EPILOGUE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the survey and the discussions in the preceding chapters underscore both the complexity involved in investigating public attitudes concerning the use/functions of English, and the complexity of factors associated with the teaching/learning of English in the Bangladeshi society.

However, we will see how far the facts that have come out are in line with the hypotheses of the study.

In brief, the findings clearly reveal the following:

The plight of our entire education system has been far from satisfactory. Infected with serious shortcoming and negligence, this sector needs to undergo drastic changes.

As a result of this, the standard of even MT proficiency, especially the written skill, has degenerated.

The decline in the overall educational quality is a consequence of the unplanned and unscientific educational strategy, where learners from their tender age have to deal with both Bangla and English.

Thus the respondents have expressed their reservation against the existing bilingual education system from childhood.

True, the pressure of bilingual education is not the lone cause behind the pathetic state of education. But the point is, when our prime target should be to impart universal education and uplift the educational level of the majority, our policy formulation and course of action need to be such that educational management becomes less complicated to operate. Given the socio-economic realities, we should try to avoid the aspects that would only increase the management burden. The issue of English needs to be handled in a planned way—though careful thinking and effective management.
Introducing English from the first stage of school curriculum without any basic infrastructural facilities is bound to yield disastrous results. The respondents have realized the results, and thus they want this unsystematic burden of English to be removed.

But that does not at all cast out English from its useful position. The functional load that English bears is undeniable. The respondents are aware of this – which is proved by the encouragement and motivation they provide their children. What they want is the proper and systematic approach to English teaching and learning in terms of present day needs and aspirations of the learners.

Thus Hypothesis A proves to be valid.

The English-speaking people in our society do not enjoy favourable attitudes among the general public. The reason lies in the fact that the English-speaking people belong to a minority which is associated with high socio-economic status and power-relations. And this class is viewed as ‘exploiter’ of the majority. This class more or less ties to imitate western style, and because of them, the native-like accentual pattern is viewed as a marker of snobbery and alien-ness. This has further added to the general impression that English is related to power and status.

Hypothesis B proves to be valid in this regard.

However, there is no denying that an appropriate language policy is the need of the hour. English has been taught over the years simply as a ‘vague and general cultural subject’ (to use Michael West’s words) and that has resulted in the lack of analysis of our precise need of English. We have to inquire why the vast majority of average Bangladeshis should find this cultural English necessary for him. We have to stop this kind of vague and general exercise of flooding our nation with purposeless biculturalism through English.

Rather, we need an appropriate language policy concerning Bangla and English as early as possible. Only then we can expect to uplift our overall literacy and create a workforce which would expedite our socio-economic developments through the proper use of these two languages.
Once language becomes an object of attention and people develop opinions about it, it is not only a means of communication but also a social or societal resource. It can be manipulated to have certain effects on the society in which it is used and in which people express their ideas about it. Hence, both Bangla and English, which have been subjected to ample public attention since long, need to be appropriated and manipulated in a way that they become tremendously useful resources for each and every Bangladeshi.

The knowledge of Bangla would be essential in Bangladesh for three prime reasons: (a) effective internal administration, (b) nourishing national culture and (c) strengthening national unity. On the other hand, the knowledge of English would be essential basically for: (a) effective internal administration related to international aspects, (b) effective trade relations with other countries and (c) educational contacts with world technology and culture. These three functions would in turn develop our national standard of living, as well as project our society and culture positively among the outside societies.

Therefore, both these languages are essential for the expedition of our overall development.

In this connection, it needs to be noted that even many developed countries have been experiencing major controversies and turmoil concerning their choice of language and language planning from which Bangladesh, fortunately, has been free. As for example, we can mention of the oppositions of French-Canadians in Quebec to the continued use of English in government and education; the protest of Belgian Flemings against the lack of Dutch-language equality in Brussels; the anti-English demonstrations of Welsh nationalists who rubbed out English highway signs in Wales; the search by Irish revivalists for government support of language restoration; the current controversy over English/Spanish bilingual education in the United States and so on. But no such events occurred in independent Bangladesh regarding Bangla and English. This should be utilized as a massive advantage.

We also need to keep in our mind the distinction between language attitude and language use. There exist substantial positive attitudes among the educated Bangladeshis toward English. But that does not mean they would opt for English in
their socio-cultural lives at the expense of Bangla. This has been rightly proved by the respondents’ overwhelming attachment with Bangla in their socio-cultural lives (as seen in tables 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 17). One’s having positive attitudes towards English means that one would go for attaining self-development through English, and thus develop one’s society. At the same time one would maintain the use and dignity of Bangla in one’s personal and social domain. There has been this tendency of creating unnecessary controversies in this issue, and it has been done with negative intention (as discussed in chapter 5).

We have to focus all our attention on proper educational reform. The present dilapidated educational structure will hardly contribute to enhance national development. Our development planners, unfortunately, have to still realize that by keeping the mass illiterate development can be neither broad-based nor sustained. Education is the only way for building human capabilities. In terms of human development objectives, education is an end in itself, not just a means to an end. It is the passport to accelerated economic growth, particularly in the context of a rapidly globalizing world economy. Only societies that have acquired the relevant knowledge and skills can compete successfully in global markets.

Investment in human capital, through schooling (run by proper management and planning), increases the productivity of people. Higher wages in the labour market are, therefore, a reward for the higher productivity of working people with a greater stock of human capital. This is the most widely accepted economic explanation for educated workers receiving higher rewards in the labour market (Becker, 1993). Empirical evidences strongly support this hypothesis. For example, the average salary in Bangladesh of a secondary school-educated woman is as much as seven times higher than that of a woman with no education (World Bank 1993b). Hence the role of education in reducing absolute poverty is decisive.

Education is also a basic component of social cohesion and national identity. The foundations for a conscious and active citizenship are laid in school. Education plays a key role in the democratization process, as the experience of nineteenth century America and Europe demonstrates and as was recently confirmed by the political revolutions of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Education allows people to resist oppression and to organize politically, hence encouraging
social justice. No educated society can remain politically, socially or economically repressed for too long. As regards the present realities in Bangladesh, our development planners must keep these in their minds and act to renovate the entire educational infrastructure.

Language education is inextricably related to educational reforms, and hence through appropriate education reforms we need to foster proper language planning for creating an effective workforce of literate people, a section of whom would be effective bilinguals. Only in this way, the politics of language would be put to rest forever. And also the 'myths' about English would disappear, and English would attain its exact status and maintain its legitimate role and function in the Bangladeshi society.

We do not require any more complicated arguments or excuses. What we need is a plain and simple decision—a decision born out of patriotic zeal and farsightedness. The cart has always been put in front of the horse; it is high time the reverse was done.