

Primary English Teachers' Understanding and Practice of Existing Curriculum of English Education in Bangladesh: An Exploratory Study



Language Acquisition

Keywords: understanding, curriculum, implement, CLT, practice, materials.

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Abstract

The study aims at exploring the English teachers' understanding and use of curricular recommendations at primary schools in Bangladesh. Recently, to implement the language teaching policy of communicative approach in English teaching at the primary level, Government of Bangladesh has worked seriously. But with students having little opportunity to use English in their classroom environment and without a sufficient number of qualified English teachers, it is less possible for the students to acquire English language skills as well as to fulfill the purpose of the newest curriculum of NCTB of Bangladesh. Previous researchers have shown that the most of the students of the primary schools are weak in English due to the insufficiency of skilled and trained teachers who are well-known to the latest methodology and approaches of teaching as well as the lack of sufficient materials for teaching in the classroom. The study will also reveal the present condition of English teaching at primary level and investigate the major issues and barriers of teaching as well as reason of not implementing the purpose of latest curriculum by the English teachers' at the primary level in Bangladesh.

Introduction

In the context of Bangladesh, to become an educated nation the significance of primary education is indescribable. To build up a skilled nation primary education is the preparatory procedure. It is considered as the basement limestone from where the coming generation initiates its start of education. The policy of English Language Teaching in Bangladesh is well documented. But the most discussed issue in Bangladesh is that how the young learners can improve their proficiency in the slandered level. In the primary level, the syllabus of Bangladeshi English Language Teaching aims to furnish students with basic skills that can facilitate them to communicate orally not only in the classroom but also outside. Kabir (2015:70) stated that "According to the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education, by the end of the primary education: i) all the students would be able to listen to and understand simple spoken English; ii) ask and answer questions, speak and express themselves clearly to others using simple language and in acceptable level of English; iii) acquire good reading habits to comprehend the simple text; iv) write legibly and express ideas in simple language and in an acceptable level of grammar". He also found "the main objectives of learning English in primary level according to the statements of NCTB curriculum are: a) To understand simple commands/ instructions/ requests and carry them out. b).To use English to talk about day to day life and fulfill communicative functions. c) To read and understands different types of texts appropriate to the learners' level. d) To writes in English, to describe persons, objects, places and events and to express needs and feelings" Kabir (2015:70) Sultana, D. (2010), stated that "But yet confusion about the curriculum objectives and teaching methodology is adversely affecting the quality of teaching and learning English at the primary level in Bangladesh. The majority of our teachers cannot teach the existing communicative textbooks properly in accordance with CLT approach, because they do not have adequate

proficiency in English and the pedagogical skills needed for CLT approach. It is therefore essential to analyze the present status of teaching English at the primary level in Bangladesh and to identify the major issues and challenges, to find out a way for effective English language teaching and learning at the primary level in Bangladesh”. Sultana, D. (2010: 102).

According to the Bangladeshi primary school curriculum Learning English should make sure that students would obtain linguistic proficiency and skills through learner centered as well as activity-oriented teaching-learning policy. Ensuring these kinds of establishing of Basic English language skills in the primary classrooms is the prime target of the curriculum. Conducting students’ lesson to facilitate the advancement of their basic skills is very important for the teachers. But in the English Language Teaching at the primary level in Bangladesh, a little attention has been given by the teachers according to the curriculum of NCTB.

Research Questions

- (i) What do primary English teachers’ understanding about the curricular recommendations?
- (ii) How the primary English teachers use the curricular recommendations?

Literature Review

English is the worldwide language in the present global village. It is the speedy horse, which is running continuously towards and occupying its place in this global village. Bangladesh is also an inhabitant of this village. Therefore, English is now a vital chapter in Bangladeshi people’s life, covering from daily life to the education and profession.

English teaching in primary school has had many ups to downs. “The purpose of studying English in the British period was to create a servant class. Those so-called servants were taught only the reading and writing skills in English. However, step by step a change has been emerged in the purpose as well as the methodology of teaching and learning. To enable our students to practice English in real life, the Communicative Approach or the CLT has been introduced in the classroom. But, our English teachers did not receive this innovation warmly” Biswash, S. (2018).

Researchers have found that the teachers are following the traditional methods of conducting the class in Bangladesh. Salauddin Khan and Rahman (2013) have conducted a study and wanted to know how the teachers conduct their English classes with roll calling, proceed with checking home works, continue with the GTM based lesson and ends with the home works. According to the teachers, they do not use any other teaching technique to teach their students (p. 46). They had said that the NCTB book is the one and only source to teach English in most of the cases.

To find out teacher efficiency and using curriculum in the classroom Sultana, S. & Ashrafuzzaman, M. (2016:212) found that “While English is studied in Bangladesh in a full swing from primary to tertiary level, its output is very poor (Haque, 2014). Harun and Al- Amin (2013) argue that “In Bangladesh English language teaching practice has got momentum over the years”. Unfortunately teachers use traditional methods and they do not use any supplementary teaching aids in the classroom. But many studies reveal that students like group activities in classes with teaching materials (Sadek, Ahmed, & Begum, 2006; Yasmin, 2007; Yasmin, 2009; Ashrafuzzaman, Babu & Begum, 2010). As many rural schools don’t get sufficient and effective learning materials, these can be produced from local materials (Islam, 2010)”.

Kabir, H. (2016:75) found that “Most of the teachers do not have proper knowledge about English curriculum and it certainly hampers their teaching, indeed. Most of the teachers said that they did not take any subject related training on recent curriculum. As they do not have idea about it, how will they conduct classes in line with the curriculum and how can they fulfill the objectives of it? It is frustrating that students cannot speak much. Because of large class size, teachers cannot find out everyone’s problem. There is lacking of teaching materials. For proper implementation of curriculum teachers need audio-video materials”.

Sultana, S. and Ashrafuzzaman, M.(2016:212) as cited Monzoor and Kabir (2008) argue, “Primary education is the foundation on which the nation's edifice of education has to be built in and the ground laid for the individual's pursuit of further learning and fulfillment of life’s potentials”. In Bangladesh, article 17 of the constitution specifies that primary education will be the obligation of the state. At primary level there is a competency based curriculum. Though the status of English is a foreign language in Bangladesh, curriculum defines it as a compulsory subject at this level. The required qualification for primary teachers is Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) (National Education Policy, 2010). So, teachers’ quality, their education and training is fundamental for quality education (Ehsan, Biswas & Ashrafuzzaman, 2012; Hargreaves and Fullan 1992).

In general, most of the teachers do not facilitate the practice of four language skills in classroom according to the curriculum. In English classrooms, majority of the teachers use traditional lecturing methods and techniques. There is hardly any student activity, although the new textbooks provide scopes for group and pair works (Yasmin, 2009).

Methodology

The methodology of this research includes the sample of the study, instruments, data collection procedure, technique of data analysis. For the sample of the study we will try to collect data from minimum five top ranking primary schools of every district of Bangladesh. To collect the data, we will use three instruments; both teachers’ and students’ questioners, interview and class observation. Mixed method will be followed to collect genuine data and mixed method

includes qualitative and quantitative method. Data about the educational qualifications and the necessary information of the teaching process of the selected English teachers are presented in tables with analysis and interpretation. The ‘yes-no’ type questions relating to teaching activities are analyzed in a table and the rest of the short answers type’s questions are analyzed in some separate tables.

Preliminary Data

According to Sultana (2018), language plays a vital role in the management of power and balancing or maintaining the relationship at the interpersonal, social or local and the global level at the same time. English becomes a lingua franca by the end of twentieth century and was widely used for international communication among the people who do not speak this language and have English as a second or third language. According to the report of Curriculum Committee-1962, in 1947 when the two nation states India and Pakistan created their own separate existence in the map of the world, the question of language raised with a strong voice. When India opted for Hindi then being a Muslim prioritized country Pakistan preferred Urdu as mother tongue.

On 21st February in 1952, a strong protest was made from the East Pakistan to establish Bangla as the state language. On that day, after the tragic shooting death, both Bengali and Urdu took place as the state languages of Pakistan. Then neither Bangla nor Urdu but English became the only common way to communicate between East and West Pakistan. Thus circumstances opened the way for English to establish its status in Pakistan period as the second language.

After that at secondary schools in Pakistan it was introduced as a functional language. The educated or even fairly educated people were instructed to use English for administrative purpose, professional issues, educational and other purposes. However, when Bangladesh became independent after the war of liberation in 1971, the official status of the English language replaced by Bangla and Bangladesh became a monolingual country. Bangla owned the position of using in every sphere of social and public affair. But in recent days English has regained an important unofficial status in Bangladesh (Salahuddin, 2013). Nowadays along with the use of Bangla in many government, semi government and private organizations English is being used for almost every purpose (Ainy, 2001). Considering the importance of English, government of Bangladesh combined the existed English teaching processes with the ‘Communicative Approach’ since 1970s. Government wanted to ensure English learning for all strata of people in the country. But, after long four decades of launching the Communicative approach, the linguists, teachers, students and educational researchers are in big confusion about the actual outcome of the approach particularly from rural learners (Kabir, 2014).

In 1998, the new English language curriculum was established as a part of the project named (ELTIP) *English Language Teaching Improvement Project*. The project in collaboration with the *Department of International Development (DID)* aimed at to bring changes in textbook,

examination format and in-service teacher training program. It also had a focus to relocate teaching-learning process of English language from a traditional structure-based approach to a function-based or communicative approach. Though textbooks have been published according to the new approach but the question about following those books and new curricula remains unexplained.

Statements of Limitations

This study addresses quite extensively the research problem of how the primary English teachers' understanding and practice of the present curriculum of teaching English issue can be successfully implemented by the proper way. However it does not ignore the limitations to reach to all schools' in Bangladesh. The researcher will conduct the research targeting two (Mninkganj and Jhalakati) districts' all the primary English teachers.

Importance of the Study

According to Ashrafuzzaman, Babu & Begum, 2010 found that most of the rural primary school s' English teachers are weak in English; they haven't got proper training to teach English through the present technology. They suggested that if the primary level English teachers got enough training to use computer as well as multimedia projector in ELT classroom then their lecture would be strengthen.

Kabir, H. (2016:75) found the lack of proper training of the primary school teachers' about the purpose of curriculum as well as how to accomplish the objective of the curriculum. He had also found that according to the English book they need audio-visual materials but it is unavailable in the most of the schools Sultana, S. and Ashrafuzzaman, M. (2016: 212) as cited Monzoor and Kabir (2008) complaint that the teachers are to qualified to teach and understand the curriculum because according to the recruitment rules primary teachers' educational qualification is HSC passed. Biswash, S. (2018) found that though a great change has been emerged in the methodology of teaching and learning in English language to enable our students to practice English in real life, the Communicative Approach or the CLT has been introduced but unfortunately our primary level's English teachers did not accept it positively. So, here it can be found the Mr. Biswash also emphasize on lack of training of the teacher of the present curriculum. Salauddin Khan and Rahman (2013) found that the teachers conduct their class with GTM based lessons that start with roll calling, checking homework and finally ends with giving homework for next day. Main thing is that they just follow only textbook and enforce the student to memorize it.

A group of researchers (Sadek, Ahmed, & Begum, 2006; Yasmin, 2007; Yasmin, 2009; Ashrafuzzaman, Babu & Begum, 2010) found that most of the students like group activities in classes with teaching materials but unfortunately our teachers do not use any supplementary teaching aids.

After the analysis of above researchers' found, firstly the teachers are not qualified as well as very weak in the 4 skills of English language as their highest background is HSC. Secondly, they are not well trained about the present curriculum of 2010. Thirdly, they follow the traditional GTM to conduct the class by neglecting CLT. Finally they haven't enough technological knowledge to use audio-visual aids as well as schools do provide the materials.

Here it can be seen that, most of the researchers made their research within 2006 to 2013 except Kabir, H (2016) and Biwash, S (2018) as well as almost all researches worked on teaching learning problems and challenges for the teachers but very few researchers has been emphasized on the teachers' understanding of the curriculum of the present English teaching. Latest Primary English book with new curriculum published in 2010 as well as in 2019 huge teachers has been recruited along with BCS non cadre qualified head teacher. So the present scenario of teachers' understanding and practice of the Curriculum of English is not clear. On the other hand a great change has come in the teaching-learning because of Covid-19 phenomena. Now the teachers are very much practiced in using technological devices like computer, smart phone and multimedia projector.

The target of my study is to find out

1. The post Covid-19 situation of English teaching learning in the primary schools of Bangladesh.
2. The capability and role of newly appointed and trained teachers to implement Communicative Language Teaching method (CLT).
3. The challenges of understanding and practice of the existing curriculum of English education Bangladesh.

Conclusion

The current approach of English language teaching at the primary level in Bangladesh prescribed in the curriculum is the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). "CLT requires interactive classroom activities with the integration of four language skills reading, writing, listening and speaking" (Sarwar, 2007, p.1). But in reality, English teachers at the primary level in Bangladesh face various types of constraints in increasing the interaction and integration of the four skills in English language teaching classrooms. "Therefore, the English teachers should be dynamically equipped with professional sensibility and in depth teaching knowledge to take swift, realistic and novel steps to" (Sarwar, 2007, p.3) ensure effective English language teaching and learning at the primary level in Bangladesh. Moreover, to equip the English teachers in such a way special projects for English teachers' development should be taken by the Government and non-government organizations.

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