

ISSN 2072-3334

Development Compilation

Volume 09. Number 01. July 2013

PROBLEMS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING AT ALIM LEVEL IN THE MADRASHAS OF BANGLADESH

Md. Anisur Rahman^{*}
Md. Abdul Kafi^{**}

Abstract : The study explored the problems encountered by the Alim students (higher secondary), sketch a picture of teacher-student interaction and their linguistic behavior in the class, and evaluate the level of performance of students in the four basic skills of English language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The study suggests certain remedial measures to overcome the problems or hindrances lying in the process of teaching-learning activities. The investigation goes around some domains directly related to applied linguistics and ELT: textbook materials, syllabuses and curriculums, teaching methods and approaches, status of teachers, teaching aids and equipment, perception of needs of English, preference of learning strategies, testing and assessment, etc. The study reveals that the major problems in English language teaching and learning at the Alim level lie with the textbook materials, syllabus, uninteresting lessons, method of teaching, avoidance of practicing listening and speaking, poor quality of teachers, lack of physical facilities of the classroom, very poor quality teaching aids and equipment, etc.

Introduction

Language is one of the most wonderful gifts given by God to humanity. It is with the help of language that a human can be able to communicate, solve a number of his/her problems and make a lot of achievements in life.¹ If there had been no language, it would have been difficult for humankind to communicate his/her views to fellow human beings, there would have come no educational activity into existence, there would have been no law making, no preaching, no lecturing and nothing like talking, singing, writing, and there would have been no books.² This is why, it is very essential for every human

to learn and use a language. Language enables people to express their feelings, ideas, wishes, and so on. It is a tool through which the worldly knowledge is acquired and preserved.³ A particular language is one of the indicators of the cultural identity of a linguistic community as well as individual personality. However, it is not easy to learn a language. Every language is a complex phenomenon, and one has to devote a number of years to learning a language.⁴ In this study some learners are able to learn more than one language if they make efforts. Language is a primarily human and non-human inborn method of communicating ideas, emotion and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.⁵ Language is a set of human habits, the purpose of which is to give expressions to thoughts and feelings.⁶ Language is the medium through which, the child acquires the cultural, moral, religious and other values of society.⁷ Further, every language plays a crucial role in maintaining social relationship between and among the people of the same linguistic community and of the various cultures, customs and beliefs.⁸ The world does not speak Bangla and nor will they ever speak Bangla. Majority of the countries in the world speak English, and only English is used in business transaction, diplomatic talks, and settling other international issues.⁹ All foreign private companies come to Bangladesh and they offer job opportunities for poor earned Bangladeshis. If these regular Bangladeshis spoke English imagine how quickly they will develop. Bangla should stay as the cultural language and English should be promoted throughout which will attract foreign investments and allow Bangladeshis to self teach them.¹⁰ Most Bangladeshis wouldn't see the importance of English, but if they lived abroad then they will understand the tremendous benefits for Bangladesh.

Statement of the Problem

It is bitter to notice that even though various efforts have been made by the government and educationists for the improvement of the English language teaching and learning condition in the madrasahs during the last few decades in Bangladesh, a sorry state of affair still exists in the achievement of English linguistic competence of Alim students. It is really important to identify the problems that the students encounter in the process of learning English. It is also necessary to evaluate their level of performance in English. In the age of communicative approach, madrasah English teachers follow the Grammar Translation Method in teaching English. The teachers do not explain the text in English, the target language; rather, they prefer to stay in Bengali, the mother tongue. They show reluctance in practicing English language skills. Though the text book (English For Today, For Classes 11-12) is written with communicative thought and ideas, and the syllabus is designed with communicative language teaching contents and items, the language teachers are found unenthusiastic about the guideline of the book. The English teachers hardly speak English in the class. The present

^{*} Research Fellow, Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh.

^{**} Research Fellow, Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh.

researcher finds that majority teachers neither speak English in the class themselves nor encourage their students to speak English with the classmates. It is painfully observed that after long years of learning English, most of the learners cannot speak English with necessary fluency, correctness of grammar, and pronunciation. The present researcher finds that teachers talk more in the class and remain busy while students sit idle as inactive listeners. Problems are also found in the textbook items and contents. Students feel bore in the class and show disinterest in the lesson and the method of teaching. Sometimes, in the English language class students are taught textbook contents rather than practicing English language skills. For all these reasons, a large number of students fail in the English subject in Alim public examination, despite learning English as a foreign language for 12 years. At present, 30% of the total students in Bangladesh have been studying in the madrashas. So, in respect of enrolment, the madrasa education system is the second biggest education provider in Bangladesh. In spite of huge enrolment in the madrashas, no formal research study has been conducted in this field till present time. The disinterest in conducting study causes slow improvement of teaching - learning situation at all levels in the madrashas, particularly at the Alim level. English language research in the madrasa education system is treated as a barren field of study. Language instruction has five important components: students, teachers, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation; therefore, research or investigation should be carried out on the bases of these components, and research questions should be raised from them.

Objectives of the Study

Objectives of the study are:

- 1) To identify the problems encountered by the students in the process of learning English,
- 2) To find out whether the English textbook material is fit and appropriate for the Alim students,
- 3) To investigate the teachers' motivation, teaching method and teaching competence,

Methodology

The present study has followed random sampling while selecting the respondents. In random sampling all populations have same chance to be selected in a study. Two types of samples are used for the present study: students, and teachers. For the present study, 100 Alim students have been randomly selected from 20 madrashas both in urban and rural areas of Bagmara Upazilla under the district of Rajshahi in Bangladesh.

Curriculum of English in Alim Class

The objectives of the English textbooks in the madras has are designed in the world context.¹¹ English For Today, For Classes 11-12 claims that the

textbook is written incommunicative view of learning. The preface to the book English For Today, For Classes 11-12 claims that this new English textbook has been developed for classes 11& 12 by English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) jointly funded by the Government of Bangladesh and DFID of the UK Government, a team of writer strained in the UK under ELTIP has written the book over a period of one and a half years.¹² The whole process of writing, trialing, and evaluation the manuscript was carried out by national and expatriate consultants of ELTIP in cooperation with NCTB. English For Today books from class 6 to onwards – the principle of learning a language be actually practicing it. This practice is carried out through the four language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing, usually in an interactive mode, underlies the communicative approach to language learning.¹³ As the focus is on the communicative functions of language, the main aim of the textbook is to provide ample opportunities for students to use English for a variety of purposes in interesting situations. The book is divided into units. Each unit based on a theme, has several lessons that contain reading texts and a range of tasks and activities designed to enable student to practice the different skills, sometimes individually and sometimes in pairs or groups.¹⁴ Some literary texts have also been included. However, the emphasis in such cases is not just on content but on the exploitation of the texts to trigger a variety of language activities. The emphasis on the communicative approach, however, does not disregard the role of grammar. Instead of treating grammar as a set of rules to be memorized in isolation, the book has integrated grammar items into the lesson activities allowing grammar to assume a more meaningful role in the learning of English.¹⁵ Thus students develop their language skills by practicing language activities and not merely by knowing the rules of the language. As mentioned in the preface to the book, the textbook follows the communicative approach to the teaching and learning of English in Bangladesh context. The book provides learners with a variety of materials such as reading texts, dialogues, pictures, diagrams, tasks and activities.¹⁶ Learners can practice language skills using these materials. They can actively participate in pairs or group or individual work. The book includes a wide range of topics from both national and global contexts. A unit on population education has been appended to the book to raise awareness about the adverse effects of overpopulation on the socio-economic conditions of the country. It is expected that the new textbook will be an effective resource for the learning of English at this level. It is hoped that the topics are appropriate and interesting to the learners thematically, culturally and linguistically. Adequate grammar elements are also integrated with language skills so that learners can transfer the elements in the real life situations. This opposes the memorization of discrete grammar items.

The objectives of the textbook are to;

1. Introduce effective communicative language teaching techniques,
2. Arrange adequate practice in four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing,
3. Integrate grammatical elements with language skills so as to make the grammar genuinely functional and communicative,
4. Adapt the existing topics so as to make them both more interesting and acceptable, create more opportunities for interaction (between teachers and students. And among students themselves),
5. Introduce and integrated æwork book æelement in order to develop writing skills at an appropriate pace, and
6. Suggest a clear teaching methodology within the framework of actual lessons, It is expected that the present textbook will meet the actual needs of the students and the teachers, and eventually, it will accelerate effective communicative teaching and learning of English language at the Alim level in the madrasahs in Bangladesh.

Marks Distribution in the Alim Examination

The six broad items are included in the Alim public examination. The items and the marks allocated for each item are shown at the right hand margin.

a) Seen Comprehension:	25
i) Objective questions:	15
ii) More free questions:	10
b) Unseen comprehension:	25
i) Objective questions:	15
ii) More free questions:	10
c) Vocabulary:	10
iii) Cloze test with clues:	5
iv) Cloze test without clues:	5
c) Grammar:	10
i) Cloze test with clues:	5
ii) Cloze test without clues:	5
d) Writing:	10
i) Guided:	10
ii) More free:	10
e) Population Education (Unit 24):	10
Total marks:	100

Evaluation of Textbook

Language instruction has five important components: students, a teacher, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation. Materials should teach students to learn, they should be resource books for ideas and activities for instruction/learning, and that they should give teachers rationales for what they do.¹⁷ There have identifies three main reasons for using textbook. Firstly, developing classroom materials is an extremely difficult, arduous process for teachers. Secondly, teachers have limited time in which to develop new materials. Thirdly, external pressures restrict many teachers with various dimensions and they cannot prepare class room materials for their own.¹⁸ Textbooks provide the objectives of language learning; they function as a lesson plan and working agenda for teachers and learners. The EFL materials currently taught at Alim class requires a deeper and more exclusive analysis and scrutiny. Hutchinson and Water suggest that contents of English textbooks should be useful, meaningful and interesting for students. Difficulty of materials, as a general rule, should be slightly higher in their level of difficulty than the students' current level of English proficiency. Instructional issues of English textbooks should have clear instructional procedure and methods, that is, the teacher and students should be able to understand what is expected in each lesson and for each activity.

Status of the English Language Teachers

It is taken as granted that teachers are the builders of nations. They are makers of the leaders and the significant figures in the society. They should be competent enough to handle the students' conduct as well as to teach his/her students in the effective way of learning. Educational fitness, good teaching methods and approaches, experience, and training are the preconditions to be a successful language teacher. A much longer list of characteristics valued by learners; examples cited were friendly, gave good notes, played games, told jokes, did not push weak learners and was more like a comedian.¹⁹ The desirable characteristics of the effective language teacher as perceived by foreign language teachers and students in Israel.²⁰ The following five characteristics emerged overall as those felt to be most desirable by the participants in this study:

- Knowledge and command of the target language;
- Ability to organize, explain and clarify, as well as to arouse and sustain interest and motivation among students;
- Fairness to students by showing neither favoritism nor prejudice;
- Availability to students.

Findings of the Study

The present study unveils some lapses and mismatches between the expectations and the existing conditions of English language teaching -

learning at the Alim level. During the study considerable correlations as well as contradictions are observed between the students and the teachers on different issues on teaching – learning. The findings of the study are presented below:

1. The present study finds that the existing syllabus of Alim class is not highly relevant to learning English language. Rather, it is a little relevant. There is a strong correlation between the teachers and the students on evaluation of syllabus.
2. Both groups of the respondents suggest that the lessons and tasks are not very enjoyable
3. The current study reveals that the students are very weak in listening and speaking, because the practice of the two important skills is neglected or avoided by the teachers in the class.
4. Majority of the students and the teachers suggest that the syllabus is examination oriented rather than achieving communicative competence.
5. The students prefer learning individually and in some cases in pairs, and dislike learning in a large group. The teachers are also aware of the students' preferences in learning English.
6. The students blame that their prescribed textbook is a little helpful in learning English language.
7. The highest numbers of students consider the lessons very difficult; while the highest number of teachers contradict with students and comment that the lessons are not at all difficult.
8. The present study finds that both the teachers and the students are with the opinion that their lessons are a little relevant to their day to day activities.
9. The investigation finds that the teachers remain active, busy and talk more in the class, while the students remain in the class as the inactive listeners. This situation directly contradicts the communicative views of teaching and learning.
10. The present study finds that the syllabus is examination oriented, and there adding comprehension and writing skills are tested in the examination, on the other hand the two important skills: listening and speaking are untouched.
11. The students blame their English teachers that they do not encourage them enough to speak English with the classmates, but the teachers strongly contradict with the students and claim that they encourage their student's very much.

12. It is found that the teachers are more or less friendly and sympathetic to their students.
13. The current study reveals that the maximum teachers follow the text book in the class all the time.
14. The study finds that the most of the English teachers do not speak English frequently in the class.
15. Most of the students disclose that their teachers do not give them extra time after class hour, though the teachers claim that they give enough time to their students after class hours.
16. It is found that the teachers use only the black board as the teaching aids and equipment in the class. Modern technologies such as; overhead projector, slides, video and audio tape recorders, computers, multimedia are totally absent in the class activities.
17. The present study reveals that the students mind if they are corrected by other students in the class. Students feel humiliated to be corrected by their class mate or by someone similar to their position.
18. Most of the students do not mind if they are asked to correct their works by themselves.

Conclusion

The present study entitled "Problems of English Language Teaching and learning at Alim Level in the Madrasahs in Bangladesh" has achieved its objectives. The study has identified some problems that the Alim students usually face while learning English as a foreign language. The study has also discovered the teachers' attitudes, behavior, interaction with the students, teaching techniques, etc. Here, in this study, the present researcher has summed up the whole study in a brief manner and places some recommendations to overcome the situations, enhance the quality of teaching-learning English language at the Alim level in the madrasahs in Bangladesh.

Notes and References

1. Zuhail, Okan, and Erdogan "Students' Language Learning Preferences." *TESL-EJ* 4 .3(2000): 3-28. p. 11.
2. Williams, D. "Developing criteria for textbook evaluation." *ELT Journal* 37.2(2003):251-255. P.26.
3. Užpaliene, Daiva, and Galina, Kavaliauskiene. "Ongoing Needs Analysis as a Factor to Successful Language Learning." *Journal of Language and Learning* 1.1 (2003):35-49.p.41.
4. Sobana, Baroie. "Communicative English in Higher Secondary Student in Tamil." Ph.D Diss. Alagappa University, Karaikudi, 2005. p.21.

5. Rashid, Harunur, K. *Speaking Strategies to Overcome Communication Difficulties in the Target Language Situation -Bangladeshis in New Zealand.* Language in India 5.12 (2005):1-61.p .7.
6. Park, G. *Language learning strategies and English proficiency in Korean university Students.* Foreign Language Annals 30.2 (2003): 211-221.p.244.
7. Januleviciene, V. and Kavaliauskiene, G. *Promoting the Fifth Skill in Teaching ESP.* English for Specific Purposes World Web-Based Journal 1.2 (2002):11-37.
<http://www.esp-world.info>.
8. Hutchinson, T. and Waters, A. *English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.p. 19.
9. Hasan, Kamrul, M. *A Linguistic Study of English Language Curriculum at the Secondary Level in Bangladesh - A Communicative Approach to Curriculum Development.* Language in India, Volume 4.8 (2004): 1-240.p.52.
10. Davies, S. *Content Based Instruction in EFL Contexts.* The Internet TESL Journal vol. IX, No 2, February (2003): 7-11.<http://iteslj.org>.
11. Cunnings worth, A. *Evaluating and selecting EFL teaching materials* London: Heinemann Educational Books, 2001.p.38.
12. Cowles, H. *Textbook, materials evaluation: A comprehensive check sheet.* Foreign Language Annals 9 .4 (1996):300-333.p.320.
13. Collie, J. and Slater, S. *Literature in the language classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
14. Chidabaram, K. *"A Study on the Learning Process of English by Higher Secondary Students with Special Reference to Dharamapuri District."* Language in India 5 (2005):112-270. P. 192.
15. Chandran, A. *"A study of the productive skills with special reference to communicative ability in speaking English of the higher secondary first year students in Coimbatore District."* Ph.D. Diss. Bharathiar University, 1999. P.103.
16. Alderson, J. C. and Urquhart. *Reading in a foreign language* London: Longman, 1984. P.15.
17. Thirumalai, M. *"An Introduction to TESOL: Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages"* Language in India 4 (2002):1-130.p.79.
18. Sysoyev, P. *"Developing and ESP course: A framework for a learner-centered classroom"*. The ESP Newsletter 1(2001): 14-27.p. 17.
19. Rahman, A.M.M.H. *"English Language Teaching: Didactics on the Pragmatics of a Language Teaching Policy"*. Dhaka: ELTIP, 1999.p.13.
20. Jespersen, Otto. *"How to Teach a Foreign Language"*. Allen and Unwin Lt d: London, 2003.p.24.