ABSTRACT

EVALUATION OF ELT MATERIALS VIS-À-VIS LEARNERS' NEEDS: A CASE STUDY OF SECONDARY LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

By
Md. Anisur Rahman Anis
1. Introduction


In Bangladesh, there are three stages of secondary education. These are:
1) Junior secondary education from class VI to VIII.
2) Secondary education from class IX to X.
3) Higher secondary education from class XI to XII.

In Junior secondary education, there are two sub-systems of education. These are:

i) General education sub-system which includes government and semi-government schools and English medium schools. General
education sub-system is managed by the seven regions of secondary education boards namely, Dhaka, Rajshahi, Jessore, Comilla, Sylhet, Chittagong and Borishal. But in English medium schools, there is no specific board. Rather, these schools are run by the autonomous bodies.

ii) Madrasa education sub-system which includes only 'Alia Line' madrasa. Madrasa education sub-system is controlled by the Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board.

In secondary education, there are three sub-systems of education. Besides the General education sub-system and the Madrasa education sub-system, we have Vocational education sub-system which includes technical education school. It was started in 1995 and has very few schools across the country. This system is maintained by the Bangladesh Technical Education Board.

Like the secondary education there are three sub-systems in Higher secondary education.

The present study concentrates only on the first two stages of secondary education - junior secondary education and the secondary education.

2. **Objective of the Study**

The present study is an attempt to analyse the prescribed ELT materials vis-à-vis learners' needs at the secondary level in Bangladesh. In the context of Bangladesh, ELT materials include texts produced by Bangladesh National Curriculum and Text-book Board (NCTB) and the publishers approved by the Board (NCTB). In this study our aim is to analyse the ELT materials used in the secondary schools of Bangladesh, which follow the curricula of NCTB and to review whether these materials meet the educational needs as put forward by the curricula. Our study will also provide insight into why there is a mismatch
between what is in our curricula and how the text-books and other materials are organised. For this, first some books and materials used in the secondary schools will be evaluated; secondly, some teachers, students and syllabus designers will be informally interviewed and finally a questionnaire will be piloted to elicit the responses from both teachers and students. The findings collected from above sources will be analysed and discussed and some suggestions will be made to minimise the mismatch, if at all prevailing in the ELT programme.

Furthermore, the present study will provide an overview of English language education in Bangladesh. A language programme can be looked at from different historical perspectives. Three different phases, in this regard, are noticeable in the context of Bangladesh, viz., the colonial phase, the post-colonial phase and the present phase. An enquiry will be made to explore how each of these phases contribute to form the nature of the English language in Bangladesh.

The study is also concerned with the nature of the English language education in reference to the language programmes as set out in syllabus outlines, sets of objectives, teaching materials, textbooks and various other planning documents. The study attempts to analyse the pedagogic difficulties in implementing the school-based material to develop an effective material and to produce a set of guidelines for its successful implementation.

3. Outline of the Study

The present study is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter one (Introduction) introduces the problem under investigation. It presents the preliminary discussion about the place, role, need and ELT situation in Bangladesh. It also presents its objective, significance and an outline of the study.
Chapter two (English Education in Bangladesh: Historical Overview) presents the status of English language in Bangladesh through history. It also includes the constitutional and Governmental policy regarding English language in Bangladesh.

Chapter three (Existing Curriculum and Syllabus at the Secondary Level in Bangladesh) proposes to assess the place of English in the National Curriculum of Bangladesh. It also discusses and analyses the existing curricula and syllabi at the secondary level in Bangladesh.

Chapter four (Analysis of Learners' Needs at the Secondary Level in Bangladesh) investigates the issues relating teachers' and learners' attitude towards English language and their needs, the extent of the use of English and the utility of the prescribed texts at the secondary level in Bangladesh. It also deals with the reporting, tabulating, finding of the analysis, and discussion of the results.

Chapter five (Evaluation of ELT Materials vis-à-vis Learners' Needs at the Secondary Level in Bangladesh) presents the types, aims and objectives, and some criteria for evaluating the prescribed ELT materials vis-à-vis learners' needs at the secondary level in Bangladesh.

Chapter six (Summary, Conclusion and Implications) which is the final chapter of this study, presents the conclusion obtained from the 'findings' of this study. It also gives the 'summary' of the results of the study and some 'pedagogical implications' and 'suggestions for further research'.

4. Methodology

The instruments used in this study were the questionnaires for evaluating the English language teaching materials vis-à-vis learners' needs at the secondary level in Bangladesh. Two sets of questionnaire had been used in the study to investigate the perception of teachers and students. Teachers' questionnaire will be denoted by (TQ) and students' questionnaire will be
denoted by (SQ) for the purpose of analysis. The students' questionnaire consisted of 39 items and the teachers' questionnaire consisted of 50 items.

In total 450 students and 225 teachers selected at random from government and semi-government schools, madrasas and English medium schools (across the country) were interviewed with the help of two questionnaires - one, Students' Questionnaire (SQ) and the other Teachers' Questionnaire (TQ) - in the academic year 2003. These questionnaires were developed on the basis of the ones designed by Zughoul and Hussein (1985) by the Curriculum Development Cell, IIT Kanpur (NEST Folder-2) and by Khan (1999). Both the questionnaires were intended to study:

i) The extent of the use of English as viewed by students and teachers at the secondary level in Bangladesh.

ii) Perception of students' language ability as perceived by students themselves and teachers.

iii) Language needs as prescribed by students and teachers.

iv) Utility of prescribed texts as viewed by students and teachers at the secondary level in Bangladesh.

Many teachers, students, and guardians have been interviewed in the study to have a closer look into the classroom teaching and learning. The statistical representation of the data collected from the two questionnaires were done both manually as well as through Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS), version 10 software (the computer based statistical package). In order to analyse the data collected through the questionnaires the percentile rank and descriptive statistical procedures were used.
5. Findings of the Study

Such an attempt to investigate the needs for the English Language Teaching (ELT) at the secondary level in Bangladesh discloses a situation, which is more or less common for all the levels of education in Bangladesh. Though English is being used as the medium of instruction by the English medium schools, engineering colleges and medical colleges, only a small percentage of students are proficient enough in the English language. Both teachers and learners have been found the lower proficiency in Productive skills (speaking and writing) in comparison to Receptive skills (listening and reading). An attempt in finding out the reason for such a phenomenon demands a proper investigation into the process of curriculum planning. In other words, the present study, furnishes the ground reality by investigating the actual use and needs of language as viewed by students and teachers. The major findings of the analysis of learners' needs can be briefed in the following manner:

Firstly, English is important in the life of Bangladesh due to the increased occupational mobility and advancement in science and technology. Today English has attained the status of global language and consequently a majority of people have realised the international advantages of learning English. Even the respondents - the teachers and learners at secondary level in Bangladesh - have realised the significance of English and were of the view that though Bengali is officially the medium of instruction, yet English is often used in and outside the classroom for various academic purposes. In addition, they also reflected the emergent need of being proficient in the English language for everyday and professional requirements in the present day Bangladesh.

Secondly, regarding the language skills, the respondents indicated that 'speaking' is the most needed skill for success at the secondary level, followed by 'writing', 'reading' and 'listening comprehension'. This set of priority as
determined by both learners and teachers, on the whole, shows at least two aspects:

(i) Since 'speaking' has got top priority, it means they need English for some communicative purpose.

(ii) Such a prioritization of language skills provide a base for the selection and gradation of materials for ELT programmes at the secondary level in Bangladesh. 'Speaking', 'Reading' and 'Listening comprehension' for instance, largely remain neglected and hence there is a lack of effectiveness in the existing language programmes and also on learners' output. These language programmes, despite some of their very effective exercises remain ineffective as they fail to make students proficient enough in these skills.

Thirdly, the teachers' and learners' responses, regarding their priority/importance of the language sub-skills, reflect their requirement of the above sub-skills confined mainly to the classroom situation. For 'listening comprehension' for example, they prefer "ability to follow and understand class lectures "; regarding reading and writing skills, they refer to "reading textbooks" and "writing test answers". respectively; and for speaking sub-skill, they say "ability to speaking intelligibly/clearly".

Fourthly, the above findings might give an impression that in the present study, the responses about language is broken into skills and sub-skills. Actually it was required in this manner, so that the learners to the English language and their needs could be deciphered minutely, premised on which a better and more effective material is produced in order to make the language programmes successful.
Fifthly, since at secondary level, it is a general course in English (i.e., not ESP) the language skills and their sub-skills should be given equal importance. Regarding the prescribed materials:

i) the respondents reflect a need for improvement.

ii) they expect a consistent exposure to the language through authentic materials of their own interest.

iii) they expect the language class to be more interesting and motivating from both materials as well as teaching point of view.

iv) they expect an equal share to each language skill. They found the present material growing more space to writing and reading skills, in comparison to speaking and listening skills.

The above data collected from Government and Semi-government schools, Madrasas and the English Medium schools it is possible to develop appropriate language teaching programmes in order to bridge the gap between the curricular aims and the socio-linguistic needs around it.

6. Conclusion

It is observed that Bengali dominates the everyday language use in Bangladesh, but for maintaining the balance with the rest of the world English plays the central role. That is, the expansion of the English language was not wholly a forced phenomenon. Rather it was the need of the hour for which the Missionaries, the natives and the government worked together to meet the need. In the post-colonial phase, Bangladesh policies and planning not only continued but also extended the use of English in every walk of life.

It is observed that the teaching of English starts at the very beginning of students' career. English is taught out of the pressing need of the time, as a lack of its education led the common mass to intellectual barrenness and poverty. Considering the deterioration in the quality of education at the secondary level.
the National Curriculum initiated the process of liberal education in the shape of secondary level where English language and literature enjoys a central position.

The modified version of 'English For Today' (a series of the prescribed textbook for class VI to X) can be used effectively:

i) if an appropriate teaching methodology is applied;
ii) if teachers are trained properly;
iii) if most of the grammar books used by school teachers, though approved by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), are suitably designed for communicative language teaching;
iv) if the madrasa education board adopts a communicative syllabus;

Though in the present study an attempt has been made to study and analyze the instructional materials vis-à-vis learners' needs at the secondary level in Bangladesh, yet more researches are required in this area at different levels, such as primary, higher secondary and university levels. This does not mean that no further research is required at the secondary level. One can always think of investigating aspects related to "the implementation of a new syllabus/curriculum", or "Factors for an effective use of Materials", or "need for Teachers' training for effective use of materials", or 'Adaptation of Materials by teachers, or the appropriate criteria for selection and gradation of materials in Teaching Methods/techniques/strategies/approaches. So areas for further research is very varied and virgin too so far as ELT in Bangladesh is concerned.

On the other hand the context for English considered in this study was ESL (English as a second language). Further research may involve foreign languages such as German, French, Arabic, etc., also. Since students' English language achievement in this study was their total grade in English including all the four language skills, more research is needed to explore the role of 'evaluation' in
separate language skills. For example, to investigate the role of evaluation in speaking skill.

Another interesting research area can relate to the use of English in teaching other subjects, such as medicine, chemistry, physics, Engineering, etc. Researches in these areas are urgently required to furnish support to National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) in order to come up with better and more effective materials.

From the above-mentioned topics it is suggested that in order to meet the English language teaching material needs of the country and to fulfil the societal and national expectations, a language policy of acute rationale is required, which will direct towards a thorough needs analysis, and materials design as well as syllabus incorporating findings of investigations and contemporary development in the field of ELT.

In order to cater to these needs, production of an teaching material is a must. Again, these materials should be used as these are intended to be used. That is, the material should carry an inbuilt methodology and technique for an effective use. For this to happen, the teachers should be trained properly. Teachers and other groups should remember that the students need English to use it in real communication. Besides these, the teaching methodology and the evaluation and examination format must be framed accordingly. Finally, at each level of development, appropriate measurement should be taken on how far it is being effective. That is, Evaluation of ELT Materials vis-à-vis Learners' Needs should be an integral and consistent part of each and every level of teaching/learning situation.