions that as the questions are MCQ based it is hard to judge candidates' genuine proficiency on grammar also. P3 mentions that the English questions of the BCS examination is completely random as it does not follow any script. There are questions from grammar but there are also questions from literature, synonyms/antonyms, phrases and idioms etc.

Usefulness in the desired job sector

In the global job sector, communication in English plays an important role as it is now the only medium of communication. Thus, many other non-native countries are concentrating on fulfilling all the four language features of English. They are providing English training to their employees and also strictly evaluates English proficiency of new employees. BCS is a high-stake examination of our country as the selected candidates' will join important and prestigious government positions. They have to sometimes work in foreign projects where English is needed for communication purposes. Unfortunately, the process in which recruiters evaluate candidates' English proficiency is inadequate. Firstly, in the preliminary round they create one question for all candidates. The candidates are not from similar backgrounds yet they have to answer the questions in order to qualify the exam. Secondly, the questions do not cover all the features of

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the English language. Thirdly, the topics of the questions are not contextualized and they are completely random. There are questions from English literature as well as there are questions on spelling, putting/selecting appropriate words and sentences etc. During my interview session almost all of the participants' agreed that the BCS English question pattern cannot be considered as an evaluating tool for English proficiency. They also added that in the job sector the usefulness of the English questions that they provide is extremely low. P8 mentions that despite being an engineering institute graduate, he/she has to memorize English segments that do not go with his/her study and even with his/her current profession. She stated, "I had to memorize words that had nothing to do with my position and my undergrad subjects. We do not even use those words on a daily basis". P6 sees the questions as a means to evaluate candidates' basic English knowledge however he also states that some of the questions are "unnecessary". P3 states that the English questions do not go with "anybody's desired job position unless you applied for an English teacher position for a government institution". P2 appreciates the fact that the English question is treating every candidate equally, however it does not add any usefulness in the desired job position of the candidates.

Quantity or Quality

In a language proficiency test, the quality of question paper and the materials matter the most. If the language test can ensure evaluation of natural use of the language, then it can be considered as a good quality language test. Many researchers have shown their concern on the concept of MCQ test. As the questions are close ended and also give away correct answers in the options; researchers are skeptical about its usefulness. It cannot be denied that it is one of the easiest methods of examination and examiners also have to use less time and energy to evaluate

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candidates through this concept of exam. However, in a high-stake test like BCS, the use of this method is utterly questionable. A large number of young graduates participate in the BCS examination every year and evaluating this large number of candidates' English proficiency through MCQ might be threatening. Judging from the response of my participants I can hereby state that the main objective of BCS preliminary exam and its English question is to eliminate some candidates and not to evaluate candidates' proficiency over the English. P6 states that, "The main purpose of this test is to eliminate as many candidates as possible". Therefore, it can be said that the principal aim of the exam is to reduce the quantity of the candidates rather than ensuring the quality of English proficiency. P8 mentions that the questions only help the examiners as they have to deal with less candidates. The recruiters focus more on eliminating a large quantity of candidates rather than evaluate candidates' English proficiency quality.

Capacity to determine candidates' current or future English language proficiency

The main reason English language is added in the BCS examination is to examine candidates' proficiency over English. Examining the primary data and also interviewing active members in this field of examination, it can be said that 1) Candidates are memorizing answers for the examination, 2) Questions are MCQ based which may not be able to evaluate candidates' properly. To determine English language proficiency, all four features (reading, writing, speaking and listening) have to be examined. But in the BCS examination 1) They do not examine all four features, 2) There is a written exam after the preliminary round however they do not evaluate the scripts by native users of English language, 3) In the preliminary examination, they are assessing candidates through the result of MCQ test. Therefore, it is impossible to determine candidates' genuine proficiency over the language as well as their future performance on the language. In

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this matter P8 states, “Just some 15-20 MCQ tests on a language can certainly not evaluate language proficiency”. He also mentions that the questions do not have the capacity to evaluate language proficiency of candidates whether it is current or in the future. P7 thinks that MCQ cannot be an ideal question pattern to assess English language proficiency and it needs a more thorough evaluation process. P6 mentions that it may examine grammar proficiency to some extent but can never measure overall language proficiency.

Characteristics of a good test

A good test has five characteristics. They are: validity, reliability, authenticity, practicality and washback. The BCS examination cannot be considered as a good test. Reasons behind are:

- 1) Lacks validity: A test can be called valid if it can measure what it is supposed to measure. The English question of BCS examination is supposed to measure candidates’ proficiency over English but unfortunately it fails due to poor design and material of the examination.
- 2) Lacks reliability: A test can be held as reliable if the test is consistent and dependable. The English question of the BCS examination has ambiguous materials like IQ puzzle and literature questions to determine language proficiency of candidates. Thus the test is not reliable.
- 3) Lacks authenticity: If the given language proficiency test corresponds with the features of the target language tasks then the test can be held authentic. The English language has four features. They are reading, writing, speaking and listening. English questions of BCS do not fulfill all the four features. Besides, the items of the question are isolated and also not natural.

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- 4) Practicality: When a test is easy to design and administrate also maintains equality among the candidates, then it can be called a practical test. The English question of the BCS examination is practical. The design of the question is simple MCQ based. All of the candidates receive the same questions. The exam is also easy to administer as the exam paper is evaluated through a computer. Therefore, the test is practical.
- 5) Lacks positive washback: Washback is the impact of the test. It has two parts; positive and negative. The BCS English questions do not motivate candidates to learn English. The test also is not a reliable medium to measure English proficiency of the candidates.

Outcomes

Positive outcomes can be expected from a test if the test can fulfill its goal. The reason why English is added in the examination questions is to examine candidates' English proficiency. The test has failed to fulfill its goal. Candidates memorize answers of the questions from different books and sheets. They are not eager to learn the language, rather they are memorizing the answers to pass the test. Such an examination system can never bring fruitful results. While interviewing my participants, almost all of them agreed that the test cannot measure English proficiency therefore the result of the test is not valid and we cannot expect a positive outcome from the test. However, P6 mentions that candidates will get their desired job upon completion of this part, therefore it can be considered as a positive outcome. P2 also mentions that it is successfully eliminating candidates which can be held as a positive outcome but in terms of language proficiency no positive outcome can be seen. Recruiters also do not appear to pay attention to the outcome of the exam; rather they use the English examination as a tool to eliminate candidates.

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Discussion

From the findings that are mentioned above, it is clear that MCQ based English questions cannot examine proficiency of candidates. The candidates are memorizing answers from different sources and are not grasping main ideas of language acquisition.

Firstly, MCQ is not an ideal pattern of questions. The efficiency of MCQs in any examination has always been a controversial topic. Many researchers have criticized this pattern of questions. Shavelson, Ruiz and Wiley mentions that MCQ based assessment is only suitable for declarative knowledge not for procedural knowledge (2005, p.415). However, in order to test English proficiency, especially for a high-stake test; procedural knowledge is much needed. First of all, in the MCQ; the answer is already in the options. Many candidates can get the answers right just by guessing. P2 mentions in the interview that during her first time giving the BCS examination, she randomly picked the answers and some of them were also correct. Note to mention, P2 did not take any preparation during her first BCS examination and still was able to correct some answers by guessing. As the answers are already given in the MCQ candidates do not need to practice English questions like any language proficiency examination like IELTS. They only need to memorize without knowing the actual use of the words or grammar rules in the real-life scenario. The questions can assess a limited type of knowledge which is not enough for an English language proficiency test. Besides, most of the MCQ do not follow any contexts. Also, MCQ can lead to ambiguity. In a language test, there is no correct answer for a topic as candidates can argue over the topic. The main target of the language proficiency test is to evaluate whether an examinee can share his/her point of view in the given topic with the target language or not. However, in the MCQ test candidates have to choose correct answers and are

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not required to show their skills in the language. Therefore, using MCQ in English language proficiency examination is nothing but a bad decision of the recruiters as it is not assessing the candidates properly.

Secondly, the English questions that come in the examination are mostly memory based. In the BCS examination, candidates from different subject backgrounds take part. As a result, most of the English questions that come in the examination are not their strong suit. For example, there are questions from English literature such as, “Riders to the Sea is —(1) an epic poem (2) a novella (3) a one-act play (4) a theatrical adaptation of a poem”. In the meantime, a candidate from medical background or business background may never have heard of this play yet they need to answer it correctly in order to prove his/her English proficiency. The only way these types of candidates can answer this question is by memorizing. P1 mentions that as he is a BBA graduate, he did not have any knowledge on English literature and he needed to memorize English literature questions in order to do well in the examination. Much research has been done on the disadvantages of memorizing language. One can memorize certain rules of the English language but in order to grasp a language, one needs to acquire the language not memorize it. Memorizing the English language can help a candidate to pass this examination but it cannot prove their proficiency over the language. Recruiters who are also evaluating the candidates’ English language proficiency based on the result of these questions are hampering not only the candidates but also our nation by not recruiting proper candidates for important positions. P3 mentions that via memorizing one can learn certain rules but they cannot hold on to the core features of English language. The candidates who are memorizing the answers are not practicing

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the English language properly. The final result of this English proficient examination is not authentic.

Thirdly, the English question examination cannot determine the language proficiency of a candidate. To examine English language proficiency; the test needs to cover all four features of the English language. They are reading, writing, speaking and listening. As the English questions are memory based and they come into MCQ pattern; it is not possible to fulfill all the features of the English language. There is a written test after the preliminary examination, but a huge number of students are getting eliminated based on the MCQ based English questions. As the examination does not fulfill all the features of the English language; it cannot determine candidates' proficiency over the language. The English questions also do not represent any real-world task of the language. Most of the questions are also out of context like I mentioned before therefore it cannot evaluate English language proficiency.

Fourthly, the English questions that come in the examination, do not have any necessity in the job sectors. Grammar is the most common part of the question in the examination. However, as it is a MCQ examination, grammar questions here are mostly about choosing correct tense, preposition, adverb etc. For example, "Eight men were concerned ____ the plot. (1) at (2) with (3) in (4) for", here in the blank space candidates need to use proper prepositions. Nevertheless, it is transparent that these types of questions cannot even determine candidates' grammar proficiency and whether or not that candidate can use proper prepositions in real life. Besides, in the real-world scenario candidates will not be given options to choose from rather they need to show their impromptu English language skills. Not only the grammar part it is concerning that other parts of the questions also do not play any major role in the job sectors. One cannot use

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their memorized knowledge on English literature in his/her job sectors. P7 mentions that the words that she memorized during the preparation period are not needed in her job life. The pressure of memorizing the answers only disrupts candidates' mental wellbeing. When a candidate attends a high-stake job examination like BCS, he/she already is burdened with several social and family expectations. In the meantime, memorizing completely new rules, words, knowledge etc. which are not even related to one's subject field can bring tremendous pressure. And even after enduring all, if the candidate fails in the examination; it shatters his/her confidence.

Finally, The English test questions do not fulfill the characteristics of a good test. A good test has five characteristics. They are: validity, reliability, authenticity, practicality and washback. The English questions lack validity because, 1) It cannot measure candidates' English proficient level as it is supposed to, 2) Do not have a representative sample of language skills, 3) The test cannot predict candidates' English language performance in the future. The English question lacks reliability because, 1) The test is not dependable, 2) Items are not well-calibrated and they are poorly designed, 3) There are no items that can differentiate between strong and weak candidates, 3) Do not allow candidate any freedom to show their English skills as it is a MCQ based examination. The test is not authentic because, 1) The English questions do not represent any native like tasks, 2) Test items are not contextualized, 3) There is no thematic organization in the question. The test is not practical because..... The test has a negative washback because 1) Do not motivate the candidates to learn English rather provoke them in order to do good in the examination, 2) The test is not reliable to evaluate candidates' English proficiency.

Conclusion

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This study aimed to analyze English questions of the BCS examination and to find out whether or not it can be considered as a good test. BCS is a high-stake job examination for our country. And as Soodeh Bordbar mentions, “High-stakes testing is one of the most provocative subjects of education, and the technicalities involved are highly complex” (2020, p.50). Thus, it needs to be taken carefully. Any mistake can cause a huge toll. The English language questions are added so that recruiters can test language proficiency of the candidates. As English is not our native language, we need to take additional precautions in terms of assessing English proficiency. But the English questions of the BCS job examination are not suitable for evaluating candidates. It is MCQ based and also the question items are not useful in real life. The segments do not go with many candidates’ job sectors. The questions do not fulfill all the features of the English language; thus, cannot determine English language proficiency of the candidates and also cannot predict their future language performance. As a result, the test does not fulfill all the characteristics of a good test.

Recommendations

Recruiters need to put more focus on the design of the English language test. As Md. Rashedur Rahman Sardar states, “The Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPSC) can bring about a big change in our job market by simply changing the syllabus of the The Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) preliminary exam” (‘A better BCS exam can create better students, job seekers’, 2021). They need to do practical tasks so that candidates can use English in a practical manner. The practical tasks will also help them in the job sector and examiners can also evaluate their language proficiency correctly. Examiners also need to add all the features of the English language and put equal emphasis on them.

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For the study, I would like to mention that more research needed to be done on this topic. I have only analyzed English questions for the BCS examination; however, there are more job examinations as well as high-stakes examinations in our country. Future researchers can conduct the interview on a large number of active people in this field. If we put more focus on this field of study it may be beneficial for the candidates of these job examinations and also for the organization as they can choose an ideal candidate for their organization.

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Appendix

1. Have you ever participated BCS? Yes/no/others
2. Have you seen/given/ practiced English questions of BCS?
3. How was the question? a. Memory based b. Skill based (assess reading, writing, speaking and listening skills) c. Others (Require explanation)
4. Do you have to put extra effort to memorize the English questions of BCS?
5. Do you think memory based English language question brings any help in the job sector?
(Explain you answer) / IF MEMORY BASED
6. Do the English questions go with the participants desired job position?
7. Are the items of the test contextualized?
 - a. Yes b. No
0. Does the test represent any real world/native like tasks of English language? (explain)
0. Do you think the language evaluation part of the job questions can actually measures what it is supposed to measure? (In other words do you think that the question is valid in terms of evaluating a candidate's proficiency over English?)
0. Does the test actually fulfill all the features of English language? (Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening)
0. Do you think that the English test question has any positive outcomes? (explain)

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0. Can we predict a candidate's language performance in the future through this test?

(explain)

0. Overall what are your thoughts about the design of English questions in BCS?

0. Do you want to suggest something for the betterment of English test question in job examination?