CHAPTER FOUR

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN BANGLADESH: SOME CORE ASPECTS

Section A

ELT Strategy in Bangladesh: The Underlying Problems

4.0 Introduction

In spite of the fact that this study is not concerned with any methodological or curricular aspects of English teaching and learning in Bangladesh, it would be, however, useful to focus in brief on a crucial feature – i.e. the real problem of English language teaching strategy in Bangladesh.

English in today’s world is seen as the language of development, nation-building, scientific advancement and economic prosperity through its functions in communication systems, travel, international correspondence and technology. English, therefore, has its significance on the social and educational structures of many countries according to the way those structures have been built over the years.

Hence, in order to maintain and develop this significance of English, each country, first of all, needs to define (or redefine) its space called English rather than imitating what the UK or the USA has been doing. Only then, appropriate and adequate English language teaching policies and strategies can be framed.

Unfortunately in Bangladesh, all English language teaching-learning strategies have been somehow or the other influenced by ‘outside’ influences. It has been a general perception in Bangladesh that English ‘belongs to them only’ and thus ‘they are the masters (and authorities) of language teaching strategies’.

This has been proved again in the lately introduced ‘English Language Teaching Improvement Project’ or ELTIP Project – jointly funded by the Government of Bangladesh and the Department of International Development of the
UK Government through the British Council. And little wonder that it has been blindly accepted by a section of our local ELT experts as the ‘saviour’.

Let us take one small example. At the ELTIP conference held at the Dhaka British Council from 31 January to 2 February 1999, there was a good number of local ELT personalities who kept on stressing the ‘need of guidance’ from ‘native ELT experts’. One key paper even suggested to incorporate ‘two/three native speaking speakers’[sic] in its proposed committee of experts to be formed by the Ministry of Education in order to formulate a proper English Language Policy. Noticeable is the use of word ‘two/three’, which depicts a vague mode of thinking, i.e. the writer of that article did not have a clear cut idea as to what should be the exact number. The paper further suggested that ‘the experience and expertise of the ELTIP expatriate team members could be fruitfully utilised’.

These types of suggestions not only display a bankruptcy of ideas, but also an escapist tendency. It proves that we do not still want to use our own perceptions of the problems and formulate our goals by ourselves. And herein lies the root of all ills.

4.1 A native ELT expert’s comprehension

In this connection, let us rather listen to what Brian Bamber, a British ELT expert, had said in that same ELTIP conference. Brain Bamber has been actively engaged in Bangladesh Government’s ‘Primary English Resource Centres’ (PERC) Project for quite some time. Based on his personal experience with the PERC project across Bangladesh, he clearly maintained:

Any language teaching innovation in Bangladesh is to be effected within this standard power coercive education management system. At first glance it would appear to be a simple matter; the host government identifies a problem; aid donors fund a consultant; the consultant recommends a switch to communicative methodology; training programmes are set up – bingo! This is in fact what normally happens in EL curriculum development projects. Unfortunately, what also happens is that innovation is frequently not sustained.

(Bamber; 1999)
And thereafter he came up with his most crucial observation:

Let me make my own position clear. I believe that an impressive amount of language teaching expertise exists in the United Kingdom. What I do not believe is that it is sensible to try to export UK teaching behaviours wholesale to developing countries.

Ellis [1996:216] supports this view, pointing out that ‘cross-cultural assumptions [are] often inaccurate and misleading. The idea that Western culture has discovered a language teaching methodology with universal application, and that communicative competence shares the same priority in every society may be just such an assumption’

(Contrary)

The result is obvious. Krisnaswamy and Sriraman pinpoint a basic fact which is equally true for Bangladesh:

Even after independence, ‘men, methods and materials’ (referring to the various British Council-collaborated activities in India like ELT Institute/structural syllabus/CIEFL etc.) were “imported” in ‘conjunction’ with the British Council and other agencies, giving a false sense of modernity; there was no attempt to evolve indigenous approaches to the teaching of English in India; there was no attempt to define the goals of teaching English in post-colonial India, which resulted in an aimless drift; the absence of any language planning. The lack of political will to implement even the policies outlined by various commissions, and the lack of co-ordination among various agencies added to the drift.

(Krisnaswamy and Sriraman, 1998:65)

And hence,

... learners somehow learn English in the midst of the great drift that continues in the sea of confusion and English teaching has become a great industry

(Contrary)

It is this ‘industry’ which we should be thinking about. The world-wide market for EFL training is worth a massive £ 6.5 billion a year according to a report of the ‘Economic Intelligence Unit’ (EFL Gazette, March 1989)

Naturally, in order to sustain and expand this enormous market, there is no shortage of invention of ELT methodologies as per numerous needs of the learners.

Braj Kachru justifiably maintains:
The very existence of their power thus provides the Inner Circle [i.e. UK, USA etc.] with incentives for devising ways to maintain attitudinal and formal control; it is both a psychological and sociopolitical process. And linguistic control is yet another such strategy, exercised in three ways: by the use of various channels of codification and by controlling their channels; by the attitude towards linguistic innovations [in non-native countries]; and by suggesting dichotomies which are socio-linguistically and pragmatically unrealistic. These dichotomies divide the users of English into us V them...

(Quoted in Brown and Gonzo, 1995: 245).

At present, there is an overwhelming craze among a section of ELT experts of Bangladesh for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which they think is the ‘mother of all solutions’. Bamber elaborates immaculately the agenda of CLT in Bangladesh. He says:

Let’s consider for a moment the practical implications of introducing unmodified Western teaching behaviours into the Bangladeshi primary classroom. Received opinion in Western Language Teaching circles urges learner-driven classes, with the teacher as facilitator rather than pedagogue. Songs, games, stories, role plays information gap activities and other interactive tasks in group and pair format are encouraged. Maximum exposure to comprehensible input in the target language is recommended, as are opportunities to negotiate meaning through the use of authentic language in a relaxed atmosphere in which the affective factor can be lowered with confidence.

We must be aware of the enormous demands this would place on our teachers. Listing some of the numerous skills required of the teacher by the ‘latest’ ELT methodology, Basanta comments that ‘even “super teachers” would find it difficult to fulfil so many requirements’.

For reasons to be outlined below, our primary teachers in Bangladesh are not yet ‘super teachers’ and must not be frog-marched into super-teacher simulation. In Bamber [1987:124-5] I argued, and still maintain, that it is foolish to move too rapidly towards communicative, learner-centred teaching ‘in schools were pupils are required to spring to attention to answer the teacher’s questions, and pupil-initiated exchanges are unthinkable’. By the same token, teachers trained from infancy to regard the academic supervisor as an authoritarian figure to be treated with the utmost deterrence are likely to be nonplussed if this awesome figure suddenly resorts to back slapping and feet-on-the desk bonhomie.

There are, unfortunately, large number of people, many of whom less than a nodding acquaintance with the principles of CLT, who confidently assert that this is the only route forward. Others, with a better group of CLT theory, who hold the same view, may nevertheless not be sufficiently familiar with the realities of the Bangladesh classroom to appreciate the implications of such as assumption.

(Bamber, 1999)
After this argument, Bamber rightly asks:

Is CLT really the wonder drug of language teaching, which everyone must have, even if they don’t feel ill?

(_ibid_)

Textbooks have been tried by our experts in line with CLT approach, but the question remains: why have not the attempts yielded fruitful results? Bamber has the exact answer:

Attempting to introduce CLT might be a far bigger step than we imagine. Without wishing to stretch cultural profiling too far, we need to recognise that classroom cultures differ quite strikingly from one region to another the educational beliefs and assumptions of European learners may find no echo in a Bangladesh classroom. I venture to suggest that there is no compelling reason why they should.

( ibid _)

Regarding the infrastructure to initiate CLT, as well as the later problems Bamber points out:

To transplant CLT to Bangladesh we would need to provide mechanism for introducing over a quarter of a million primary teachers to CLT theory. If we are able to overcome this hurdle there is no guarantee that theory would be converted into practice on any significant scale without a considerably greater intervention than this current project allows for.

( ibid _)

Brian Bamber repeats his basic question in the end to which our CLT experts probably have no readymade answer:

Can we therefore be at all certain that we, as expatriate ‘experts’, are the right people to decide what constitutes appropriate methodology for Bangladesh?

( ibid _)

Arifa Rahman, a faculty of Institute of Modern Languages at Dhaka University, cited a classic instance of our donor-appeasement attitudes in ELT. Rahman was actively involved in a study in 14 secondary state schools in 1994 to investigate teacher’s perceptions of communicate Approach to ELT that was introduced in secondary schools through the OTEFL (Orientation of Teachers of
English as Foreign Language). This was linked to a project for secondary school materials development and the revision of the ‘English for Today’ books for classes 6-10. Local teachers were working as co-material writers with the native experts. The text materials were piloted in a number of schools, and an elaborate system of feedback and evaluation by the participating teachers using the materials was worked into the pilot phase of the programme. On her experience, Rahman comments:6

I have no knowledge of the nature of the feedback obtained from the participating teachers in the pilot project but I suspect they had duly provided what they were expected to say in terms what the developers wanted to her- the Bangladeshi culture is very adept at pleasing others especially those placed in power positions.

(Rahman, 1999)

It is high time we did some serious rethinking on these issues. Instead of dancing to the tune of donors whom we judge as saviors, we must create something on our own. Instead of running after CLT, we may perhaps consider what M. Shahidullah, an eminent faculty of English Department at the Rajshahi University suggests:7

Bangladesh needs what Macedo (1994) calls an ‘antimethods pedagogy’; that is, a methodology which is not enslaved by the rigidity of models and methodological paradigms. It suggests that ELT in Bangladesh needs to abandon the ‘methods fetish’ (Bartlome, 1994) and be free from the blind adoption of so-called effective strategies.

(Shahidullah, 1999)

It is an impossible proposition to achieve any progress in English language teaching-learning without clearing the mess prevailing in the entire education system. A famous educationist of Bangladesh in a personal discussion remarked,

Our actual problem is that, we are better talkers than doers, better planners than executors. This very condition means that we have already heard everything, and tried very nearly everything, after a fashion. But too often this execution is half hearted, inept, or bogged down in cross-purposes. As a result, there is rapid deterioration of good policy ideas. This is what we have been experiencing as regards our language policy over the years. It should be the foremost question of everybody whether or not our present English teaching strategies should perpetuate— accompanied by the huge flow of foreign currencies.

We have done much wastage, but then, there is no wrong time to start the right thing.
Section B

Key Issues Concerning the ELT Context

4.2 Introduction

From the analyses of the responses of the students (and given the earlier background information concerning their extent of association with English related aspects), we may now move to more concerted discussion in this regard. This would help us to understand why the measurement of student attitudes has been necessary for this study.

4.3 A recent fact

The New Delhi edition of the prominent daily ‘The Statesman’ carried a small item in its ‘International’ page on 17th March 2001. Reporting on the start of the SSC examination in Bangladesh, the item mentioned that 8000 students across the country had been expelled on the first day for copying, while 25 teachers had been suspended from their jobs for helping the students by providing ‘answers’ of the questions (The Statesman, 17.3.2001). And it was the day of the English examination.

The news itself is self-explanatory.

4.4 The saga of a Monu Mia

Educationists and concerned people have time and again narrated the woeful plight of the English teaching-learning situation that prevails in our classroom, particularly in the schools of non-urban areas. Even urban schools do not display any better picture when it comes to the schools in lower-middle class localities.

The following quotation from an English translation of a Bangla short story ‘Beyond the Circle of Light’ by eminent Bangladeshi educationist and author Husne Ara Shahed is a classic example of what an average Bangladeshi student in a non-urban, as well as urban, educational institution encounters in his English studies.
...He [Monu Mia] was not highly educated. After having failed thrice, he passed his matriculation examination at the fourth attempt. Then he got himself admitted to a neighbouring college. For two years he attended it, walking a distance of three miles every day. Instead of buying new books, he managed with ones secured from senior students. He studied Economics, Civics, Bengali, Logic—so many subjects—of which some he understood, some he did not. However, no one bothered to find out if he understood anything or not. The English classes gave him the maximum trouble.

In his childhood Monu Mia had started with three languages—Arabic, Bengali and English. The knowledge of Arabic was confined to the reading of Quran; there it ended. After learning to write it no one took any further trouble with Bengali. Monu Mia somehow managed to pass the matriculation. Then this English. No one seemed to know the correct pronunciation of any word. Each pronounced a word is a different way. Monu Mia did not think that those who taught English knew any better. So his study of English was most desultory, to say the least. He had begun with the tenses and parts of speech from class four. They went on till the final class, yet he could not make head or tail of them. However in the classroom he always nodded his head sagely even if he understood nothing, following the example of other students who sat close to him. As a student Monu Mia always gazed at the face of his teachers wonderingly. He always saw them busy pocketing their salary at the end of each month while he found them least concerned with the state of their students learning. Yet he had gone to his classes regularly, taken his seat quietly and anxiously, and awaited his teacher's arrival as soon as the bell was rung...


The character of Monu Mia symbolises the plight of millions of jobless or ill-paid youths who have been undergoing traumatic experiences in the English classes. These Monu Mias have no place in the minds of our education planners. They have no future to decide on their own. They have no beacon to follow. Nobody cares to guide, leave alone nurture, their aspirations and lives.

4.5 The educational ideology

Bangladeshi society is strictly defined in hierarchical terms established by tradition. As a result, in the classroom, the teacher is authoritative and authoritarian, indeed autocratic. Knowledge is seen as a monolithic entity, a finite, inflexible 'object' to be accepted whole and to be memorised and regurgitated. Education is seen as not only bestowing this block of knowledge but as upholding moral values and conserving national unity and identity as well, thus imparting a cultural and moral base to the school curriculum—a common practice in the whole of South East Asia. The syllabus is content-driven, therefore there is a strong desire to believe in the ultimate authority of textbooks. As in many educational cultures, textbooks carry
a unique authority and are understood as the legitimate version of the society’s fund of knowledge.

The psychological assumption is that students come with blank minds with no previous experiences and have to be moulded to a form of behaviour that demands complete initiation and hence teaching is heavily teacher-centred. Students listen passively as teachers talk or lecture with a few ‘good’ pupils in the front responding to teacher queries. The ‘learning’ spills over into wide scale private tuition which takes the strict form of preparation for examinations. There is thus no scope for learner interaction or the fostering of cognitive elements or the understanding of relative realities. This leads to rigid value system that cannot cope with options, choices or change resulting in a total divorce between the idealised world presented in the classroom and the messiness of the real world outside.

In terms of English, the underlying assumption is that language is a code made up of rules of syntactic structures. The learning of the language is thus equated with the learning of the code. The most common activity is grammar-based work such as transformation exercises memorised as content and not as a tool for using the language. Texts in books are also treated as content and are never used to develop language skills i.e., language is not treated as functional or interactional although the curriculum explicitly defines it as such. The overall impression of the English class is one of students memorising texts, doing translations and exercises with little or no understanding.

Grammar guides and notebooks, even more than the textbooks, are hugely popular with teachers and students alike, from the lower secondary to the tertiary level, creating a massive market in the publishing business. As there is a general fear of English as a difficult subject and the examination is considered the end-all, the notebooks provide a lifeline to the student community throughout the entire education system. They provide, in a bilingual mode, model essays, letters, translation passages, grammatical structures and model answers to content-based textbook exercises.
4.6 The English classroom

One will find an average urban English classroom in Bangladesh full of students of with apparently homogenous facade. A little acquaintance with the students will reveal that this homogeneity is actually deceptive. The students bring to the classroom not only a variety of attitudes and expectations, but also varying degrees of proficiency in the English language.

Above all, the students bring to the classroom what seems like an almost insuperable fear of English language. A number of researchers have agreed that second language learning involves a fundamentally traumatic experience for the individual (Clarke, 1976:377). Now, this is not only the result of any intrinsic aversion for the language itself. In most cases, this fear of the language also arises from the past failures, and the dread that it is a subject in which a student is likely to fail in the future as well.

Given such a situation, the need for upgrading the classroom environment with respect to its physical settings and teaching styles becomes very crucial. But instead, situation has been prevailing as it was without any concern from any quarter.

Bernard Shaw once remarked that his education had been continuous from childhood except for a brief interruption in school! Howsoever queer it may sound, Shaw’s comment seems to be ironically true far as our school system, and our classroom context, is concerned. Inconvenient classroom conditions with overcrowded pupils, lack of proper ventilation and light, followed by inconsistent syllabus pattern and teaching styles by unskilled / semi-skilled teachers have only added to the misery of the learners as a whole.

Barring a few exceptions in the urban areas (that too largely in Dhaka and Chittagong), most of our schools countrywide are plagued by pathetic disorders. This is what has been remarked in the ‘Bangladesh: Country Profile 1997-98’ by the Economist Intelligence Unit of London:

The main complaints raised about schools include poor quality of education as a result of badly trained (or absent) teachers, large classes and shortage of books, and the lack of responsibility of schools towards the pupils.
Precisely speaking neither the classroom size nor the physical environment permits the ideal teaching-learning situation. Shortage of classrooms compels the students to be squeezed into one class, and inevitably disturbance and discomfort ensue. In Bangladesh, the number of students in a secondary classroom is usually 60, with space constraints a major drawback (Hoque, 1997). The teaching shortcomings and syllabus in consistency only add to students' woes in the English classroom which is already marred by psychological fear on the students' part. The extent of time allocated for teaching English in the class routines (by the National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee) is as follows: 3 periods per week in classes 1 and 2; 4 periods per week in classes 3, 4 and 5; 5 periods per week in classes 6 and 7; and 6/7 periods per week in classes 9 and 10 (ibid: 136).

There exist many debates whether or not the time allocated for English is adequate, but the point is, regardless of the allocated time, the physical environment of English classroom hardly permits any sound teaching-learning to take place.

4.7 Stress in the Classroom

In course of personal discussions with several randomly selected students, almost everyone maintained that their overall school environment was 'demanding' and 'competitive'—both in the negative sense of the terms.

'Demanding' because, they were expected to perform beyond their natural cognitive abilities whereas little was being done to upgrade and nourish their abilities in order to enable them to perform better.

'Competitive' because, with their limited abilities, they were in a serious mental stress to cope with the system where difference of one or two marks meant a lot for them.

In simple words, average students were hardly prepared to keep up with the pace which made them more and more frustrated.

The students further said that they found their classroom atmosphere 'lacking in warmth' and 'lacking emotional support'. The attitudes of their teachers and the burden of homeworks were the chief causes of academic stress.
The homework given in schools were deemed as 'too much', plus 'monotonous and boring'. The reason, they felt, was their teachers never taught them properly as to how the lessons should be done at home. As for example, the English teacher would read out a piece of prose, gives somewhat a small description of it, and ask them to do all the exercises at home without explaining or guiding them properly. This virtually left no recourse for them except to follow and complete the homework by themselves. Consequently, they depended heavily on private tutors. They also said that the volume of their homework notebooks was three-four times larger than that of their classroom notebooks.

In several cases, some students had to rely on their parents or elder brother-sisters as they could not afford private tutors. Agony was what they had to face. Because of 'cluelessness', their guardians sometimes failed to help them do the homework properly. And not completing the homeworks meant punishment and humiliation in front of the classmates which led to heightened stress.

In short, the mindless attitude of the teachers, their constant threat of punishments, verbal insults and bias towards 'good' students and to blame for the stress the students endure. The problem is compounded by poor teaching, plus incompetence and acute shortage of skilled teachers.

4.8 Teachers and their teaching

The clear cut message that has come out of the responses is, teachers are not student-friendly. Students are afraid of their teachers, so much so that they hardly have the courage to ask them for any help in front of other students.

No doubt this is the most unhealthy situation that has been in operation inside the English classroom. English is not just a 'subject' like mathematics, geography, history or accounting which are taught and learnt in Bangla. English is a subject which itself works in an alien language, and students have no other choice except coping with it in their examination scripts in that alien expression. It is in this context that the English teacher's role becomes really crucial and fundamental.

The teacher's goal is just not to teach the language. He has to keep in mind that the moment he calls the people in front of him a 'class,' he accepts for himself
the role known as ‘teacher’ and along with it the obligation to help his students to move forward toward the goals that they had brought with them. Thus the teacher should ensure that by the end of the course, students will feel more at home with the language than they do before the start of the course (Stevik 1988:6). Moreover, ‘they will prefer to concentrate on the work at hand rather than on the clock’ (ibid), and ‘they will throw intellect and imagination into the lesson, and not just go through the motions with their voices and their pencils’ (ibid).

Therefore, it has been rightly maintained that,

In the long run, the quantity of one’s students’ learning will depend on the quality of the attention they give to it. The quality of their attention will depend, in turn on the degree to which they are able and willing to throw themselves into what is going on.

And they will throw themselves in only to the extent that they feel secure in doing so.

In this respect, they are something like a turtle, which moves ahead on its own power only when it is willing to stick to its neck a little.

(Ibid)

However, there is one basic fact to consider. That is, the socio-economic backgrounds of the learners are never on the same level. Therefore, the teacher has every chance to misinterpret individuals unless he has reasonably good picture of the background out of which the individual has come.

Unfortunately, such issues as stated above are hardly ever taken into account as far as our teaching system is concerned.

R. Bowers (1980) mentions a number of real situations in the teaching/learning process in relation to both learner and teacher. An inventory of situations concerning the teacher is as follows:

(E) that in which teacher wants to teach more language-or more about language-than he needs to teach in terms of the syllabus within which he is required to operate;

(F) that in which the teacher needs — i.e., is required to teach more than he wants to teacher;

(G) that in which the teacher wants to teach coincides in general with what he needs to teach.
We can, I hope, dismiss (as a hopeless, if not impossible case) the situation where the teacher neither needs – is required to – teach anything nor wants to teach anything.

(Bowers, 1980: 72-3)

In classroom teaching, nothing is as important as the teacher's competence, his sincerity and professional integrity. If a teacher has positive attitude toward his profession and is serious, sincere, and competent in discharging his duties, then optimum results may be obtained (situation G). The problem arises with the people who, with or without adequate competence and qualifications, become teachers of English not because they love the profession, but just because they cannot engage themselves in anything better. If they can help it, they would love to get all the benefits of their profession without doing any teaching in the classroom (situation F). In the case of situation E, there may not be anything wrong with the teacher's seriousness and sincerity, but there may be some lack in his professional competence.

The last situation which Bower wants to dismiss and does not want to consider, although inconceivable in the countries where education is valued, owing to the lack of accountability and proper planning, may not be rare in certain TEFL/TESL situations.

In this respect, creating the appropriate incentives for teacher performance is vital if standards are to be raised in Bangladesh. Poor motivation translates into indifferent classroom practices, teacher absenteeism and early departure from the profession. The high turnover in this profession is actually damaging, because the initial investment in teacher training goes to waste, the benefits from in-service training are lost, and the government has to bear heavily the cost of training replacements.

The low motivation of teachers in our country is due to five main factors.

First, the lack of teacher motivation results from an inadequate salary structure. While money alone will not change an uninspired teacher to a good teacher, good teachers with financial security will be more likely to manifest dedication and enthusiasm.
Second, the prestige of the teaching profession is very low. The status of teachers – particularly male teachers – has suffered so severely that teaching is often taken up only as a last resort of the unemployed educated, and even than seen at best an interim job.

Third, poor working conditions further reduce the motivation of teachers. Conditions within the classroom discourage potential candidates from becoming teachers and often force incumbent teachers to leave the profession.

Fourth, the lack of clear career advancement opportunities reduces teacher motivation still further.

Fifth, local authority and supervision to ensure that teachers attend classes and teach pupils is generally missing.

Thus, a number of young people who become teachers of English due to their genuine enthusiasm and strong fascination for the ideals of teaching profession face the inevitable shock in no time. When they also see that they are being superceded by the ones less qualified, or have no scope or opportunity to pursue higher studies and training, or have to make rooms for the favoured ones transferred to different places at the whims of the influential bureaucrats and administrators they have one option left. These enthusiastic people, brushing aside their noble ideals, engage in profitable ventures like coaching centres where they can earn even lakhs of Takas per month. It is the classroom teaching that eventually suffers.

4.9 The learners are the ultimate victims

We may look into the issue of learners in the following way:

The learners are provided the input (i.e. knowledge) in a learning environment (i.e. classroom) by technical engineers (i.e. teachers) with the aid of some device (i.e. textbooks, blackboards, chalks) framed as a scientific system (i.e. curricula and syllabuses) by a group of scientists (i.e. education managers of the Ministry, Textbook board etc.) added with the support of external catalysts (i.e. parents and guardians) in order to get the deserved output—both short-term (i.e. public examinations) and long-term (i.e. contribution to the society).

(Shahed, 2000:6)
Thus, it is the learners who come to acquire something—which automatically implies that they are the ones who are at the receiving end. Before the students get the chance of receiving the ‘input’ or knowledge, a wide variety of functions has to be operated by a large number of people and organisations. It connotes that irrespective of those people and organisations related to the machinery nobody can wash his hands off by arguing this or that, or by blaming others. Unfortunately this is what has been the normal practice since long. There is actually no immaculate cooperation among the numerous facets under the education sector. This has put a direct bearing on the teaching-learning system.

The SSC examination results last year with a pass-percentage of only 41.12 have raised eyebrows in all quarters, especially of the common public. The dismal picture of the high percentage of failures in all the education boards has marked a new low in the gradual degradation in our educational arena. There were no shortage of arguments and counter arguments in newspapers, electronic media and seminars, thereafter putting a big question mark on the quality of education imparted in schools.

But very interestingly, most of the educational administrators showed a general tendency of putting blame on ‘today’s inattentive students’ who ‘could not pass because they did not study’. Herein lies the issue: why blaming the students when firstly, the entire teaching-learning process is a part of a massive inter-related infrastructure, and secondly, the students are at the receiving end who have no power to decide on their own what to learn and how to learn? When a school kid tells that he faces such and such problems inside the class, should we point our fingers at him as the culprit, or should our duty be to scrutinise the real reasons behind his feelings? As Prof. Sadrul Amin puts it,

There should not be any excuse for the disappointing outcome of English language learning if we consider the years of formal education the students have had. Certain things must be responsible for such senseless waste of time, money and energy. The socio-political unrest which is yet to part company with Bangladesh and the lack of proper, pragmatic education policy are the main reasons for her lagging behind in the field of education. Till today there has not been any well-defined EFL/ESL curriculum and detailed syllabuses for different stages to give a sense of direction to English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh.  

(Amin 1997:40)
He suggests a remedy:

...To make English language teaching effective, a part from other things, proper attention should be paid to the number and quality of teachers, duration of the courses, and the frequency of contact between the teachers and students.

(ibid).

The issue of improving the quality of teachers and duration of courses need to be taken seriously. Given the fact that students hardly use English in their social domains, as evident from table 17, classroom is the prime centre where almost everything has to be manipulated effectively. We have the greatest advantage of parental encouragement regarding English learning, an aspect which was absent even fifteen years ago. Then why not use it as the driving force inside the classroom? For how long one will have to wait to see the students become free from the torments and sufferings inside the English classrooms?
Notes:

1. That keynote paper titled ‘ELT Issues in Bangladesh: An Overview’ was written by Prof. Shamsul Hoque, ELT Advisor of Bangladesh Open University. A senior Professor of English, Shamsul Hoque has been involved in numerous ELT schemes and is particularly known for his deep fascination for Communicative Language Teaching Approach.

2. Brian Bamber presented his article ‘Feet or Clay: Compromise in Primary Teacher Training’ at the ELTIP conference. This quotation as well as all his quotations is taken from his paper.

3. Prior to this statement Brian Bamber had mentioned: ‘The content and methodology of primary teacher in Bangladesh’ encapsulated in the Certificate in Primary Education [C.Ed] syllabus, are the responsibility of the National Academy for Primary Education [DPE]. The syllabus is delivered by instructors at the Primary Training Institutes [PTIs] in one-year INSET courses offered to an average of one hundred selected teachers per PTI per year. This entire infrastructure has been described by him as ‘standard power coercive management system’.


7. From his paper ‘Towards an Appropriate Methodology for ELT in Bangladesh’ presented at the same conference.