

State Of English Teaching In Bangladesh

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LIKE many developing countries Bangladesh has an English, as a foreign language, teaching policy as spelled out in the National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee report. In the policy specific needs for learning English have been identified in the following areas:

Higher/Professional studies, international communication, some jobs in and outside the country, and cultural development.

To meet these needs the policy has also clearly specified broad objectives of teaching English, which are mainly four basic language skills.

In pursuance of the above policy our curriculum prescribes teaching English for ten years (from class 3 to class 12) as a required subject. Accordingly, English text-books for upto class 10 have been written and introduced. Also teachers are being trained in Teaching English are a Foreign Language (TEFL) at the Primary Training Institutes (PTIs), Teachers' training Colleges (TTCs), Institute of Education and Research (IER), Dhaka University, and National Institute of Education Administration, Extension and Research (NIEARE). Moreover, orientation courses on methodologies and new textbooks are often held at National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB).

But in spite of all these attempts and efforts made so far, the present state of English teaching is in the doldrums. The progress made so far in the TEFL programmes is undoubtedly unsatisfactory and even disappointing.

This state of English teaching is due mainly to some inconsistencies prevailing between what we have done or planned in theory and what we have been doing in practices in teaching this subject. It's time we looked back and tried to see where the rub is and took measure to improve English teaching in Bangladesh. These inconsistencies are overtly noticed in the following areas of our education system:

Teacher Training. Theory: Ten-month training courses in TEFL together with other subjects are offered to primary teachers at the 54 PTIs and to secondary teachers at the 10 TTCs and the IER. Short training courses in TEFL are occasionally organised at NIEARE for secondary and higher secondary teachers.

Teachers at the primary and secondary levels are now eager to get training (10-month certificate courses) mainly because the trained teachers at these levels are provided

with greater service benefits in terms of salary and promotion.

PRACTICE: The formal training institutions mentioned above are insufficient to train the vast number of our teachers especially at the secondary and higher secondary levels. As a result, the majority of our teachers untrained or inadequately trained cannot be expected to handle the language textbooks effectively. Even those who have got training relapse into teaching according to the traditional grammar-translation method mainly because of three factors:

1. The majority of the untrained colleagues who have been following the traditional methods for years would not like their newly trained counterparts who are in the minority to follow new methods and techniques in the same class for fear of being less knowledgeable, less qualified in the eyes of their students.

2. The modern language teaching methods and techniques, unlike the easygoing traditional methods, demand harder work from the teacher in the form of preparing lessons, conducting groupwork, drills, etc.

3. Once a teacher gets his training certificate he is no longer officially accountable to anybody, any authority for choosing any method, traditional or modern, while teaching his class. As a result, the language based textbooks are being grossly mishandled in classrooms, which causes unnecessary difficulties in the Process of learning and generates an aversion in the Learners' minds to learning English.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A pilot scheme for training all the teachers at all the three levels—primary, secondary and higher secondary—should be undertaken with the specific objectives:—

a. To enable the teachers to use modern language teaching methods and techniques while handling the new textbooks for effective teaching in their respective classroom situations and.

b. To improve the teachers' own proficiency in English. It is a fact that what has been wrongly learnt from an untrained, inefficient teacher becomes very difficult for the learners to unlearn.

Under this pilot scheme each course should be of at least 6 week's duration. The courses should be organised by NCTB in collaboration with the Directorates of primary, secondary and higher education, PTIs,

TTCs, IER, NAPE, NIEAER and UNICEF. The leader trainers' course should be held in Dhaka and the subsequent courses should be held all over the country.

2. The contents of the 10-month as well as short training courses at the PTIs, TTCs, IER, NIEAER and NAPE should be revised, updated so as to enable the teachers to use TEFL methodologies and techniques in their respective classroom situations more effectively. Provision for separate courses for per-service and in-service training of teachers at all levels should be made.

3. Orientation and refresher courses on different curricular aspects like curriculum changes, syllabuses, text material, testing and evaluation should be organised regularly by NCTB.

Teacher Guides

THEORY: A teacher guide with practical guidelines on teaching methods to be used while teaching a particular section or lesson of a book, with actual planning done on each lesson and with additional information needed for making a lesson interesting and effective in class is of good use to the classroom teachers—and more so to those who could not have yet received any formal training in TEFL. The guide will also be useful as training material at such institutions as the PTIs, IER, NAPE, NIEAER and NCTB. Considering these manifold uses of teacher guides, the curriculum provides that they be prepared for all the textbooks (for classes 3-12).

PRACTICE: No teacher guides were prepared for the secondary classes. Only one guide was prepared for the primary textbooks (for classes 3, 4, and 5) by NCTB with UNICEF assistance. Copies of the book were supposed to be distributed free of cost to all the primary schools. But no evaluation was made on whether the book was used by the teachers and how it was used. Moreover the book has gone out of print after its first edition. However, again three teacher guides to the three primary textbooks have been prepared by NCTB with UNICEF assistance. They were expected to be used from the 1988 session.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Teacher guides to all the textbooks for the secondary and higher secondary classes should be prepared by NCTB and given free of cost to each school/

college for use by the English teachers. The respective school/college authorities will make sure that they have each received sufficient numbers of copies of these guides and that these books are being used by the teachers.

Notebooks

THEORY: Considering that notebooks particularly those for the lower classes are harmful to the learning of English the government has banned the publication of those upto class 8. However, notebooks for classes 9 & 10 and 11 & 12 are allowed, which are published by the private publishing houses. There are clear government orders that publishers must not force students to buy any notebooks and that any publisher bookseller doing so will be prosecuted.

Practice: What is actually being done about this notebook business is really shocking to many teachers, guardians and educationists. Notebooks for classes 3-8 which are officially banned are produced underground and sold almost freely to the students/guardians in the rural areas. Also it is found especially in the rural areas that textbooks, even the banned ones.

Bazar notebooks produced by the commercially motivated publishers, which are full of printing errors and many other types of language weaknesses, aim only to provide students with shortcuts to examinations, focusing mainly on translation work and answers to questions. As a result, they turn the language learning exercises incorporated in the textbooks useless in class. Hence these books are perhaps the most harmful hindrances to the learning of English in Bangladesh.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Ban on producing notebooks for upto class 10 should be imposed and strictly followed. The law enforcing authority in cooperation with students, guardians and the educated society must make sure that these notebooks are not published and sold.

However, notebooks for classes 11 and 12, written by the experienced teachers trained in TEFL, and approved by NCTB may be allowed. A notebook thus prepared will be like an extension of the language exercises provided in a textbook. It will also provide additional information, explanations of grammar points, difficult words, etc. needed for understanding of the text. (To Be Continued)