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THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE TEXT BOOK, FOUR SKILLS IN LANGUAGE AND EXAMINATION FOR LEARNING ENGLISH IN THE CONTEXT OF BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY : A STUDY

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Abstract : A close relationship is always expected in the class room activities, teachers' role, students' role, text and tests in order to develop the four skills in English language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the perspective of Bangladesh Open University, English teaching system should have a great change in order to have the desired goal. These four skills have to be gained to cope with the present demand along with passing or making a good result in the examination. An examination should correspond to the text and the text should correspond to the class room activities. This paper is a humble attempt to examine and investigate the relationship among these three: text book, four language skills and examination system of Bangladesh Open University and to fulfill the lacking of this relationship. The paper ends with some recommendations and concluding remarks.

Introduction

As there is always expected a close relationship among the the text book, four language skills, and examination system for learning English so the methods of teaching English language should have a great change in order to have the desired goal in the context of Bangladesh Open University. Otherwise, the desired result will not be fulfilled and regarding this a proportionate tie between teacher-student and text or exam will have to be cemented. By introducing the life-close education system Bangladesh Open University has been able to spread education in the remotest part of the country. In the case of learning, distance learning is complementary to updated education. Courses are run by technological and multifarious means such as printed materials, radio, television, computer, internet etc. The aim of the teaching system of the Open University is to make the best use of limited wealth to fulfill the demand of the learners and make them at home in

learning education. Through this learning, a learner gets the opportunity of learning in spite of staying at home. The learners are provided with printed materials which act like text books and teachers. People of any age get the opportunity of this successful learning. But there are some problems in the relationship among the text book, the four skills in the textbook and the examination system of Bangladesh Open University (BOU). The paper attempts to study the gaps for making relationship among the three systems of learning English and suggested some recommendations in the light of the findings of the study.

Textbook of Bangladesh Open University

When we see the objectives of the text designed by Bangladesh Open University, we can see so many similarities and dissimilarities between the texts of the first paper and the second paper in the Higher Secondary Certificate level that students cannot find any variety from question No.1 to question No. 5 and this is not a good sign of learning English both from classes and examinations. After question No. 5 there are varieties in question No. 6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13 and 14. These questions more or less contain the same pattern.

Question Items in Part A and Part B

The question items in part A and part B of the final examinations in the year of 2010 under Bangladesh Open University are as follows:

English First Paper

Part A: Seen Comprehension

1. Choose the best answer to complete each sentence:
2. Write whether the following statements are true or false (If false, give the correct information)
3. Fill in the gaps with correct form of words in brackets (Add any preposition if necessary)
4. Answer each of the following questions in one complete sentence:
5. Summarise the above passage in five sentences.

Part- B: Grammar

6. Join the following pairs of sentences as directed (any five):
7. Transform the following sentences as directed (any five) :
8. Make sentences with the following phrases (any five:)
9. Translate into English

Part- c: Vocabulary

10. Column B contains the explanations of the words in column A. Match the words in column A with the explanations in column B.

English Second Paper

English second paper includes-

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Part-A:

1. Choose the best answer to complete each sentence:
2. Write whether the following statements are true or false. If false, give the correct information:
3. Fill in the gaps with correct form of words in brackets. Add any preposition if necessary:
4. Answer each of the following questions in one complete sentence:
5. Summarise the above passage in five sentences.

Part-B: Grammar

6. Fill in the blanks with the correct form of words in brackets (any ten):
7. Correct the following sentences (any five)
8. Translate into Bengali:

Part- C: Vocabulary

9. Column B contains the explanations of the words in column A. Match the words in column A with the explanations in column B: 10. Fill in the blanks in the letter below with the correct form of the verbs in brackets:

Overall Discussions on Both Papers

The above questions show that in both papers in parts A and B, question numbers: 1 to 5 are the same. In the first paper No. 10 is as same as No. 9 in the 2nd paper. So question arises-Are the question patterns helpful for the students to learn English?

I think first paper should be completely different from 2nd paper. As the items are more or less the same, the students get no chance to go to other items. No inventive power is expected to be created from them. The grammar items which have been included in the text are appropriate to learn English. And for learning English well, both grammar-translation and communicative methods are important for the students of the Open University and grammar-translation (GT) method is very necessary. It is known to all that communicative method is more useful than any other method in the present situation. In Bangladesh, GT will help the students understand everything easily and they can speak English gradually. As there is a break of study or a gap of study, they may have forgotten many things about English. So they need to re-adjust themselves to this language through this method.

Prior to the 18th century the translation of literary texts was the main method for studying foreign languages. The classical method, as it was originally called, underwent a name change in the mid-1800s and was thereafter known as the GT method. GT was criticized because it was unconcerned with students' oral communication skills. As a result, in the late 1900s the tedious GT method lost popularity in the United States (Savignon1991).

Simply learning how to translate and recite rules was insufficient for learners who recognized the value of oral communication in the target language.

GT was teacher-centered, which limited interaction and spontaneous creativity. Teachers used GT to focus students' attention on grammar and vocabulary by having them read and translate target language texts; it was assumed that this process would allow students to gain an understanding of the grammar of their own native language (Larsen-Freeman2000).

Examining grammatical structures and deducing rules was also considered an excellent mental exercise that would help students grow intellectually by broadening their language, history, and literary knowledge. However, the classical target language texts were often difficult because they were written in nonstandard language and presented as a linguistic exercise with no attempt to include themes, style or culture into the lesson.

However, GT is still popular in some places, and is considered a good method for individuals who want to be translators and are not concerned with knowing how to speak or pronounce the target language. It is also still used in many EFL (English as a foreign language) settings where students like a teacher- centered method that includes the intensive study and memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary.

In every unit, the readers are informed of the objectives before the passage starts and listening and speaking are emphasized again and again. But practically, there is no reflection of the objectives in the class room in that at present every educational institution is over-crowded and class size is unusually large. Nothing is discussed in pairs while listening and speaking is only possible through class room activities. In the present situation of the English class room activities; there is no grouping of students, no monitoring and no work in pairs. Then how is it possible to fulfill the objectives of the text? In the text, there are some dialogues which are the best forms of speaking and listening but the students are used to memorizing every thing just like a parrot.

So there is no development of listening and speaking .They just wants to cross the stairs of the examination. In order to develop these skills, the teacher can play an important role to increase the listening and speaking practice. Class room activities should not be ignored at all for the purpose of developing students' speaking and listening practice. To assess the listening and speaking practice, viva voce and the evaluation of students' class room performance with respect to the tasks and activities on speaking and listening skills can be made a part of the final examinations. Students' fear of passing the examination should be dispelled at first from their minds. They have to be informed of the matter that class room performance ensures better marks than that of the memorizing system. It is believed that teachers

do not have much time to teach the students. Rather learners can make the best use of the time and carry out their responsibilities. They have to understand that what teachers can do is limited and that they themselves have to try to learn. A question rises about whether teachers or students should speak more in the class room. Some of the teachers opine that both teachers and students should speak in the class. If only teachers speak and students do not have any chance to speak, teachers fail to understand the students' progress in study. It is also a matter of regret that most students like to be back benchers and only their heads can be seen because they fear that teachers may ask them questions. This bad habit of the students needs a change.

Most teachers believe that they can act as a catalyst in the class. That is, they want to have the full authority in their hands. They do not want to give the students freely speaking chance and if they make any mistakes they are made to sit down and not to continue any more. It is true that students feel very pleased when the teacher is permissive and friendly and acts as a facilitator. The students often think that the teachers feel comfortable when they themselves think that their business of teaching is done when the teacher controls the class effectively. When a student in our country is given a little importance or authority, he thinks himself very important and very self-confident and at one stage the class room activities are hampered. English is a language that should be learned interactively. Teachers' one-sided lectures are thought to be boring and uninteresting. In Bangladesh students rarely speak in the class. They feel uneasy and hesitated to speak to each other in English. This is the real picture of the class in the whole of Bangladesh. Here is an example of the role of the teacher: Teachers are gardeners. They cannot make a flower bloom but they can help it grow. Gardeners cannot control the weather but they can prepare their plants for what may come. Good gardeners know that every seed will have different needs; each needs its own amount of soil, sunlight and water. Gardeners must know that they do not see results immediately. Gardening takes a lot of patience, but gardeners' rewards come when they see their flowers bloom.

Listening is the initial stage in first and second language acquisition. According to (Sharpe 2001), the promotion of children's speaking and listening skills lies at the heart of effective learning in all subjects of the primary curriculum. Therefore, English as second/foreign language teachers have to make the development of children's listening skills, a key aim of primary teaching and equip them with the best strategies for effective listening.

(Linse2005) also considers that the teaching of listening skills as foundational to the development of other language skills. We should, however, be aware that any kind of listening comprehension activity needs to

be well guided with clear aims. To this end, (Ur1996) argues that a listening purpose should be provided in the definition of a pre-set task. The definition of a purpose (a defined goal, as in the wake up example) enables the listener to listen selectively for significant information. Providing the students with some idea of what they are going to do with it helps them to succeed in the task; it also raises motivation and interest. The fact that learners are active during the listening, rather than waiting until the end to do something, keeps the learners busy and helps prevent boredom. In the perspective of the H.S.C. Programme in Bangladesh, listening and speaking are totally out of touch in the classroom. But these two skills should be given more importance so that students can gradually capture these two skills. They are found to be very weak in speaking and listening. But no steps are taken to develop the skills of the students. The students remain passive in the classroom. They are devoid of these two skills. It is mentionable that speaking and listening are here less emphasized. But it is no problem at all for the students of the Open University because they will gradually bring listening and speaking under control without any obstruction if side by side grammar- translation method is introduced in the classroom. And it is the duty of the teachers to create the English speaking environment. In suras Alak and Ar- Rahman, Allah has emphasized both reading and speaking. So the importance of speaking and reading cannot be avoided at all. In sura Ar-Rahman Allah says, 1.Ar-Rahman 2.Allahmal Quran3.Khalakal insana 4. Allahmahul bayan.It means (1) Merciful Allah (2) It is He who has taught us the Holy Quran3.He has created man 4.Then He has taught him how to speak. In sura Alak Allah says, 1. Ikra bismi rabbikallaji khalak 2. Khalakal insana min alak 3. Ikra wa rabbukal akram. It means 1. Read with the name of your Creator who has created man 2.It is He who has created man from a lump of blood.3.Read, and your Creator is benevolent. Thus we can realize the importance of the skills.

Reading and writing cannot be excluded from the class room activities. As far as I know, reading is not done at all in the class room. But for the students of the Open University, reading is a must because without reading well, they cannot comprehend anything. Here benefits of extensive reading and writing are given below: reading literature is an excellent way for students to make progress in English language learning; it exposes them to exciting plots, interesting characters, and authentic dialogues as they learn the language in context. Reading assignments also make it practical to integrate the other skills: students speak and listen when they discuss the text in small groups, and write when they perform pre-, during-, and post –reading activities. If the texts are too difficult, if students do not know the objectives, and if instructors have no guidelines for assignments, reading is drudgery for students and teachers alike. Extensive reading motivates learners to read a large number of texts on a wide range of topics because the students themselves select

the material based upon its relevance to their interests, knowledge, and experience. Students read texts that match their language level, and they choose the time and place to read. Extensive reading is generally associated with reading large amounts with the aim of getting an overall understanding of the material (Bamford and Day 1997). In other words, the purpose is to get the main idea of the text rather than a complete, detailed understanding of every grammatical, thematic, and discourse element, as would be done with intensive reading tasks. Extensive reading allows students to find pleasure in reading as they gain a general understanding of literary ideas, learn reading strategies, acquire new vocabulary, and increase their English proficiency. Since students read a large amount of material both inside and outside of the class room, it is important for the teacher to make the objectives clear and properly monitor the students' progress. This includes knowing how to make reading interesting for students' and also what assignments and assessment procedures contribute to a successful reading project. Over the years, numerous studies have reported that extensive reading benefits language learners in a variety of ways, including in the area of literacy. These studies claim that prolific readers noticeably improve their reading proficiency, reading habits, reading fluency, and vocabulary retention, as well as writing and spelling (Nation 1997). In addition to gains in a range of language skills, students experience delight in language learning and positive feelings as extensive reading motivates them for further study and reading. Gee (1999) argues that the more we read, the more competent language learners we become, and the more we enjoy it, the more we read, and the more competent language learners we become. This cycle consolidates language learning in other important ways as well: we gain more competence in the target culture and acquire broader background knowledge for more complex reading. The guidelines described below are essential to an extensive reading project.

The guidelines

Week -1

- Think of, read about, and discuss the goals and benefits of extensive reading.
- Talk about how people read in their first and second language, and discuss any similarities and differences.
- Talk about what the students are excited to read and write about.
- Review various lists of worldwide bestsellers and consider ways to obtain the books.
- Students review books that are at home and at school to get an idea of the books' subject matter and level by leafing through them and reading bits at random.

- Discuss why some of the books are appealing and others not.
- Students compare samples of a few texts to see which of them is most comfortable for their language level.

Week-2

- Students begin selecting books.
- Consider various ways of organizing reading logs, and meet with students who have already completed reading logs and are willing to give a few tips.

Week-(3-4)

- Students select books and begin reading. Make sure that students have selected a book to read and enjoy.
- Brainstorm on entries that students might choose for their reading log or discuss the ones they are working on.

Week-(5-7)

- Students report to class about the book they have chosen, the number of pages they have read, the complexity of the vocabulary, and plot development.
- Students continue working with their reading logs.

Week-(8-10)

- Students report on how they are getting on with reading, problems they have encountered, and emotions and feelings they experience as they read and write.

Week-11

- Students recount their experiences in both reading and writing. Since they have finished reading the book by now, it is time for them to give an overview of the book and to recommend or not recommend the book to their classmates.

Week-12

- Students submit their final reading logs.

Writing is one of the most marvelous things ever invented by man. Indeed our present civilization depends largely upon writing. But for it, the nations of the world would at this very state know little about one another and would still be in a state of ignorance and semi-savagery.

Writing helps students integrate different sources of information and organize their thoughts; as a result, their thinking is more fluid, flexible, and tangible, thus promoting conscious awareness and deeper comprehension. Although reading and writing are different skills, they supplement each other in the learning process because of what they have in common, including

awareness of the composition process, discourse conventions, and rhetorical elements that make up literary texts. Listening is the receptive use of language, and since the goal is to make sense of the speech, the focus is on meaning rather than language (Cameron 2001).

Saricoban (1999) states that listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. For learners listening is how spoken language becomes input (i.e., It is the first stage of learning a new language). In the classroom, this happens by listening to the teacher, a CD, or other learners. It is the process of interpreting messages----what people say.

Two Theories of Speech

Two theories of speech perception portray listeners as having very different roles. In the first view, listeners play a passive role and simply recognize and decode sounds, and in the second view listeners play an active role and perceive sounds by accessing internal articulation rules to decode rules (Crystal 1997). Whether speech perception is active or passive, or a combination of both, (Philips 1993) says that listening tasks are extremely important in the primary school setting, providing a rich source of language data from which children begin to build up of their own ideas of how the foreign language works. This knowledge is a rich source that young learners draw on to produce language.

Testing

The area of progress testing has been neglected and has lagged far behind developments in language teaching and testing in general. In most classrooms today, English is taught through communicative textbooks that provide neither accompanying tests nor any guidance for test construction. Teachers are on their own in constructing tests to measure student progress and performance.

In many cases, teachers have been reluctant to administer regular tests. Stevenson and Riewe (1986) give the following reasons for this:

1. Teachers consider testing too time-consuming, taking away valuable class time.
2. They identify testing with mathematics and statistics.
3. They may think testing goes against humanistic approaches to testing.
4. They have gotten little guidance in constructing tests in either pre-service or in-service training.

Personally, I would add:

Teachers feel that the time and effort they put into writing and correcting tests is not acknowledged with additional pay or personal praise.

There is the personal implication that I would call the image in the mirror: Testing puts you face-to-face with your own effectiveness as a teacher. In

this sense, testing can be as frightening and frustrating to the teacher as it is for the students.

Need of Test

If we assume that a well-planned course should measure the extent to which students have fulfilled course objectives, then progress tests are a central part of the learning process. Other reasons for testing can be identified:

1. Testing tells teachers what students can or cannot do –in other words, tests show teachers how successful their teaching has been. It provides wash back for them to adjust and change course content and teaching styles where necessary.
2. Testing tells students how well they are progressing. This may stimulate them to take learning more seriously.
3. By identifying students' strengths and weakness, testing can help identify areas for remedial work.
4. Testing will help evaluate the effectiveness of the programme, course books, materials, and methods.

This continuous feedback provided by tests will benefit students, who will feel that their weaknesses are being properly diagnosed, and their needs met.

Theoretical Considerations

As the majority of teachers have not received enough training in test development, let me suggest a framework for the design of tests that fit with classroom activities. Let us start by defining progress tests as a measure of students' progress towards definite goals. In this sense we do not make any distinction between progress or achievement tests: we conceive of both as one means for monitoring performance and evaluating the final outcome.

The second important issue is whether there is discrepancy between teaching and testing. (Weir 1990:14) has pointed out that the only difference between teaching and testing within the communicative paradigm relates to the amount of help that is available to the student from the teacher or his/her peers. Still there are some constraints that the process of testing imposes, such as time, anxiety, grading and competition. But, on the whole, we agree with (Davies 1968:5) when he says that a good test is an obedient servant since it follows and apes teaching. Our tests should be based on the classroom experience in terms of syllabus, activities and criteria of assessment. Their final aim is to measure the language that students have learned or acquired in the classroom both receptively and productively. We could conclude by saying that the more our tests resemble the classroom, the more valid they will be.

Validity of Test

The theoretical requisites that a test must achieve are validity, reliability, and practicality.

A test is valid if it measures what you want it to measure.

Construct validity refers to the concomitance between the test and the underlying teaching principles. It follows from this that tests should reflect the objectives of the course and underlies its teaching principles. As regards communicative testing, it is crucial that tests be as direct and authentic as possible; they should relate to real life and real communicative tasks.

A progress test has content validity if it measures the contents of the syllabus and the skills specified in the course book. Hence, we should take into consideration the learners' need and their particular domain of use to ensure content validity. Success with regard to this aspect is quite easy to achieve since the course book designer has decided on the course content. The task of the test writer---the teacher---is to sample this domain, measure it, score it, set up pass/fail cutoffs, and give grades.

If a test is appealing to laymen---students, administrators, etc. ---it has face validity. In other words, tests should be based on the contents of the textbook and the methodological teaching approaches, as well as measuring what it is supposed to measure.

Reliability of Test

Tests are reliable if their results are consistent, i.e., if administered to the same students on another occasion, they would obtain the same results. There are two main sources of reliability: the consistency of performance from candidates and scoring.

Finally a test has practicality if it does not involve much time or money in its construction, implementation, and scoring.

If we want our test to influence teaching and testing, we should ask our students and ourselves the following questions:

- What do students think about the fairness of the test?
- What poor results are due to poor item construction?
- How could the items be improved?
- What poor results are due to poor or insufficient teaching?
- What poor results are due to course book or other materials?
- What areas of weakness in student performance have we detected for remedial work?

-Can we make any assumptions on the relation between teaching and learning?

-What changes should be implemented in our classroom as a result of the test feedback?

Boundary of Test

Tests should cover the language, grammar, vocabulary, phonology, functions, and skill areas. Therefore, they have to cover both the content input and the activities or tasks. A test of communicative competence should test usage and the ability to use the language appropriately. If we want testing to accord with teaching, there should be a complete harmony between our teaching and our testing specifications. We shall test what we teach and in the same proportions. Teachers have to present and feedback results to the students with the aim of reviewing and revising the teaching of content or skills in which the test has shown students to be weak. Teachers should listen to what students have to say about the test and profit from their comments.

Responsibility of a Test User

As test users go about gathering information and making interpretations, which then lead to decisions and actions, the use of language tests obviously affects a variety of individuals and the language classrooms and programmes themselves. We should therefore specify what consequences, both positive and negative, are likely to occur as a result of the intended use of language testing tools. Individuals who might be affected by using language tests include students, parents and other family members, teachers, employers and other involved in the assessment process. Since each of these individuals may be influenced in different ways, we should consider the potential positive and negative consequences of a test. Additionally, the test may influence other elements of the language education context such as teaching practices, materials and activities, curricular objectives, enrollments, funding, program reputation, and so forth. For all of the individuals and program elements that may be affected by language assessment practice, we need to ask what the worst possible consequence of using the test is, what the ideal consequence of using the test is. Once we have specified the likely results of test use, we can select testing instruments and procedures that will maximize negative consequences. Given an explicit statement about who or what the assessment practice should affect and in what ways, we can also have a basis for evaluating the actual consequences of test use.

Conclusions

Two main implications may be drawn from these principles. The first is that we will have to concentrate both on use and usage. The second involves a

reconsideration of the authenticity of texts and tasks. Authentic texts are not problematic but the fact that tasks should be based on real life contexts may present difficulties. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four skills which should be developed separately by a person wishing to bring about command over a language. But in Bangladesh, the courses followed in different levels put emphasis on writing and reading whereas speaking and listening do not receive even minimum focus. Of course, everybody knows that every language is basically spoken. If one cannot produce sentences verbally, it is thought that his/her language learning has not been completed. It is true that all the prescribed books contain instructions encouraging the students to hold conversation in English on a wide variety of topics. But the interesting thing is that the students need not face any test which can fathom their ability to speak or listen. So the absence of test or evaluating verbal competence is thus directly responsible for the poor speaking and listening skills of the students. It is possible for the students of the Open University to learn English if they have desire. Their sincerity is a must to develop their skills and classroom activities should be given more and more importance. Texts and tests need to be more practical. In the absence of the test no development of the skills is possible. Teaching and testing are two inseparable aspects of the teacher's task. In spite of the current reluctance to profit from the latter, this article contends that testing has an essential role in the development of students' communicative competence. The brief nature of the article does not allow for an exhaustive description of progress testing. My intention is to encourage teachers to read more on the subject and to try some of the suggestions given.

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INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION ON WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE: A STUDY OF RURAL BANGLADESH

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Abstract : The rural women of Bangladesh are the most disadvantaged and exploited section of the society. In a patriarchal society, any kind of environmental degradation affects women more seriously than men. It is because of their different activities and socio-economic roles, and the close relationship between nature and women. In addition to these, as the poorest and most vulnerable section of the society, rural women have less adaptive capacity during any disturbed period and they do not have adequate resources to face the situation. The present study has dealt with how and to what extent environmental degradation affects the reproductive healthcare of the rural women of Bangladesh. As the research area, the study has selected Rathura, a typical village of Bangladesh.

Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries of the world. Almost half of the country's population is poor and the women are called "the poorest of the poor" (*Bangladesh Economic Review*, 2011: 182). Individual, family, society, culture, religion, environment all these have made the women the "second sex" (Beauvoir, 1949: 1-12). Particularly, the rural women of Bangladesh are the most disadvantaged and exploited section of the society. In such a patriarchal (Hatfield, 2000: 34) society, any kind of environmental change and natural disaster, like flood, cyclone, drought, tidal bore, *monga*, water crisis, fuel crisis, cold season and rainy season more seriously affect women than men. Eco-feminists assume that natural calamities make them the most victim section of the society. It is because of close relationship between nature and women (Ortner, 1994: 68-87). In addition, as the poorest and most vulnerable section of the society, the rural women have less adaptive capacity during any disturbed period and they do not have adequate resources to face the situation. In such a patriarchal society, if there is any question to sacrifice both in the family and society, women have to take the

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