Abstract

Bangladesh is one of the very few countries in the world where the status of English has not yet been defined in the Government documents. Various research findings in the sector of ELT and education in Bangladesh suggest that the language proficiency of the graduate students is far below the required level. The picture of language and communication skills among engineering graduates is further miserable. These engineering graduates, in most cases, are unable to effectively deal with their engineering textbooks in English and accordingly fail to make impression in their academics and profession. The educationists and relevant stakeholders usually blame the unstable education and language policy of the country for the students’ poor communication skills. Though most education policies put up recommendations in favour of creating more technical human capital, promote technical education and career oriented program of studies in all technical educational institutions across the country, ironically the English language teaching in these technical and engineering institutions have remained outside the focus of research. Hence the present study makes an attempt to assess the current English language teaching learning practices in Engineering Universities of Bangladesh and obtain information on the components of English curriculum in the form of needs analysis. Being explorative in nature, the study aims at exploring the loopholes in the existing English curriculum in the Government engineering universities of Bangladesh and thereby presents suggestions and recommendations for possible changes and reformation in this sector. The assumption is that once the loopholes and other related weaknesses are identified, the concerned stakeholders, especially the English teachers will be in better position to address the
students’ needs and help them develop their language and communication skills. Further assumption is that, with a sound language and communication skills, these engineering graduates will be able to create a better impression of their professional skills in the corporate sector.

Hence the rationale for this present study stems from (a) an absence of an effective skill-based ESP curriculum for engineering learners in Bangladesh, (b) the lack of awareness of ESP courses and teaching approach among English teachers in Bangladesh (c) the change in ESP teachers’ role in engineering pedagogy and (d) the absence of empirical research in ELT curriculum and practice in the engineering context in Bangladesh. Consequently the study attempts to conclude to provide detailed insights into how to effectively adopt the ESP approach in the country.

In obtaining information on these sources, the researcher has used various research tools such as questionnaire for students and teachers, interviews with English teachers, HR personnel, in-service engineers and classroom observation. To enhance the validity of the study further, the researcher has studied the sample syllabus and examination question papers as well.

Students’ questionnaire has been administered to tap information about the engineering learners’ perceptions of their academic and professional needs. Since students are the most important source of information for this study, students’ questionnaire has been designed with seven major domains such as students’ attitude and motivation for learning English, existing English syllabus, teaching methods and learning preferences, teaching materials, current evaluation system, the potential gap between students’ expectation versus reality,
the gap between industry and university in terms of skills instruction etc. Apart from these domains, an open-ended section has been included to obtain the suggestions from the students on various issues related to curriculum transaction. The teachers’ questionnaire aims at obtaining teachers’ perceptions on the various issues related to these areas and to substantiate all the domains in a bit different format. Interviews with English teachers has been conducted to obtain their reaction towards the current English teaching learning practices and also to compensate on the areas of information that has not been addressed in the questionnaire. The interview with HR personnel has been conducted to elicit information that the engineering graduate require in the industry. The in-service engineers have been interviewed to obtain data on their reflections of the university English course and its effectiveness and usage in their respective profession. In addition, the classroom observation has also been conducted to collect information on the actual practices in the classroom and to further compare with the claims and perceptions drawn from the corresponding interview and questionnaire. The close-ended items in the students and teachers’ questionnaire have been analyzed quantitatively using frequencies and percentage and presented in the form of tables for clear demonstration. The open-ended responses in both the questionnaires have been analyzed qualitatively using thick description. The information drawn from the interviews and classroom observation have been analyzed qualitatively.

The findings of the study reveal that the existing English curriculum has not been designed incorporating the engineering students’ needs. Hence the English teaching learning practices are in a vulnerable state. The results further suggest that the students are not satisfied with the components of the existing English curriculum as most of the contents in the English syllabus are not relevant to engineering learners’ future usage. Besides, most of
the domains of this study have not been effectively transacted due to the lack of teachers’ professional training and development. Hence the study has established that whole English curriculum needs a thorough revision. The implication is that the English language course needs to be designed after a thorough needs analysis to incorporate the needs of the engineering students and that of industry.

The study has been divided into six chapters. First chapter provides information about the chronological history of English language teaching and education as it exists in Bangladesh. The chapter also throws lights on the education system in Bangladesh comprising of the profile and structure of higher education in Bangladesh, present context of engineering education and current practices in Engineering classroom and English for specific purposes (ESP) in Bangladesh. The chapter further focuses on the significance followed by statement of the problem, objectives of research and research questions involved in the study.

The second chapter deals with literature review. The chapter addresses the relevant studies conducted both in Bangladesh and across the world. This chapter has provided insights through various relevant studies in the similar field either in the academic or professional needs for language and communication skills. This chapter has thus provided the right direction for this current study.

The third chapter deals with the theoretical underpinnings to establish the theoretical paradigm for this current study. This chapter specifically addresses on issues like various concepts, sources, models and developments of curriculum. This section also focuses on the distinction between curriculum and syllabus, language curriculum and innovation, features of ESP curriculum, role of ESP teachers. It has further focused on the use of technology in
language pedagogy and vocational education. This chapter further discusses the theories of ESP that befits this current study. Finally this section addresses on the specific theoretical issues and factors behind the growth of ESP that has finally given the shape of this study.

The fourth chapter deals with the research design adopted in this study. Methodology of the study has been elaborated with special focus on various research tools used and samples selected. The study primarily includes students and teachers from the government engineering universities and in-service engineering professionals and HR personnel from industries as the target sample for this study. To increase the validity of the study, it has included Classroom Observation Checklist, evaluation of English syllabus and semester-end examination papers.

In the fifth chapter, data analysis, results and interpretation of the findings have been presented. Close-ended items have been analyzed quantitatively and open-ended items have been analyzed qualitatively. Results of the findings from all sources have been further tabulated into triangulation framework to draw interpretation and conclusion. The results generated from the quantitative data have been shown in table, charts, and converted into percentage alongside the qualitative descriptions. The open-ended items have been analyzed and presented qualitatively.

Chapter six concludes the study by summarizing suggestions, conclusions and recommendations for the concerned stakeholders such as curriculum designers, university authority like Deans and Heads of the various branches of engineering for further improvement of the English language teaching learning enterprise in these engineering universities in Bangladesh.