



GCSE

Bengali

8638/SF Speaking (Foundation)

Report on the examination

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General Comments

The 2025 GCSE Bengali Foundation Tier speaking test successfully allowed students to demonstrate oral proficiency aligned with their abilities. This year, 108 students participated, with an average mark of approximately 47.99 out of 60. Overall, student performance was comparable to previous series, possibly due to a consistent approach to the Role-play and Photo Card tasks.

This report provides a detailed analysis of the Foundation Tier speaking test, with a focus on teacher conduct and student performance. It highlights best practices and areas for potential improvement.

Quality of Recordings

Most tests were conducted in appropriate settings with high-quality recording equipment. However, a few instances of external background noise and substandard recordings affected the clarity of students' responses.

Test Routine Procedures

Many teacher-examiners adhered closely to the guidelines provided in the **Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations**, ensuring smooth execution of the test. This adherence helped put students at ease and streamlined the marking process.

However, some teacher-examiners did not follow prescribed procedures. It is essential to include the Role-play number, Photo Card letter, and the nominated General Conversation theme when introducing these elements to each new student. During the test, procedural announcements should be brief and conducted in the target language, with the appropriate wording provided in the guidelines. It is especially important to announce any change in theme during the General Conversation. Missing out the required question was also evident in conducting conversations by some of the teacher-examiners.

Timings

Many students comfortably completed the Photo Card task within the Foundation tier time limit of two minutes. On the rare occasions when all five questions were not asked in time, this was typically due to slow delivery or unnecessarily lengthy responses, particularly when describing the photo.

For the General Conversation, timings generally adhered to the minimum and maximum limits. Very few conversations fell short of the required minimum time, but in some cases, the second theme was insufficiently covered, which affected the communication score. Centres are advised to note that the second General Conversation theme begins as soon as the first question of that theme is asked. Time spent before this point counts towards the first theme. Moreover, teacher-examiners should remember that any content beyond the maximum time limit is disregarded for assessment. In some cases, the timings went well above the maximum allowance; the teacher-examiners should have kept the recordings within a reasonable duration. Some cases showed an imbalance in the time spent on each theme of the conversation.

Conducting the Role-play Task

Most teachers followed the prescribed role as outlined in the teacher's booklet. However, a few teacher-examiners deviated from the script, invalidating subsequent student responses. In some instances, the context was altered. Occasionally, teacher-examiners repeated the role-play questions more than twice or supplied key vocabulary, contrary to the guidelines. During role-play, there were a few instances in which the teacher-examiner missed out the prompt or did not provide an opportunity to let the student ask the required question.

Conducting the Photo Card Task

Most teacher-examiners adhered to the questions as they appeared on the card. While paraphrasing is permitted, it must preserve the exact meaning of the question. Any deviation from this creates an unfair advantage, and such responses must be invalidated to ensure fairness.

Teacher-examiners should be mindful that if a student begins to give an incorrect but incomplete answer, the full question may be re-asked. However, if a complete but incorrect answer is given, any subsequent response to a repeated question is disregarded for assessment.

Conducting the General Conversation

Most teacher-examiners asked questions appropriate to the students' abilities, though there were instances where a set list of questions was used without considering individual student needs. Questions were generally phrased to allow students to express and explain opinions, which is necessary to achieve top marks for communication in the Foundation tier. Higher-achieving students were typically encouraged to use three-time frames, enabling them to access the 9-10 band for range and accuracy.

Some teacher-examiners, however, continued to ask low-achieving students a series of tense-oriented questions, which led to confusion and unclear or unintelligible responses. It is essential to note that the successful use of three-time frames is only required for top band marks in range and accuracy. Some students may perform better by answering a series of simple present-tense questions.

When students misunderstand a question and offer an appropriate but incorrect response, the teacher-examiner should redirect the conversation by rephrasing the question or asking a follow-up question. Irrelevant information provided by the student cannot be credited and will negatively impact the accuracy of their performance.

Teacher-examiners should use questioning techniques that encourage spontaneity. While some tests fostered authentic conversations, this was the exception rather than the rule, as many performances were dominated by pre-learned responses.

In examples of best practice, teacher-examiners allowed even lower-achieving students to demonstrate spontaneity through simple follow-up questions. Such techniques can greatly assist low-achieving students in sustaining a conversation.

Most teacher-examiners were aware of the requirement for students to ask a question during the General Conversation. Some students asked their questions at their discretion, while others waited for the teacher to prompt them at the end of the test. Unfortunately, in some

cases, students were not prompted at all. There were also instances where students asked questions unrelated to the nominated themes, or where inaccuracies in following the given sequence card led to overlap between the photo card and one of the conversation themes. These responses resulted in a loss of marks for communication.

Key Advice for Teacher-Examiners on Each Section of the Speaking Test

Role Play

- **Stick to the Script:** Follow the role exactly as outlined in the teacher's booklet. Deviation results in a mark of 0 for communication in that task.
- **Intervene if Necessary:** If a student begins to give an incorrect answer, stop them and repeat the question. Once a student has provided a completely incorrect answer, any subsequent responses will be disregarded for assessment.
- **Repetition:** Repeat the question if a student asks for clarification or omits to answer, but not more than twice.

Photo Card

- **Paraphrasing:** You may paraphrase questions, but the meaning must remain unchanged to ensure fairness.
- **Ask All Questions:** Ensure all five questions from the teacher's booklet are asked. Avoid asking follow-up questions.
- **3 info on each:** It would be better to prepare the students to refer to at least 3 points on each task, including opinion and justification.
- **Time Management:** Be mindful of time. If a student's response is overly lengthy, consider moving on to the next question before the two-minute limit is reached.

General Conversation

- **Encourage Variety:** Promote the use of a wide range of language structures and vocabulary.
- **Opinion Justification:** Encourage students to express and justify opinions independently.
- **Sensitivity to Ability:** Tailor questions to suit the student's ability, avoiding overly complex topics for struggling students.
- **Tailor Questions:** Ask questions that reflect the student's interests rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach.
- **Promote Spontaneity:** Foster spontaneous conversations with follow-up questions based on the student's responses.
- **Announce Theme Changes:** Clearly announce any changes in theme in Bengali.
- **Time Management:** Keep track of time. If one theme is covered in less than 1 minute and 30 seconds, communication marks will be lowered. The General Conversation should not exceed five minutes; responses beyond this will not be assessed.
- **Prompt Questions:** Remind students to ask their questions, especially regarding the nominated theme, to ensure it is addressed.
- **Address Nonsensical Questions:** If a student's question does not make sense, prompt them to rephrase it.

Student Performance

Performance in the Role-play Task

Most students demonstrated strong comprehension of the target language and responded appropriately with concise answers. It was encouraging to see that very few students repeated subject pronouns or possessive adjectives from the bullet points. Students of all abilities recognised and responded well to the standard formulation, and the most commonly used opinion structure was *It is + adjective + because + ...*. It was paired with a justification *It is + adjective + because + ...* and a simple adjective *It is + adjective + because + ...*.

Some students extended their responses unnecessarily, which is not required as per the instructions. Students need to focus on the necessary details as outlined in the bullet points. Students found transactional role-plays more challenging than informal scenarios. Some of the students were well-prepared to recognise when a request needed to be made, as indicated by the words *Request* but many students could not link it properly to the given context in the relevant bullet point. Adequate preparation is crucial for responding appropriately in these tasks.

Many students successfully formulated questions based on the given prompt word(s) for the question (?) task, although the questions were often not well-suited to the prompt. Some students found it challenging to respond appropriately to the unprepared (!) task. Those who performed well generally had a strong grasp of question words and had been trained to provide brief yet appropriate responses.

Specific Foundation Tier Role-play Comments

The following role-play tasks were particularly **challenging** for students:

- **Role-play 1**

Task 3: Several students did not recognise the word **Ärde**.

- **Role-play 2**

Task 3: Students often successfully understood the demand of the task (100%) but responded with a one-word answer.

- **Role-play 3**

Task 5: Some students could not process this task and to link with the prompt 'Ágá ágwnááqÄ qÄ | CÄs Áál bá?'.
 Ágá ágwnááqÄ qÄ | CÄs Áál bá?

- **Role-play 4**

Task 4: Some students could not link the unprepared task '1l Äw Ä è ä Ä w ^ Äw | Ç'.

- **Role-play 5**

Task 5: Many students struggled to form a question with the prompt # A è A;] A

- **Role-play 6**

Task 6: As in Role-play 5, several students could not access the prompt word to form a question with *¿* is! pÆ

Performance in the Photo Card Task

Most students performed well in providing developed responses to the first three questions. A well-structured response typically includes three clauses, each containing a verb. However, some students provided overly brief or excessively long responses, which impacted clarity. Many students successfully provided their opinions and explanations. However, a few were restricted to lower bands due to an inability to offer an opinion or to explain their views adequately.

Performance in the General Conversation

Overall, students were able to sustain a conversation on two themes for the required minimum time. Most students made efforts to develop their responses, including offering and justifying opinions. Few students were restricted to the 1-3 band due to an inability to offer an opinion or missed out on the 10-12 band because they did not explain their opinions, or missed out on their tasks. However, some students relied on repetitive structures and basic vocabulary.

A few students successfully incorporated a broader range of structures, while others struggled with complex vocabulary and structures beyond their level.

Specific Foundation Tier Photo Card Comments Based on Students' Performance

The following Photo card tasks were particularly **challenging** for students:

- **Photo card A**

Task 5: Some students did not understand the question at the first attempt, and the teacher-examiners had to rephrase the word 'সে' (se) on task 5.

- **Photo card B**

Task 4: Some students could not decipher the element 'কিছু' (kichu) and the teacher-examiners had to remind or emphasise this part of the element.

- **Photo card C**

Task 1: The photo used on this card was found to be comparatively indicative to some students, as there were some written signs, and many students used those as their prompts to describe that photo.

- **Photo card D**

Task 5: The meaning of 'কিছু' (kichu) was not widely recognised and appeared as very challenging.

- **Photo card E**

Task 4: The element of providing an opinion on the cooking club posed a challenge to some of the students.

- **Photo card F**

Task 5: With the element 'কিছু' (kichu), a surprising number of students, rather than extending their response, demonstrated very short responses to this task.

Advice for Students

- **Use Preparation Time Wisely:** Utilise the 12 minutes of preparation time effectively.

- **Prepare Your Responses:** Write down your planned responses for Role-play tasks and the Photo Card questions.
- **Photo Card Responses:** Aim for responses that include at least three sentences with a verb in each task.
- **Listen Carefully:** Pay close attention to questions from the teacher-examiner during the unprepared tasks and General Conversation.
- **Learn Common Question Words:** Familiarise yourself with common question words.
- **Request Repetition in Bengali:** You may ask for a question to be repeated at any point in the test but remember to ask in Bengali.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.