

ENGLISH SYLLABUS IN HIGHER SECONDARY LEVEL IN BANGLADESH: ITS TARGET AND ACHIEVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

In order to meet the communicative challenge through language in the present modern world, the National Curriculum Board modified and started implementing a new English syllabus at the higher secondary level by putting emphasis on the Communicative Language Teaching approach keeping in mind the importance of all the four skills of learning a language – listening, speaking, reading and writing. Since the implementation of the 2010 National Education Policy, no tangible progress in the field of English Language Teaching has been achieved. This paper is an endeavour to search the hidden reasons responsible for not having the proper result from the new, improved syllabus and there will also be an effort to find out some probable solutions to the crises.

Keywords: *CLT, H.S.C, Education, Syllabus, Bangladesh.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy 2010 endorses the need for learning English for communicative purposes that will help prepare the country's future generation for the competitive globalized world of the 21st century. Therefore, the curriculum focuses on teaching-learning English as a skill-based subject so that learners can use English in their real-life situations by acquiring necessary language skills as well as knowledge, learning about cultures and values, developing positive attitudes, pursuing higher education and having better access to local and global employment.

The successful implementation of a communicative language curriculum depends mainly on skilled and competent teachers with proper training. This is because in a communicative language curriculum 'how to teach' is more important than 'what to teach'. This emphasizes that:

- All four basic language skills would be practiced in classrooms.
- Skills would be practiced in an integrated manner - not in isolation.

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- Skills practice would be done in meaningful contexts, i.e. practice in language use should go beyond the textbook and include real-life situations.
- Interactive activities would be carried out between teachers and students, and more importantly between students and students.
- Graded grammar would be taught through communicative approach.

So, it becomes clear that if this syllabus is properly followed and practiced in the higher secondary level of education in Bangladesh, a student after completing his/her H.S.C level will not face any difficulty to communicate with other English language users – both in oral and written form.

1.1. Objective of The Research/Study

The aim of this research is to find out why the students of H.S.C level in Bangladesh even after completing the syllabus that has been designed based on CLT approach to make them communicatively competent are failing to prove them efficient users of English in all the four different skills and this research also aims to find out some suitable ways to overcome those problems.

1.2. Literature Review

According to *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, “CLT is an approach to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the goal of teaching is communicative competence”. In the same dictionary communicative competence is defined as “the ability not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences but also to know when and where to use these sentences and to whom.” That means a communicatively competent person will not only be able to use grammatically correct sentences but also that person will know the appropriate use of them in the appropriate social context. Littlewood (1981: 1, cited in Richards and Rodgers, 1994: 66) states that “one of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it plays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language”.

Canale and Swain (cited in Richard and Rogers, 1994: 71) identified four dimensions of communicative competence – grammatical competence, socio-linguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. This is a common notion of most of our teachers that Grammar Translation Method focuses mainly on reading and writing skills whereas the communicative approach focuses exclusively on listening and speaking skills. But according to Richards and Rodgers, the communicative approach aims to “develop procedures for teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication” (1994: 66). But even among some of the teachers it is found that they believe that while in Grammar Translation method the main focus is given on reading and writing, in CLT the main focus should be on listening and speaking. And for obvious reasons, CLT covers the teaching of all the four language skills. Some people even think in CLT fluency should be achieved even if it is necessary at the cost of accuracy. But this is an inappropriate idea of fluency that CLT approach will never

suggest because in that case this approach will fail to produce any ideal educated communicator. *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* says, "When a person is fluent, they can speak a language easily, well and quickly." And here best possible meaning of the word "well" is correctly. According to *Longman Dictionary of Teaching & Applied Linguistics*, in second and foreign language teaching fluency describes a level of proficiency in communication which includes the ability to produce written and spoken language with ease. That means, fluency applies not only to speaking but also to writing. At the same time, if anybody wants to achieve proficiency in communication, they should also be fluent in listening and reading because without being a proficient listener, a person cannot communicate properly with a fluent speaker. In the same way, an imperfect reader cannot communicate with a fluent writer.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research involves library research as well as empirical and experimental survey. As a part of the field study, a survey has been done on 150 students of Rajshahi division and among these students some are the current students of different reputed colleges like New Govt. Degree College, Rajshahi College, Rajshahi Women's College, Rajshahi Model School and College of Rajshahi city and so on and in addition to them this survey has also been done on some students who have completed their H.S.C recently and now are the students of honours first year.

3. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

But nowadays, it is found that even after following this syllabus and completing their H.S.C students fail to communicate with other English language users. Sometimes when in the honours first year level a student is asked to write down five-six sentences on a particular topic, shockingly none of the sentences written by that student becomes correct. And at the same time, when they are asked to say something on a topic, they simply remain silent and they get nervous to speak in English. Fortunately if some of them prove themselves courageous enough to speak, their speeches are found full of incorrect expressions both in consideration of sentence construction and also pronunciation. Sometimes in the honours first year level when the teachers give their lectures exclusively in English, the students request them to translate it into Bangla or to give lectures in a mixed up language – both Bangla and English – because they cannot understand the speeches of the teachers if it is delivered completely in English. In addition to it, if the students are asked to read something from a given material, they face a lot of difficulties to read them out and they complete their tasks with lots of pauses and wrong pronunciations and sometimes they even fail to pronounce some of the most common words as if they have never seen them before.

So, I have dealt with both the written material and the delivered speeches of some of the students who have got good grades in H.S.C to find out the mistakes they are making. Here is the speech of a student of honours first year on his feeling and experience about 'a winter morning':

That's the morning which is not regular or normal. This morning is so much cold and there is no sunlight from the starting of the day. When I get up my/ get from my bed, I feel so much cold that that is why I'm j/ I'm just get again sleeping. That's why I am late from my

class and it is cold that not much a than yesterday but cold enough a cold enough to harm my sch schedule of all of my days. First of I am just late of my first class in university. Then when I come to the university I I am feel so much pain because of cold wint wind waind and a fog a fog. That's all sir. (ID: 06130350708, Honours 1st semester, Northern University Bangladesh)

Now, if we just analyze this speech, we can find a lot of problems like – wrong choice of expressions, presence of confusion, and wrong use of grammar. In the introductory sentence he could have used ‘This morning is not a regular or normal one’. He is giving reference to the incidents that have already taken place but he is using present tense to mention them. In addition to this, he is making some other mistakes like ‘I’m just get again sleeping’ where he should have used ‘I started sleeping again’ to express the idea correctly. In the same way, he is using ‘it is cold that not much a than yesterday’ and ‘schedule of all of my days’ where he may have used ‘it was not that much cold as it was yesterday’ and ‘all of my days schedule’. He sometimes is repeating the same thing – ‘I get up my/ get from’, ‘that that’, ‘I’m j/ I’m just’, ‘cold enough a cold enough’, ‘sch schedule’, ‘I I am’, ‘wint wind waind’, ‘a fog a fog’ and all these repetitions show his lack of confidence and proper control over himself while he is speaking. He has also made a mistake with the pronunciation when he pronounced the word ‘wind’.

Here is a script of another student of honours first year where she has written some sentences about her school life and she got A grade in English in H.S.C:

My school life are like a salt and suger. It look alike but tottaly differ in taste. I obtain different information and knowledge in my school life. I played various types of games in the off periods. Several times I bunk my classes. I enjoyed my full school life. I liked to gossip that time so much and for that reason my teachers gave me warning many times. I also punished several times. But now I miss my school life so much. Because those days are very memorable for me. (ID: 06130350719, Honours 1st semester, Northern University Bangladesh)

Now, if we analyze this particular piece of writing, the first mistake she has made is subject-verb agreement and tense. After the subject, ‘My school life’, in the first sentence, instead of using ‘was’, she has used ‘are’. The next mistake is wrong choice of expression ‘salt and suger’ where she has also misspelled the word ‘suger’. In addition to it there is another misspelled word ‘tottaly’. In the second sentence, she has used incorrect subject ‘It’ because it refers to ‘salt and suger’. In the third sentence, she has used ‘different information and knowledge’ where she should have used ‘different pieces of information and knowledge’ because ‘information’ and ‘knowledge’ are uncountable nouns. In the fifth sentence, the mistakes are of tense and preposition where she has used ‘I bunk my classes’ but it should be ‘I bunked off my classes’. In the sixth sentence, there is a problem with diction where instead of ‘full’ the suitable word may be ‘whole’. The next problem is with the expression ‘so much’ that she has used in simple sentences in her writing twice but in case of simple sentence the suitable expression for ‘so much’ is ‘very much’. In the eighth sentence, she has used active form where the suitable mode is passive form.

Now, the question is why this is happening. Is there any problem with the syllabus or with the way it is being implemented?

To find the answers to this question, we have to go back once again to the objectives of this syllabus. This syllabus is made completely on the basis of Communicate Language Teaching approach where the teachers are supposed to involve the students always in different types of tasks to give the students the opportunity to develop themselves properly in all the four basic skills of language – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – that means the students should learn through involvement and communication.

According to Jim Scrivener, there are three kinds of teachers – teacher: the explainer, teacher: the involver, and teacher: the enabler.

Teacher (the explainer): This kind of teacher relies mainly ‘explaining’ or ‘lecturing’ as a way of conveying information to the students. Here students are not usually involved in any kind of discussion.

Teacher (the involver): This kind of teacher is confident enough to share control with the learners, or to hand it over entirely to them. Decisions made in his/her classroom may often be shared or negotiated. In many cases the teacher takes his/her lead from the students; seeing himself/herself as someone whose job is to create the conditions that enable the students to learn for themselves.

Teacher (the enabler): This teacher knows about the subject matter and about methodology, but also has an awareness of how individuals and groups are thinking and feeling within the class. The teacher actively responds to his/her planning and working methods and in building effective working relationships and a good classroom atmosphere. A teacher’s personality and attitude can be an active encouragement to learning.

Now, the question is what kind of teachers we are getting at our H.S.C level. Are they efficient enough to implement the CLT approach in the classroom? Do they have proper understanding of what is CLT? This is a very vital issue because without properly trained efficient teachers, the goal of H.S.C English syllabus will not be achieved.

Professor M. Jahurul Islam, one of the writers of English H.S.C textbook, has shared his experience in one of his articles, “... it is a matter of concern that many of our school and college teachers have not yet understood the meaning of CLT clearly. ... A few years ago I went to National University Gazipur to teach a class of college teachers. I was discussing the communicative approach to language teaching. One of the teachers took part in the discussion but he was speaking all the time grammatically unacceptable English. At one stage I was disgusted with his English and asked him what kind of English he was speaking. I pointed out that most of his sentences were grammatically wrong. He then defended himself by saying that he was speaking communicative English and in communicative English speakers should not bother about grammar. When I asked him if the writers should bother about it, he categorically said, “*Sir, reading and writing does not fall among communicative English.*” (Praxis: Vol: 5. p.173). So, this is one example and I think if we make a survey, we will find a large percentage of H.S.C English teachers who have the same notion of CLT – but I am not saying that all the teachers will have the same idea.

Now, just to find out the real scenario of English teaching and learning at the H.S.C level in Bangladesh, a survey has been done on some of the students of Rajshahi division and among these students some are the current students of different reputed colleges of Rajshahi city like New Govt. Degree College, Rajshahi College, Rajshahi Women's College, Rajshahi Model School and College and so on and in addition to them this survey has also been done on some students who have completed their H.S.C recently and now are the students of honours first year. Here is the questionnaire that was used for the survey:

Name of the student:

Name of the institution:

Please tick the answers you want to choose:

Questions				
1. Is the medium of instruction in the class exclusively English?	Yes	No		
2. Does the teacher involve you in speaking?	Yes	No		
3. Does the teacher give you any writing task?	Yes	No		
4. Does the teacher check your writing task?	Yes	No		
5. Does the teacher discuss grammar in his/her lectures?	Yes	No		
6. Does the teacher check grammatical errors in your task?	Yes	No		
7. Do the students ask the teacher any question?	Yes	No		
8. When they speak, do they speak English or Bangla?	English	Bangla	both	
9. To which particular skill (listening/speaking/reading/writing) does the teacher give more importance?	listen	speak	read	write
10. How many students are there in your class?	70-250			

There were 150 respondents in this survey. Among them, for the first question, according to 25 respondents, the medium of instruction in the class is exclusively English but for the rest of the 125 respondents, it is not exclusively English. So, according to the majority of the respondents, the medium of instruction in the class is Bangla. For the second question 44 respondents have said that the teacher involves them in speaking but 106 respondents have given their opinion against it. So, for the second question, according to the opinion of the majority of the students, the teacher does not involve them in speaking. In response to the third question, 60 respondents are in favour of their involvement in the writing task by the teacher, whereas 90 respondents are against this opinion. Here, also the majority of the respondents' opinion is that they are not involved in the writing task by the teacher. 68 respondents have chosen 'yes' option when they have faced the question whether the teacher checks their writing task but 82 respondents have chosen 'no' option here. So, here also according to the majority of the respondents the teacher does not check their writing task. In response to question no.5, 62 respondents have said that the teacher discusses grammar in his/her lectures but 88 respondents have said that he/she does not. So, in this question majority of the respondents' opinion is that the teacher does not discuss grammar in his/her lectures. At the time of choosing answer to the question no.6, 54 respondents have given their opinion that the teacher checks grammatical errors in their task but 96 students have given their opinion against it. So,

here also, according to the majority of the respondents, the teacher does not check grammatical errors in their task. In reply to the question, whether the students ask the teacher any question, 132 respondents have said that they do but 18 respondents have gone against it. Here, the majority of the respondents agree that they ask the teacher questions. Now, in response to the question, when the students ask the teacher any question, if they speak English or Bangla, no respondent has said that they use English, only 22 have said that they use only Bangla and rest of 128 respondents have given their opinion for both languages. In question no.9, when the respondents are asked to which particular skill the teacher gives more importance, 30 respondents have gone for listening, 24 for speaking, 9 for reading and 87 for writing. So, here it becomes clear that according to the respondents, the teacher gives importance to writing skill. And in reply to the last question, as the respondents have given different number of students, the range of students varies in different classes from 70-250.

From the result of the survey it is found that majority of the students have said that the medium of instruction in the English class is not exclusively English; the teacher does not involve them in any task; if the teacher involves the students in any task, he/she does not check their tasks and point out any errors and gives any instruction to overcome their mistakes; the students do not usually ask any question to the teacher and if they do, they do it in both English and Bangla; the teacher gives more importance to writing among all the four skills. And the result of this survey focuses on the improper implementation of the new syllabus that makes it clear that if things go on in this way, the target of learning English at the H.S.C level by implementing the new syllabus will never be achieved.

But why is this happening?

In an article titled ‘Sorkari college e shikkhoker tin hazar pod faka (Thirty thousand teaching posts vacant in different government colleges)’ in the *Daily Prothom Alo* (Saturday, March 08, 2014 p.20), it is said that a large number of government colleges in Bangladesh do not have the sufficient number of teachers against the posts created for different subjects and among these vacant posts majority of them are for English teachers. So, from this report we can easily find one of the major issues behind the failure in teaching English in Bangladesh at the H.S.C level.

In addition to this shortage of teachers of English, another issue that is also very important is the lack of proper training among the existing teachers and as a result of this, they sometimes fail to create such an environment which is necessary for the CLT learners. For an effective classroom for the CLT learners, we need the teacher to be an enabler. But in most cases in Bangladesh we find the teachers functioning like the teacher as explainer. And that is why the students usually learn some English in the instructional method going against the principles of the Communicative Approach. According to Harmer, to develop an overall communicative competence in the target language students must have maximum exposure to both spoken and written use of the language and it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure such exposure. The next issue that has a vital role in the case of creating suitable environment is the class size. From the survey, it has become clear that most of the classes consist of 70-250 students but in a standard class the number of students should not be more than 30. So, when a teacher has to conduct a class of 70-250 students,

it becomes impossible for the teacher to pay concentration to each and every student and to make them involved in different types of tasks and to go through their tasks for corrections even though the teacher may have interest. Another problem in Bangladeshi colleges is the lack of logistic support. In most of the colleges, there is no multimedia projectors and also no language lab. But without having such kind of facilities, a teacher is quite helpless to involve the students in listening practice and unless the learners are good listeners, they cannot be good communicators. And sometimes a general objection is raised from both the students' side and also from the parents that in some of the colleges the teachers are not responsible enough to take their classes regularly and they are more interested in teaching the students either in private tuition or in coaching centers.

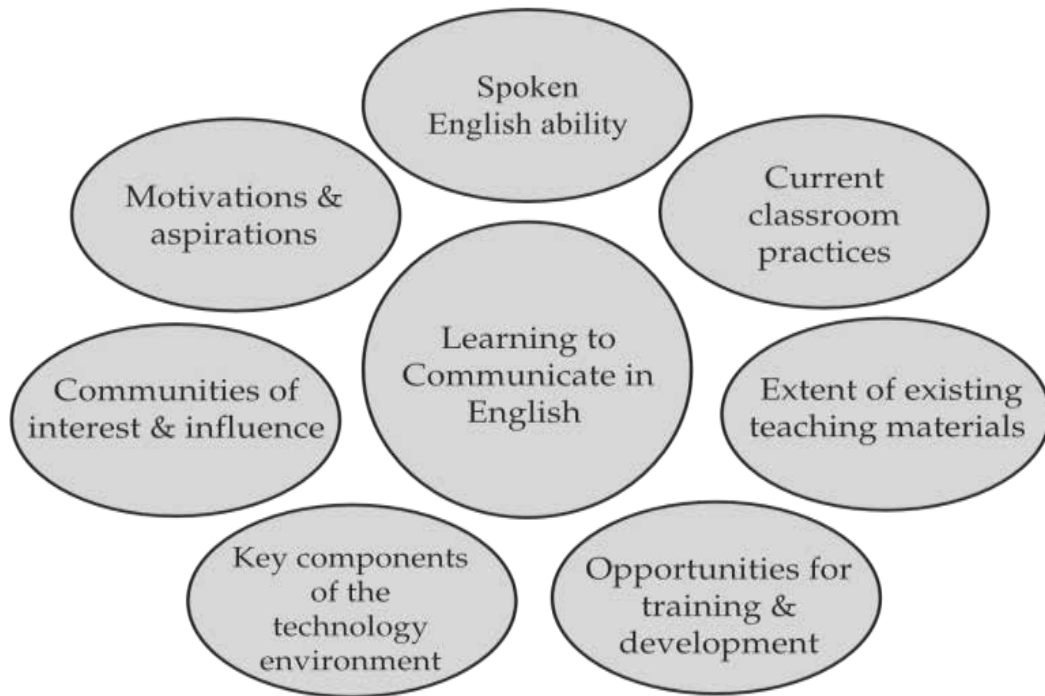
4. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

To make the H.S.C English syllabus more effective, we have to overcome these problematic issues. And some suggestions to overcome these problems may be:

- i) Class size should be reduced.
- ii) More teachers should be recruited to conduct sufficient number of classes with the standard number of students.
- iii) The teachers' regularities in conducting the classes should be ensured and strictly monitored by the head of the department.
- iv) The teachers should have experience in the field of teaching.
- v) The teachers should go through rigorous training process and thus have the proper knowledge of teaching methods and also classroom management.
- vi) The teacher should create a learner friendly atmosphere where each and every student will actively participate without any hesitation or shyness.
- vii) The teacher should always try to involve the students in different types of tasks either individually or in groups and monitor their tasks properly and correct the errors in such a way that among the students a positive mental attitude will be created.
- viii) Teacher should always speak in the easiest form of English using all the well-known expressions and easiest words and motivate the students to involve themselves speaking in English.
- ix) Like physics and chemistry lab, there should be a language lab in every college.
- x) There should be some changes in the examination system also like provisions of listening and speaking tests in the H.S.C final examination. So, there may be practical examination in English like some of the science subjects.
- xi) The last but not the least, the teachers' involvement in the private tuition and coaching centers should be highly restricted by properly implementing the newly approved law against coaching centers and private tuition by the Ministry of Education.

The following figure gives us an idea of effective communicative environment:

Figure 1: The Communicative Environment



If these suggestions can be implemented properly, it is to some extent possible to overcome the present crises and in this way, a positive environment can be created for the English learners in the H.S.C level through which the fixed goal – having students as experts in all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) – will be achieved.

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