

English language education practices and society

by **ABM Razaul Karim Faquire**

THE English language education system in Bangladesh has been created based on the National Education Policy 2010, implemented by authorities such as the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education and the University Grant Commission. It as a system which covers a compulsory education of general English with an emphasis on the communicative English up to the pre-tertiary phase of education as well as the optional education of academic subjects in English medium in all phases of education. It, as a system, is not based on any kind of language policy rather than on some arguments the instances of which can be found in the writings of advocates of the ELE in Bangladesh. Such advocates actually echo the suggestion of English language educationalists who have been working to vernacularise English in the plurilingual countries, eg, India, Kenya and Nigeria. They provide the following arguments: (i) English is a colonial inheritance, (ii) English is an international language, (iii) English is a means for the access to global knowledge, and (iv) English is a means for the access to global job market in favour of the compulsory provision for the ELE.

On the basis of these arguments, ELE policy-makers of Bangladesh made the English language a compulsory subject in the education system of Bangladesh with the two basic principles: (i) English for all, and (ii) Earlier is better.

The ELE system follows a principle of giving an extraordinary burden of the ELE in earlier phases of education and

exemption from the requisite level of the ELE to undertake study in higher phases of education. It also gives an exemption from the linguistic competency to be necessitated by the teachers at the entry to teaching jobs in each phase of education. In fact, the prevalent ELE practice has brought forth a number of adverse consequences which are causing damage to the country's language and culture.

Loss of various domains of Bangla language: The prevalent ELE system has created a situation of language contact conducive to the borrowing and calquing of linguistic elements from English into Bangla. Many of the borrowings from English are replacing words and expressions, such as congratulations in Bangla. Because of the unusual borrowing and calquing, languages of academic domains in Bangla have been falling into disuse, the process which has been causing the disuse of the domain specific languages in Bangla. This process of disuse of domain specific languages has continued to create deficiency in Bangla, which, in effect, has been causing the loss of capacity of Bangla in containing the growing disciplines of knowledge.

Change in linguistic landscape: The consequences of the ELE system have manifested itself in the linguistic landscapes of Bangladesh. Accordingly, a change in the visual landscape can be noticed on the signboards/hoardings in the cities and labels of commodities all over the country. There are some centres in every city, where hardly a Bangla hoarding can be seen. The English-medium institutions and organisations also present a visual landscape of languages that they can hardly be recognised as it to be a part of

Bangladesh. The change in the acoustic linguistic landscape can also be noticed in the localities. The code-mixing of Bangla and English as well as the code switching from Bangla to English have been a common phenomenon in the premises of different social and educational institutions, and corporate offices. They can be noticed in the speech and music broadcast through television and radio. Hence, the ELE has continued to shape the national culture and create English subculture in the major cities, and causing the loss of empathy to the indigenous culture.

Shifting of Bangla-medium institutions into English-medium corporate organisations: The consequences of the prevalent ELE has manifested in such a way that the government and private institutions, and the corporate organisations have continued to turn into English-medium organisations for which the main cities of Bangladesh have appeared to be the cities of the English-speaking countries.

Reproduction of English subculture: The ELE has been shaping the thinking process of the English-educated who have been contributing to the creation of an English subculture within the Bengali culture, which is different from its parent Bengali culture, by importing culture of the Anglophone countries. The reproduction of this home-grown English subculture has been steadily occurring with the participation of English-educated people coming out from the English-medium schools and universities. Hence it has now been evident that the ELE practice has appeared as a means to reproduce the extraneous English subculture with the own resources.

Submission to the English linguistic

empire: The ELE carried over from the British colonial education system has been contributing to the withstanding of a condition for the submission of Bangladesh to the English linguistic empire. Though English was once merely a language of the United Kingdom, it has now been the language of dominant countries, eg, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, which are actually colonies of invading Europeans occupied in the last centuries. This is how the Anglophone countries have achieved pre-eminence over other major powers of the world since the era of colonial expansion.

Creation of social disparity: The ELE has been the symbol of power, prestige and economic affluence. It has been a means of social mobility in that it serves as means for jumping to the higher socio-economic strata from the lower socio-economic strata. It has brought disadvantage for the poor social class, because of their socio-economic disposition. Therefore, the ELE policy has been contributing to shaping society which can be characterised with economic disparity.

Thus Bangladesh, consequently, has got a faulty ELE system which has continued to yield undesirable consequences in the society and culture of Bangladesh that call for a reformation of the prevalent ELE system in Bangladesh. Therefore, a new ELE system is required to be formulated based on a rigorous language planning grounded on the language policy underpinned with a consolidated linguistic ideology.

ABM Razaul Karim Faquire is a professor at the Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka.