CHAPTER IV

EVALUATING REPORTS ON ENGLISH TEACHING IN BANGLADESH – THE OFFICIAL ASSESSMENT

4.1 EAST PAKISTAN EDUCATIONAL - REFORMS COMMISSION REPORT 1957

Though Pakistan was created on the basis of religion, at the beginning it was a democratic secular state instead of being an Islamic republic. Since its inception a note of discord had started growing between the east and west wings separated by the Indian territory extending over one thousand miles. The people of East Pakistan began to feel exploited and internally colonized by their West Pakistani counterparts, especially by the dominant Punjabis in the field of education, economy and culture. With the passage of time this feeling was getting stronger and stronger in the minds of Bengalis who in turn got disenchanted with the Pakistani ideology. Much of political anger in East Pakistan was the result of shift of powers towards the West since the Partition. This led to unity amongst the opposition parties in East Pakistan. Keeping in tune with the anti-West Pakistan sentiment of the public, and taking advantage of the widespread popular support for the Language Movement of February 1952, the non-Muslim League parties of East Pakistan forged a new front known as Jukta Front (United Front). Thus the United Front emerged from anger against West Pakistan.

The United Front was non-communal and secular in spirit and nature. Since it came into being on the eve of the 1954 election, it issued a 21 point charter. One of the main demands in the charter was recognition of Bengali as one of the official languages of Pakistan.

The people of East Bengal gave their overwhelming verdict in March 1954 election. The United Front won a sweeping victory.
At that time people were expecting a change in the prevailing system of education introduced by the colonial masters – the British. One of the main tasks of the United Front Government was to reform the existing education system of East Pakistan in keeping with the need and expectations of the society. So, wasting no time the government decided to appoint the Education Reform Committee by Resolution No. 39 Edn. dt. 3 Jan. 1957, Dhaka, to recommend appropriate measures for a reorganization and reconstruction of the entire system of education in East Pakistan.

The Committee consisted of seven members headed by the Chief Minister Ataur Rahman Khan. The salient feature of the Committee was that all its members were from East Pakistan. They were asked to submit the report before the end of March 1957.

The Committee was briefed about the fact that only a small fraction of the population was being benefited from the existing education which was qualitatively theoretical, bookish and unrelated to the realities of the societies and unable to make the learner an original thinker. The most serious problem with the education was that the teachers engaged in imparting education were incompetent.

The members were also made aware of the fact that "East Pakistan is faced with the problem of reorganizing the existing system which was condemned for its lack of realism and its inability to adjust itself to the needs of a rapidly changing society. The system also comprises uncoordinated sub-systems that ran along parallel lines and tend to create or foster opposing or parochial outlooks or which is worse a negative attitude to life" (Report 1957: 3).

The Commission was asked to recommend a system of education that would check the deterioration of standards on the one hand and would
have definite objectives at each stage of education, on the other. They were also expected to coordinate between different sub-systems in order to avoid duplication. Their recommended system was expected to aim at a sturdy nationhood balancing "the material well being and spiritual elevation".

So, keeping the needs of the society in mind, the Commission recommended a new liberal and secular education policy - giving priority to the aspirations of the people of East Pakistan within the shortest possible stipulated period.

The recommendations of the Commission are presented here under the 3 heads:

1. School
   (a) Primary Education (from class I-V).
   (b) Secondary Education (from class VI –X).
   (c) Higher Education
2. Medium of Instruction
3. Others (teachers’ training, translating books etc.)

1. (a) Primary Education

According to the recommendation of the Commission the Primary curricula and syllabuses did not have any space for second language teaching-learning. The Commission was very straight forward and specific in their views about language teaching. About this they included the following two clauses (serial no. 8 and 9) in their report.

"8. Special attention should be paid to the teaching of the mother tongue. The students should not only be taught reading and writing the mother tongue but they should also be taught to speak the same well."
9. No second language is to be taught during the first 5 years of a child's education in a Primary school" (ibid: 10).

The Commission offered the following reasons for not recommending second language teaching at the Primary level.

"It must not be forgotten that the store of psychological energy in a child is limited. If it is frittered away in the learning of languages he will find it difficult to cope with other subjects. Moreover, learning of a few languages (Bengali, Urdu, Arabic and English) means so much difficulty to the child who had not yet overcome the obstacles of learning his own language, namely the mother tongue. A new language brings in its train of troubles - a new script and altogether unfamiliar sounds with widely different meanings. At that age, when his mind is still in a very underdeveloped stage, the new language means too much strain for him. The result is dissipation of his concentration and consequent loss of interest in learning. The measure referred to was a wicked one and could be interpreted as a means of disrupting the education in East Pakistan (here the reference is to the introduction of Urdu and Arabic as compulsory subjects at Primary stage). At the Primary level of education there should not be any attempt to introduce any other language beside the mother tongue of the child" (ibid: 88).

1. (b) Secondary Education

The purpose of Secondary education was to prepare students for admission to various institutions of higher education. While recommending appropriate steps for higher education, the Commission was directed that higher education should aim at producing useful and responsible citizens who would be aware of the problems of the country in which respect they should have definite obligations to the society. It should also create in them a thirst for further knowledge and a spirit of co-operative, peaceful and healthy living in the society.

Keeping the above objectives in view the Commission recommended that:
1) During the Junior High School (from class VI to Class VIII) stage a student should be taught two languages; English and state languages should be introduced at this stage, subject to the principle that no two languages should be introduced in the same year.

2) The mother tongue or the regional language shall be the only language that must be taught compulsorily.

3) Students proceeding to the university or higher technical or commercial institutions should study English as an optional subject.

   The Commission also recommended that English should be an optional subject from class VI or VII and the students who opted for science and specialized subjects (like engineering, medical, agriculture etc) may opt for it.

   According to the Commission it would not be inappropriate to introduce a second language for a child when he comes to the Secondary level, because at this level his personality gets developed to such an extent that he is capable of learning a new language with greater ease than he could have done earlier.

   The Commission was also clear about the introduction of two languages. It said that it was possible for a child to learn more than one second language at the Secondary level. But care should be taken not to introduce them together. If one was introduced in class VI, the other should be introduced in class VII.

   In respect of the selection of the second language the Commission favoured English, because the teaching of English would be of special significance for the children at this level. Although its importance as a medium of instruction would not be there (at the university stage of his
education), yet for an easier access approach to sciences and other subjects he would have to be conversant with English. But it must be remembered by the teacher that what he should aim at teaching English at this stage would be the language and language alone. The courses should not, therefore, be based on literature.

(c) **Higher Education**

The Commission did not recommend any thing about teaching-learning of English either as an optional or compulsory subject at college or university level. Since the Commission recommended English as an optional subject at the Secondary level, it could be assumed that the Commission did not favour teaching of English at college or university level.

2. **Medium of Instruction**

(a) The Commission was strongly in favour of the introduction of Bengali as a medium of instruction from the Primary to the university levels.

(b) It proposed that the mother tongue or the regional language should generally be the medium of instruction throughout the Secondary stage subject to the provision that for linguistic minorities, special facilities should be made available.

(c) The Commission **recommended** mother tongue as the medium of instruction at degree level (for both Pass and Honours courses).

It gave the following reasons for recommending the mother tongue as the medium of instruction for higher studies.
"We recommend that the medium of instruction in the university should shift immediately to mother tongue. From the work done in the universities, it appears that the general mass of students fail to have adequate comprehension of arts and science subjects when trying to learn them through English. They also find it difficult to express their ideas adequately and well in English. This has been particularly so since the medium at high school stage has become mother tongue. Unnecessary importance need not be given therefore, to English. What is really necessary is that the learner should have clear conception of the subject of his study and he should be able to express his ideas well in his own language. This aim is better realised by making mother tongue as the vehicle of learning. This is also necessary because by that means a young man will get a better chance to raise his standard of attainments higher. The present system has put a serious handicap in the way of his attainment of his subject or even learning a language. By shifting the stress on to the mother tongue our students will at least be better able to express their ideas and have a more exact and deeper knowledge of the subjects they study" (ibid: 107).

3. Method

(a) About second language teaching the Commission suggested that second language teaching should be in keeping with the age of the learner. The method suitable for teaching a five or six years old boy, if adopted for teaching a more grown up boy approximately eleven or twelve years old, would be wrong. If the right method was adopted, the Commission held, the progress would be rapid and his perception would also be quicker and more helpful for assimilation of the new language.

The Commission was of the opinion that learning the language by Direct Method would be much more suitable than the classical method of learning the grammar first before anything of the language learnt.

(b) The Commission's recommendation for Bengali as the medium of instruction at all levels of education appeared appropriate in the context of East Pakistan but it remained mute about the availability of Bengali texts and reference books for higher studies. At that time, at the university level,
almost all the text books were in English and even today there is a great
dearth of suitable texts and reference books in Bengali for higher studies.

(c) Evaluation

The Commission was very vocal against the sinister Pakistani plan
to destroy the education system of East Pakistan by introducing Urdu and
Arabic as compulsory subjects at Primary level. The recommendation of
the Commission regarding language teaching in East Pakistan at Primary
level could be considered a corrective step.

In recommending Bengali as a medium of instruction, especially in
the universities, the Commission went to a position which might be
regarded as one-sided in the Pakistani context. Pakistan was and is still a
multilingual state and English was and still is the language of power,
prestige and wealth. The knowledge of English was almost a must for
obtaining a Pakistan Civil Service job or any other job in government or in
the private sector. It was unlikely, therefore, that without the knowledge of
English how could some one from East Pakistan be able to compete with
his West Pakistani counterparts. While recommending this the Commission
perhaps did not take this fact into consideration seriously.

The recommendations of the Education Reforms Commission of
1957 for a liberal and non-communal modern education policy caused a
furore among the reactionary fundamentalists. They reacted very sharply
against the new education policy branding it as anti-Pakistani ideology.
They organised meetings and started giving statements in the press
provoking the tender religious sentiment of the public against the policy.
As consequence, a liberal education policy could not develop in East
Pakistan.
Moreover on 7 October 1958 Pakistan entered a new phase in its political history. Major General Iskandar Mirza issued a proclamation abrogating the constitution of Pakistan, dismissed the national and provincial governments and their legislatures and banned all political parties. He declared martial law in the country.

Thus, with the fall of the United Government, the first attempt to reform the colonial education system in East Pakistan came to a tragic end.
4.2 THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON NATIONAL EDUCATION (SHARIF COMMISSION) - 1959

After Partition the people of Pakistan were not happy with the education system inherited from the British. People began to feel that "the Westernization of education cut at the roots of local culture and tradition; the use of English as a medium of instruction proved a handicap to original thought and research" (Dr. Muneer Ahmad 1997: 240). This was also voiced by the Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah in his message to the First National Conference on Education in November 1947. He regretted "that the greatest failing of the colonial system of education was that it did not build the character of future generations in terms of integrity, selfless public service and a sense of responsibility" (ibid: 242).

In the first twelve years of Pakistan there was much quantitative change in education with the establishment of new universities, agricultural, engineering and medical colleges. "There was, however, no significant improvement in quality of education. The country went on following the patterns of education left behind by the British colonial administration, was not in conformity with the needs and requirements of local culture and tradition" (ibid: 243). So, soon after Independence in 1947 the people in power began thinking of reforming education on priority basis.

Mr. Ayub Khan assumed power in Pakistan and became the Chief Martial Law Administrator in 1958. Within two months he announced the appointment of a Commission on National Education to reform and restructure the existing system. It was known as Sharif Commission and it was asked to recommend ways of improving the system and bringing it in line with the needs and requirements of the country. It was directed to recommend a system of education that would reflect the spiritual and
cultural aspects of the nation. It would also meet the growing demands of the people in the field of agriculture, science and technology.

The Commission said that in its report efforts had been made to identify the drawbacks of the present system and to the best of their capacity they had tried to remedy the defects.

Aims and Objectives of Education

The Islamic moral and spiritual values which are inseparably associated with the independence, unity and strength of Pakistan should be the ideals and basis of the education system.

The first and foremost aim of education should be the creation of a sense of unity among the people of all parts of Pakistan. The Education should be restructured in such a way that it would act as a social wealth for uplifting the living standard of the people of the country.

The Commission was made aware of the fact that for rapid economic development industrialization was essential. So, the Commission was directed to put emphasis on technical education that would produce competent engineers, scientists and trained workers.

The reformed education system, according to the Commission, would remove the deep-rooted misconception about the manual labour from the minds of the young boys and girls.

"Moral and spiritual values, nation building, scientific progress, responsible citizenship and public service should be the basis of education" (Ed. Comm. 1959: 15).

According to the Commission the Secondary education which would be from class nine to twelve, should be considered a self-sufficient unit in itself instead of a part of higher education or as a gate to the
university. Secondary Education should have subjects that would enable the learners to develop their inner abilities to do their duties competently and to lead a decent and honourable life in the society as a perfect human being, an ideal citizen, a skilled worker and a true patriot.

Following are the recommendations of the Commission regarding the teaching-learning of English:

1. (a) **Primary Education (From class I – V)**

   The Commission did not recommend teaching of English at Primary level.

(b) **Secondary Education (From class VI – XII)**

i) "In our opinion English should be a compulsory subject from class VI to XII. The proficiency in English is a must for studying all kinds of professional and university courses. It is also a necessary quality for them who want to study science and technology at higher level. Emphasis must be laid on English not as a language of literature but on its use as a living language. Utmost importance should be put on teaching-learning of English in classes IX-X."

ii) Time spent for teaching a language must be in accordance to the usefulness of the language for the individual and the society. From this point of view maximum time should be reserved for teaching-learning of English and national languages" (Edn. Comm. 1958: 151).

(c) **Higher Education**

The members of the Commission recognised the great importance of learning English-the language of wider communication from class VI to
degree level as a compulsory subject to enable scientists, engineers and the people of other technical professions to exchange ideas and views at the international level.

2. **Medium of Instruction**

   According to the Commission since Urdu and Bengali had been declared as the state languages of Pakistan, there was no room for any contradiction regarding the replacement of English by these two languages in the education sector.

   As for the introduction of national languages (e.g. Urdu and Bengali) as media of instruction the Commission said that the national languages were great forces to create the feeling of nationalism, to remove social barriers, to create originality of thought in the mind of the students to enhance their creativity along with the development of their imagination and creating qualities of leadership in them.

   The Commission also pointed out the adverse effects of the English education saying that there had come up a great social barrier between the English-knowing people and non-English-knowing people and as English was the medium of instruction, the development of the regional languages was hampered seriously. Consequently, till today no standard texts and reference books for higher studies are available in native languages - though many of them have very rich literatures.

   All universities and all intermediate boards allowed their arts students to write their answers in the national languages (e.g. Urdu and Bengali) in the examination. But only Dhaka and Karachi Universities allowed their science students also to use any of the national languages in their answer scripts. The Commission recommended that other universities and boards should follow suit. They also recommended that the national
languages should replace English in higher studies step by step. But care should be taken to check the deterioration of standard of education while doing so. As for higher education, the Commission believed that the text books should be of a high quality so that they would widen the outlook of the students and sharpen their intellect. Since such standard text books were not available in the national languages, care should be taken regarding the change of the medium of instruction at the university level.

The Commission also believed that it would take at least fifteen years to change the medium of instruction from English to the national languages without lowering the standard of education. The members of the Commission were also hopeful that within this period the necessary teaching-learning materials would be prepared to make the shift.

3 (a) Writing Textbooks in National Languages

According to the Commission, the greatest problem confronting writing books in national languages was the lack of corresponding technical terms in national languages for the English ones.

As a solution the Commission suggested that the English scientific and technical terms and symbols should be retained without making any effort to translate them into the national languages because such an attempt, the Commission held, would prove fruitless and harmful for the development of thinking ability and for the spread of knowledge. "So the best way is to adopt the English scientific and technical terms" (Ed. Comm. 1959: 344). Within a few years the native languages would internalise them and they would no more be considered foreign words.
(b) Setting up Boards

For an effective change of the medium they proposed to establish two boards - one for the preparation of the materials e.g. writing texts and reference books and the other for looking after the technical and scientific terms.

(c) Importance of Learning English

Though the Commission was strongly in favour of the national languages as the medium of instruction, the members also strongly recommended the great importance of learning English.

According to the Commission English was the richest language in respect of her massive stock of words. "Her voluminous literature is getting richer and enlarged day by day. Hundred of thousands of pundits and scientists in library and research centres in various countries are recording their findings in English. So everyday new information is being added to the store-house of knowledge in English and innumerable books and journals of very high quality carrying the results of researches and up-to-date information on various subjects are being published constantly. At the same time information published in other languages are being translated into English. So English is, therefore, a store-house of ancient and modern social and scientific knowledge" (ibid: 38).

According to the Commission, English has spread all over the world so much so that it is now used in all the continents. "Now it is the language of trade and commerce industry and diplomacy. English is taught as a foreign language in many countries outside the English-speaking world... So English has acquired such a stature that no country in the world can deny its importance" (ibid: 387). Now-a-days the progress of scientific
knowledge, researches and inventions are taking place so fast that no country is self-sufficient.

"Therefore Pakistan cannot remain isolated from the rest of the world. In her education system she has to reserve a place for English teaching-learning. Though we believe English has to be replaced by the two national languages e.g. Urdu and Bengali ultimately, we still believe that there should be a permanent role of English in our education system. It is through English our scientists and other scholars can get themselves acquainted with modern knowledge in science and technology. Our diplomats may present their constructive views in the international forum and the armed forces personnel can obtain the up-to-date information regarding the use of modern arms and ammunitions. It was through English the people of many parts of the sub-continent joined the freedom struggle and it is English which after the Partition, has been the means of maintaining the contact between the two wings of Pakistan" (ibid: 347-348).

In view of the needs for English mentioned above, scholars, educationists, businessmen, administrators, directors, statesmen needed English. So students, the Commission held, coming out of the university after successful completion of their courses should have sufficient competence in English as to maintain a contact with the current flow of thought in the world. They should have sufficient skill in English to publish the results of their research in the international journals.

(d) Method of Teaching English

The Commission held that great attention should be paid to the teaching-learning of English and modern methods of language teaching should be adopted for this purpose.

According to the Commission it must be taught as an effective means of communication rather than as a medium of literature. For this purpose the Commission suggested to adopt technological devices like tape-recorders, gramophones etc. The system of education should be
restructured for modernizing it. In this respect, the Commission suggested, the assistance from the British Council and the Sydney University could be sought. Taking the fruits of modern research the teacher-training scheme and the task of writing suitable texts should be undertaken.

(e) Scripts

Mr. Ayub Khan, the Martial Law Administrator on 31 December 1958 suggested that "the introduction of Roman script 'for all languages of Pakistan would help increase literacy and could result also in creation of a common language" (A. Khan cited in Tariq Rahman: 1998: 99).

As to the question of script the Commission's belief was that there should be a system of writing which must be appropriate for writing literature and which would be easy to acquire and smooth to read. It invited opinions from people. Many favoured the Roman script while others were against it on the ground that it would cut them off from the past heritage. Instead of giving any opinion the Commission recommended the setting up of a Committee of experts who would decide the question of the adaptation of a script for all Pakistani languages. And if the Roman script was not accepted, it would also devise means for improving Bengali and Urdu scripts.

(d) Evaluation

The Sharif Commission's recommendations were the first attempt by the native educationists to give Pakistan an indigenous education policy. However, there was violent agitation against it in the both wings of Pakistan on several grounds.

"...it proposed that the minimum length of university courses should be three years and that the stage of Secondary education should cover class IX and XII, in other words, that the
intermediate classes form part of high school rather than college education. The proposal for three-years-degree course met vociferous opposition from students' parents and teachers. The resistance was so intense that the government decided to withdraw the reform. The recommendations of the Commission made religious education compulsory upto class VIII, but its contents failed to inspire the younger generation to inculcate Islamic moral values. The attempt to diversify courses at the Secondary stage did not take off largely because of the paucity of teachers in the newly introduced technical subjects. Some steps taken to reform the education system also had to be withdrawn as they did not produce the desired results. The textbook boards set up to produce high quality books met with limited success" (Dr. Muneer Ahmad 1997: 244).

The proposal for setting up a Committee to see the possibility of adopting the Roman script for all Pakistani languages including Bengali, was opposed by everybody and caused a great furore in East Pakistan. In East Pakistan "students chanted slogans on 21 February 1961 that the writing of Bengali in the Roman script would not be tolerated..... The idea (of adopting the Roman script) had to be abandoned" (Tariq Rahman 1998: 99).

Though the Commission recommended the gradual replacement of English as a medium of instruction by the national languages e.g. Urdu and Bengali, it had put great importance on the learning of English in global context. According to the Commission English was not only the language of modernizing the society but also industrializing the country. They believed that if English was bidden farewell, Pakistan might be cut off from the rest of the world community. Moreover, English was the link language between the two wings having nothing in common except religion and being separated by one thousand miles of Indian territory. Considering the importance of English they proposed to introduce it in class VI as a compulsory subject. They did not favour English at Primary stage thinking that it would be too much for young children who had
already been taxed with two other languages - e.g. Urdu and Arabic in addition to the mother tongue.

Existing education in Pakistan was secular and liberal in spirit but the Sharif Commission's recommendations attempted to Islamise it for the first time in the history of Pakistan.
4.3 THE COMMISSION ON STUDENTS' PROBLEMS AND WELFARE - 1966 (The Hamoodur Rahman Report)

The Commission on National Education, also known as the Sharif Commission submitted its report on 26 August 1959. Its recommendations were accepted by the government on April 6, 1960. As a part of implementation the University Ordinance was first promulgated in East Pakistan in June 1961 and in September of the same year in West Pakistan. Soon student agitation erupted against the reforms introduced at the college and university levels resulting in clashes with the police. A call for strike was given in both wings of Pakistan against the three-year degree course and other reforms. Student agitations continued so vigorously in different parts of the two wings of Pakistan that at last President Ayub Khan announced at Multan that a high-power Commission would be set up to look into the problems of students.

Accordingly a Commission was set up by a notification of the Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan being No. F. 7-3-64-UE-1 dated December 15, 1964.

"Its terms of reference as set out in the notification were as follows:

(1) To examine the provision of the University Ordinances and suggest modifications where necessary;

(2) To take stock of existing facilities for a sound programme of studies and to suggest remedial measures commensurate with available resources;

(3) To determine adequacy or otherwise of the recreational and welfare facilities of students and suggest ways and means of providing them within available resources;
(4) To examine any other matter affecting student life" (Report 1966:1).

About the aims and objectives the Commission itself says:

"It was not our function, as some people conceived, to criticise report of the Commission (the Sharif Commission). Our function was confined mere to ascertaining the deficiencies, if any, in physical and teaching facilities and on looking into matters which were causing dissatisfaction amongst students. We were not, thus called upon to lay down a new educational policy nor did we consider it necessary to do so" (ibid: 192-193).

Regarding teaching-learning of English the recommendations of the Commission were as follows:

1. (a) Primary Education

About Primary Education it strongly supported the recommendations of the Sharif Commission 1959 which did not recommend teaching English at Primary level. As to the demand of the students for abolition of kindergartens and English medium schools it considered such demand unjustified on the ground that their education system was neither against the interest of the country nor a deviation from the standard approved by the government. The Commission defended the missionary schools on grounds of religious freedom granted by the constitution and English medium schools on grounds of excellence. As to the charge of snobs produced by these schools the Commission took a defensive stand on the plea that they were meant to produce military and civilian administrative elite (Tariq Rahman 1996:234).

Existing English medium schools and kindergartens should continue. But paradoxically the Commission recommended no more
establishment of such English medium schools by the government on the ground that "such schools violated the constitutional assurance that all citizens are equal before law" (ibid: 235).

(b) Secondary Education

The Commission recommended that English should be introduced in class VI and be compulsory up to the Matriculation level (ibid: 116).

(c) Higher Education

The Hamoodur Rahman Commission did not recommend teaching of English either as an optional or compulsory subject at college or university level. But it observed approvingly that "Universities in East Pakistan appear to be anxious to maintain the position of English and have, therefore, constituted a Committee to examine the question of the change-over in detail keeping in view the retention of English as a compulsory subject up to the undergraduate level" (ibid: 112).

2. Medium of Instruction

The Commission supported the recommendations of the Sharif Commission regarding the adoption of the vernacular as the medium of instruction e.g. Bengali for East Pakistan and Urdu for West Pakistan with a note of dissent. The Commission rather indirectly accused the Sharif Commission of not having taken into account the question of 'a common vehicle of communication' for the two wings and the impact of such change upon the unity of the country while proposing Bengali and Urdu as medium of instruction in East and West Pakistan respectively. The Commission here pointed out that the Central Government was quite aware of the problem posed by the two national languages (Bengali and Urdu) for the two wings but the government hoped that 'if the vocabulary of the two
languages could be so ordered as to incorporate as many words shared by both as possible, a commonly understood language might be evolved’ in due course (Report 1966:108).

The Sharif Commission recommended 15 years for universities to change the medium of instruction from English to national languages. According to the Hamoodur Rahman Report this was partially accepted by the Government and "it was resolved that in respect of the humanities and social sciences those universities which do not allow the option of teaching these subjects through the medium of a national language may consider only so after a preliminary period of preparation and with due regard to maintenance of academic standard" (ibid: 110). In case of the science subjects the government accepted the recommendations of the Sharif Commission. With regret the Hamoodur Rahman Commission observed that some universities flagrantly violated the Central Government’s directive not to change the medium of instruction and examination in science subjects and in professional colleges without its prior approval. In such cases the universities, the Commission regretted were 'swayed more by sentiment than by a dispassionate judgement’.

Violating the government directive regarding the change of media, Karachi, Punjab and Peshawar universities gave option even to their B.Sc students to write their examination papers either in Urdu or English much before the stipulated time. Sind University went a step further allowing their degree students of all groups to use Sindi besides Urdu and English in the examination papers. The Agricultural University of Lyallpur also allowed Urdu for B.Sc students. English was the only medium of instruction and examination at the University of Engineering and Technology of Lahore.
Dhaka and Rajshahi Universities in East Pakistan also accepted Bengali, in principle, as the medium of instruction and examination upto B.A. B.Sc and B.Com. Pass level and for the subsidiary subjects of an Honours course with effect from the examination held in 1964. The affiliated colleges of these two universities had also been permitted instruction either in the national languages or in English.

According to the Commission there were many eminent educationists who questioned the appropriateness of "such a radical change at the highest level of education in the present state of academic unpreparedness."

The supporters of the change-over argued that the students being taught in foreign medium tended to memorize the foreign terminology like parrots without appreciating their exact connotation and that could be avoided by vernacular equivalents which would immediately reflect in their mind their precise significance.

Under such controversy the Commission recommended that the Intermediate and B.A. Pass course students should be allowed to write their examination papers either in the national languages or in English.

As to the question of change-over of medium for B.Sc Pass and Honours and post graduate studies the Commission recommended that a Committee of experts set up by the Central Government, should look at it. Till such time as the Committee was satisfied with relevant arrangements made for the change, no university should be permitted to effect the change-over.

The Commission regretted the lack of co-ordination among all the universities of the country and the existing haphazard change-over of the
medium of instruction and examination without following any uniform principle.

So, the Commission recommended that any hasty change of medium to the national languages was unacceptable. The change-over of the medium at the highest level of studies must be approved by a high powered Committee of experts set up by the Central Government.

3 (a) Lack of Standard Textbooks in Native Languages and the Problem of Scientific Terminology.

The Commission observed that there was great dearth of textbooks in the native languages.

The university of Dhaka constituted a number of panels of teachers to compile essential textbooks in Bengali on different subjects up to graduate and post graduate levels and for coining Bengali equivalents for scientific and technical terms. According to Dhaka University the deadline for complete change to Bengali was the year 1970-71. But the Director of the Central Board for Development of Bengali expressed his view in favour of the importance of English which, according to him, should continue as a compulsory second language for the next 25 years.

The Board for the development of Bengali and for facilitating the change-over by 1965 prepared only eleven books in Bengali for B.A., B.Sc Pass and Honours courses as against the originally proposed twenty-three. The Board also decided to retain the standard international terms, notations and symbols in Bengali spelling with the English original in brackets. Only in some rare cases a Bengali equivalent were to be coined. The Board also commissioned some specialists to write original books in their own subjects.
The Commission also pointed out that some critics thought that mere mixture of international scientific terms with Bengali or Urdu connecting words would be no change at all, and if Bengali or Urdu equivalents were coined they would for the most part be quite incomprehensible to the students.

(b) The Commission strongly condemned the drastic decision of the Karachi University barring the English medium students from receiving education from the university or its affiliated institutions from the year 1967.

(c) Importance of Learning English

Lastly the Commission laid great emphasis on the teaching-learning of English for the following reasons.

1) English was an international language.

2) Books available for higher studies were mainly in English.

3) Any contribution to knowledge in other languages was readily available in English.

4) Students and teachers had to go for further studies to countries where the medium of instruction and research was English.

5) English was the window to the world.

6) English must be learnt to avoid isolation from an incredibly fast growing knowledge all over the world.

7) English served as an indispensable means of communication between East and West Pakistan (ibid:116).

(d) Evaluation

The Hamoodur Rahman Commission was essentially paradoxical of nature. On the one hand it attempted to Islamize the whole education system by recommending religious study as a compulsory subject from the
Primary to university levels (ibid: 56) and on the other hand, it attempted to modernize the society by retaining English as a means of acquiring up-to-date information in science and technology from the Western world.

The recommended education policy for retaining English and English medium schools would have "the effect of perpetuating the barriers which separate:

(a) those who go through the religious stream and those who seek knowledge in secular schools,
(b) those who use English language in their normal day-to-day business and those who do not,
(c) those who are born in well-to-do families and those who are not" (Education in Pakistan. Proposals for a new Education Policy, 1969, cited in A. Aftab Kazi 1994: 84).

This Commission's report also gave rise to student movement throughout Pakistan.

"Since major beneficiaries of this policy were from the dominant system group, the inequitable sociopolitical and economic system prevented successful achievement of the defined goals, since it did not distribute educational resources equally among the ethnic groups. The policy was found unsuitable and resulted in strong ethnic unrest during the entire One-Unit Era under the Ayub government" (ibid: 82). Caring a fig for the martial law the student movement reached such a high tempo against the Hamoodur Rahman Commission's report that the government of Ayub Khan was at last forced to withdraw it (Shafi-Uddin Ahmed 1994:201).

Thus, the Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report met an unexpected end in the face of student unrest.

As per aspirations of the newly liberated people of Bangladesh, on July 26, 1972 the National Education Commission, popularly known as the Quadrat-e-Khuda Commission was formed by the government of Bangladesh with the aim of removing "the various defects and deficiencies of our present education system to indicate a way as to how a wholesome nationhood can be achieved through the medium of education and to strengthen the country in modern knowledge and creative endeavour" (Report 1974: 1). The Commission was expected to restructure the education system for building up a socialistic society and also to 'make all possible efforts to evolve a long-term education system capable of meeting all our legitimate educational requirements on a semi-permanent basis'.


About the aims and objectives of education the Commission said that education was an equipment to implement the hopes and aspirations of a nation and to build a new society. So the main responsibility and goal of education were to arouse an awareness among all the people about the urgent requirements of life and enable them to evolve the ability to solve various related problems and inspire them to move ahead towards the creation of a socialistic society. Since education is a powerful weapon it must be used "to instil into the minds of our people a genuine attachment for nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism and to ensure that this is truly reflected in their everyday existence" (The Report 1974:1).

The Commission further said:

"our education system must be used as a medium for utilization of particular creative skills for the reconstruction of our individual
and social lives. Simultaneously we must arrange for the development of vocational skills required for the creation of a democratic and progressive society" (Report 1974: 1).

The Commission dealt at length on the issue of the medium of instruction and place of foreign language in education system.

The recommendations of the Commission are presented below:

1 (a) **Primary Education**

The Commission kept no provision for teaching-learning of English at Primary level.

About teaching English at Primary level the Commission believed that there was no need for learning English upto class V. It considered the imposition of English an 'additional burden' for the young learners and that acted 'as an impediment to their mental development'. The introduction of English at this stage might, the Commission feared, upset the implementation of its recommendations.

There were many kindergartens and English medium schools in the country. But the Commission did not say anything about them. Since the purpose of the education is to reflect socialism, we can presume that there would be no continuation of such schools any more because their existence violates the equal right of citizens and divides the society.

(b) **Secondary and Higher Secondary Education**

The Commission recommended that English must be introduced as a compulsory second language from class VI and must continue upto class XII in order to 'liberalise the pupils' outlook and to help students acquire modern knowledge. It also favoured a third language being taught at this stage according to the perceived need.
The Commission believed that English would enable our students to read and understand English books and journals at the higher stages of education.

(c) Higher Education

The Commission did not recommend teaching of English either as a compulsory or optional subject at college or university level.

2. Medium of Instruction

According to the Commission Bengali is a bridge between the past and the present and a source of the emergence of nationalism, national cohesion, dignity, originality of thought and research and an easy and effective weapon for the spread of knowledge among common people. So Bengali should be the medium of instruction at all levels of education in the country.

The Commission believed that English continues to be the medium of instruction at the higher levels as a result of the colonial education system. "This is an impediment for pupils and has an adverse effect on their creative faculty... As a result, we have not been able to make any original contribution to the great fund of knowledge available in these fields" (Report 1974:13).

Therefore, the Commission recommended the immediate adoption of Bengali medium at all levels of education.

The Commission made it very clear that the adoption of Bengali as a medium of instruction did not mean that it was not necessary to learn English. The Commission recommended that English would continue as a second language.
Though it recommended the change-over, it did not set any time limit for effecting the shift. The Commission did not give any option to the students to use either Bengali or English in the examination paper before the final change-over at the university level.

3 (a) Translating English Books and Preparing Bengali Text-books

The teachers engaged in translating English books into Bengali and preparing original Bengali textbooks must "be granted leave and other necessary facilities to enable them to devote themselves whole heartedly to the job of preparing textbooks in Bengali for higher education. The persons able to do the above job independently and to translate foreign text books into Bengali should be provided with required facilities for undertaking it individually or collectively. For this purpose government grants should be made, if needed" (ibid: 220).

The Commission also admitted that the great problem with writing books of science in Bengali was the lack of equivalents for English technical terms in the national language. It suggested the adoption of the scientific terms and signs and symbols as used in English on the plea "that 'the language used in science is universal and not the exclusive property of any nation. Gradually these terms will be absorbed in our language and no one will be aware of them as foreign elements. Many such foreign words have become assimilated in Bengali" (ibid: 221).

(b) Committee

The Commission further recommended the setting up of a Committee of scientists, linguists, writers, historians, technicians, social and political thinkers and other experts under Bengali Academy to give advice and guidance regarding the different aspects of preparing suitable terminologies.
(c) Setting up an Institute

The Commission recommended the establishment of an institute of modern languages where interested persons would learn their language of choice including English.

(d) Evaluation

Finally, it can be said that the first Commission of the newly liberated country proposed an educational system that was purely liberal and non-communal in nature keeping intact the spirit of the four fundamental principles of the state. But the complete implementation of the recommendations was not possible because of the political turmoil that resulted from the murder of Sheik Mujibur Rahman on 15 August 1975.
4.5 THE ENGLISH TEACHING TASK FORCE REPORT-1976

It is a very common feature with Pakistan and Bangladesh that whenever army takes over power, state policies in all sectors including education are also changed. When the government of Sheik Mujibure Rahman was overthrown by the military regime in August 1975, in the same year on October 27, the government of Bangladesh by an order No.5/7AS-38/75 set up a Task-Force to visit the general schools and colleges and teachers' training institutes to assess the English proficiency, standard and techniques of teaching English in class VI to XII and to recommend effective practical measures for improving the teaching of English.

Accordingly the Task-Force visited more than 50 representative institutes in different parts of Bangladesh. It gave an understanding of some of the reasons for the existing situation and suggested ways for improving it.

The findings and recommendations of the Task Force were as follows:

1 (a) Primary Education (class I-V)

According to the Task Force Report "the English teaching situation in the Primary system appears to be far worse than that seen in any other part of the education system" (Report 1976: 28) There appeared little true learning and after studying English for three years the students came out having learned only writing letters and recognizing few simple words in isolation. This was partly due to lack of qualified trained teachers.

To improve English teaching-learning the Task Force recommended teaching English compulsorily either from class III or from class VI in
order to bring uniformity in the education system, because in urban areas English was taught and taught well from class I, whereas, in rural areas it was taught from class VI. But the class VI textbook wrongly assumed the grasp of previous materials by the students.

(b) Secondary Education (class VI- X)

While investigating the situation the Task Force found a dismal picture of English teaching learning situation. In S.S.C. in 1975, 13.2 per cent of government schools' candidates failed, 57.5 per cent of urban private schools' candidates failed, and in rural private schools, 39.4 per cent did not pass. It must be remembered that this low achievement was attained in spite of the relatively large amount of time reported to be spent per week on English - in government schools, nearly 8 classes per week and in private schools more than 9.

(c) Higher Secondary Education (from class XI-XII)

The college situation was even more upsetting. In government colleges 48 per cent failed in the annual examination of class XI and 42 per cent failed in H.S.C. in 1975. The highest failure rates were found in private colleges where the figures were 62 per cent and 64 per cent respectively. About the students of government colleges, the Task Force stated that

"they are, on average about four years below their expected level of proficiency. They have not mastered material beyond a class VII level and could not be expected to study the ungraded texts in English which are used in tertiary level education... In general the standards of English in non-government colleges are much the same as those in class IX in government schools. In other words, students in these institutions are a long way below their supposed levels of proficiency and it is very unlikely that they could gain much from unsupervised reading of ungraded books in English" (ibid: 19).
(d) **Cadet College Education**

The Task Force appreciated the high quality of achievement by the Cadet College students. Perhaps the Task Force was not aware of the fact that only extraordinary boys were admitted there and huge amount of national money spent per annum on each cadet for quality teaching. Such achievement, therefore, was not a matter of surprise.

2. **Medium of Instruction**

The Commission did not say anything about the medium of instruction. It ignored the subject, because officially Bengali was the compulsory medium of instruction from class I to class XII.

3 (a) **Causes of Failure in English**

Some colleges attributed failure in English to the lack of motivation to learn on the part of students. No students (with some exceptions) felt the necessity of borrowing books from the library. Instead they depended on guides and bazar notes or the notes prepared not by themselves but by their private tutors. Moreover no schools or colleges had teaching aids other than textbooks, blackboards and chalk.

(b) **The Teachers Training Institutes**

The situation existing in teacher training colleges, college of education, Bangladesh Education Extension and Research Institute and Primary Training Institutes was equally deplorable. Only 20 per cent trainees of teacher training colleges showed efficiency of handling materials above class VIII, and only 26 per cent students of first year of college of education showed mastery over class VI materials and "all the college teachers tested could be considered able to teach in class VIII but perhaps only 30 per cent in class XI and XII - the classes which they all
must teach" (ibid: 19). None of the students of Primary Training Institutes could handle materials beyond class. VII.

Training of teachers must be ensured to make English teaching effective at all levels. Again there was lack of qualified instructors of English in Primary Training Institutes to train the Primary teachers. This deficiency should be removed with immediate effect.

(c) Texts

According to the Task Force most colleges reported that language in their text was difficult and that vocabulary and grammar were their students' main difficulties. The text was also not graded.

"It was clear that the lack of suitably graded textbooks at all levels contributed to low student achievement" (ibid: 24).

As to textbooks the Task Force recommended that "The textbooks should contain more examples of structures, a greater variety of exercises and more opportunities for reinforcement of writing as well as speaking skills... The aim of self-teaching textbooks should be considered by the writers" (ibid: 34).

(d) Method

The Task Force observed that classroom teaching was teacher-centred. The main classroom activities were writing on the board, reading out aloud, and explaining the grammar rules. So the system was passive-learning oriented. Writing skills were given a relatively minor place. In addition to this, hardly any college arranged tutorial classes for students.

Moreover, the Task Force observed that the teacher relied heavily on the textbook's language. Only some few good students were asked questions and the same few students answered. Voice change, translation
and tenses etc. were the typical features of teacher's approaches. This led the students to memorization of useless material and a general inability to comprehend.

(e) **Overcrowded Classes:**

Since English was a compulsory subject and there was dearth of requisite number of teachers, the college English class was generally large. The Task Force believed that in a class with large number of students, 'any kind of teaching except lecturing is difficult'. This is why the majority of the college teachers, as reported by the Task Force, complained of the problem with huge class size and the lack of motivation on the part of students.

The Task Force further pointed out the lack of life and interest and over crowded sitting arrangement in the English classroom.

(f) **Syllabuses**

For the overall development of English teaching situation in the country the Task Force recommended that:

"There should be an integrated course from the beginning right upto H.S.C. In this course each part or level should serve as a basis for the succeeding part or level but at the same time as far as practicable, study at each level should be terminal in that it equips the students with particular skills" (ibid: 33).

The syllabus should, the Task Force believed, be designed according to the needs for which English was being learnt. It also believed that not more than 50 structures should be set for class III to V and 200 structures for class VI to VIII. For class IX to XII a graded continuation of the preceding structured contents should be attempted.
The teachers should be provided with handbooks which would explain the syllabus and guide them on how to implement it.

(g) Examination

The Task Force was in favour of a change in examination system. According to it examination should test comprehension and writing skills in meaningful situations. To discourage rote-learning, examinations should be 'based on language content and structures of the textbooks and not on the actual stories.' The Commission recommended the test of listening and speaking skills up to class VIII and competence in language other than in literature should be examined up to class XII.

(h) Setting up a Special Committee

It recommended setting up of a Committee of experts to take care of English in Bangladesh. "It would examine the practical function of English for each level of schooling in order to enhance the relevance of textbooks... It would also develop teaching materials and experimental textbooks and try them out in both urban and rural settings" (ibid: 36). It should also examine the competence of teacher training college instructors and suggest ways for improving the training of Secondary teachers. It would also look at the possibility of such intensive courses that would equip the learner to do some specific jobs in English.

(i) Evaluation

The salient feature of the Task Force was that it was set up to investigate exclusively English teaching situation up to class XII. Though the Primary level did not officially come under their purview, they made a thorough study of this level on the plea that "failure at later level often originated at this level" (Report 1976: 1).

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After assessment of the results of their tests conducted at various institutions all over the country the Task Force pointed out three major causes of the poor state of English teaching in Bangladesh viz.: (1) lack of helpful textbooks, (2) the great shortage of qualified teachers of English at all levels of education, and (3) the defective examination system. As corrective measures the Task Force recommended the preparation of a series of textbooks, each one complete in itself, sound training for teachers of English and drastic change in the examination system that would test the competence of the learners in language use.

The Task Force’s recommendation about text books that could be used for self-learning was most befitting in the Bangladesh context. The Commission had truly felt that most students from the rural areas did not have any one to help them with English. Under the circumstances the suggestion for such self-learning texts was a wise one.

It is very interesting that the Task Force did not report anything about kindergartens and English medium schools. Such a lapse about an important issue is really hard to understand.

Finally, it can be said that the Task Force’s recommendations were accepted by the government and accordingly reforms were introduced. As a part of the reforms ‘English for Today’, a textbook series, was introduced for class VI to class X and in 1986 ‘English for Today Book VIII’ was introduced for Class XI and XII. But in the face of great agitation the book was withdrawn within a year (This has already been discussed in Chapter III).
4.6 REPORT OF NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION POLICY: 1997


The Committee made an exhaustive study of all the existing branches of education in Bangladesh from Primary to university levels and from general to technical education including even the nursing. On the basis of their findings the Committee has recommended steps for necessary changes and improvements.

The Committee has also articulated its opinion in clear terms regarding the status of English as a subject of study as well as the medium of instruction for different levels and branches of education.

The recommendations of the Commission regarding teaching-learning of English are presented below.

1 (a) Primary Education

According to the report of the Committee, English should be introduced in class three. The Committee offered the following rationale for introducing English.

"Now English is compulsory from class one. To many, teaching children two languages from the very beginning of their academic life (learning of Bengali and English from class I) is to adding pressure on their mind. Though two languages are now taught in our schools, neither English nor our mother tongue - Bengali is properly taught because of the country's academic environment, session and lack of learning materials. So arrangements should be made to teach the students a second language after they have acquired necessary proficiency in mother tongue. Besides most of the children of our country, just after completing Primary
education, enter practical life; they hardly use and so they can not retain their knowledge of English .... English has been introduced from class one by an executive order of the Government since 1991. But, in most of the schools of rural areas, teaching of English is not done properly, because of the dearth of efficient teachers. In the present-perceptive, arrangement may be made for teaching of English from class three and raising the standard of the existing method of teaching it" (Report 1997: 44).

The proposed curriculum structure for Primary education shows that there will be compulsory English of 100 marks with 6 forty minute classes a week from class III.

(b) Secondary Education

According to the Committee the Secondary education will consist of class IX to XII. The Committee lays great stress on Secondary education.

Secondary level will also be regarded as the last level of general education and learning of this level will be regarded as an entry permit for higher education in different departments (ibid: 63).

At Secondary level there will be three sub-systems e.g. general education, vocational education and madrasah education. The Committee recommends compulsory English of 100 marks for all the three groups.

(c) English Medium Schools

There are some English medium British pattern Secondary schools in the country. The Committee recommends that with the permission of the government they may continue with their 'O' level and 'A' level programmes.
(d) Higher Education

The Committee proposes four-year coordinated degree course and one year Master's course for university level and three-year coordinated degree course for general college. It also proposes four-year coordinated degree course and one-year Master's course to be taught in some good colleges which will be called university colleges.

"At the degree course level, English language of 100 marks will be compulsory for all the students. The students who will fail in English for the first time will get opportunity to appear at the examination for two more times at best" (ibid: 99).

2. Medium of Instruction

(a) General Education

The Committee is strongly in favour of Bengali medium but at the same time it is aware of the importance of English. The Committee believes that higher education should be modern and of international standard. Persons who will be engaged in teaching, research and policy-making must be proficient in English. The learners of higher education should, the Committee thinks, have knowledge of English to explore the store-house of knowledge of the past and present which is in English.

The Committee further believes that 'since in the realm of knowledge and wisdom particularly in science and technology change and development are taking place so rapidly that it is not still possible to keep pace with it in translating books or periodicals into Bengali language, teaching and writing of answers to questions in English may continue, though it may be for a short time' (ibid: 100).
The Commission recommends that at the Secondary level English medium is going to be introduced alongside with Bengali. As a positive steps towards the implementation of the programme, text books are being prepared in English under the supervision of National Textbooks Board.

(b) Professional and Technical Education

As to the question of the status of English for medical, engineering and nursing education the Committee recommends English as medium of instruction since the texts, reference books and journals are in English. Moreover, doctors of Bangladesh go for higher studies in English speaking countries and our engineers have to keep contacts with local and foreign personnel in respect of development projects. This is why the knowledge of English is a must for them. The Committee holds the same view about English in case of agricultural universities and law education.

3 (a) Translation

As Bengali has already been introduced as the medium, steps should be taken to translate ‘all useful important writings of modern knowledge and wisdom’ into Bengali.

(b) Evaluation

According to the statement in the 'Foreword' of the report of the Committee and the full study of the contents of its report, it goes without saying that the report is just a reproduction of the Qudrat-e-Khuda Commission of 1974 with some minor modifications, cuts and additions. This, as the Committee asserts, has been done on the ground that the education system should meet the needs and aspirations of the society.
Another feature of the Committee is that it is defensive of English and strongly in favour of reviving the liberal and non-communal spirit in education system of Bangladesh. But it cannot be denied that by retaining English medium schools and introducing English medium along with Bengali medium at Secondary level it will widen the gap between the rural and urban societies, because the protagonists of the English medium are generally from metropolitan privileged class who will dominate the fields of business, administration and other domains of power. Thus they will colonize their non-English medium counterparts.
4.7 ASSESSMENT OF ALL THE REPORTS

A close look at the reports of all the Commissions/Committees reveals some common features in respect of the entire education system including teaching-learning of English and medium of instruction.

All the Commissions/Committees in one voice recommended introduction of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in place of English for all the courses of general education except science subjects at higher levels. Only the Sharief Commission set the time limit of 15 years preparation time for complete change of the medium at the degree and post graduate levels. Other Commissions/Committees did not set any time limit.

All the Commissions/Committees unanimously recommended the retention of English medium for medical, engineering and agricultural studies on the ground that all the textbooks and journals are in English.

With one exception they all recommended that English be introduced in class six. Only the National Committee on Education Policy 1997 is in favour of introduction of English from class III. This Committee also favours teaching English as a compulsory subject up to degree level whereas others recommended it up to the Secondary stage.

Without any exception all Commissions/Committees recommend that Primary education should cover upto class VIII and Secondary level should be from class IX to XII.

With exceptions of East Pakistan Education Reforms Commission of 1957 and National Education Commission of 1974, all other Commissions/Committees were in favour of the continuation of English medium schools.
The reports prepared at the direction of East Pakistan Government and Bangladesh Government are liberal and non-communal in spirit whereas the reports prepared at the direction of Pakistan Government are Islamic ideology-oriented. Thus, the reports reflect the government policy towards education. In fine it can be said that though all the Commissions/Committees were in favour of mother tongue instruction at all levels, they all admitted the importance of learning English for studying science and technology and also for international communication.