

# **From Basic English to Business English: An Overview of Baugladeshi Realities**

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## **Ahstract**

*The role and function of English in the present global perspective is beyond all doubt. As the language of wider communication especially due to its inevitable attachment to international trade and commerce, English has turned out to be of prime importance in the domain of our business education. Apart from being the working language of international organizations and conferences, English is the key language of all sorts of business, trade and financial activities. This role and function of English in the contemporary global avenue have been steadily implanting its value in the Bangladeshi socio-economic plus educational scenario. English for Business Purpose, i.e. Business English has thus become fundamentally crucial in our English Language Teaching (ELT) arena in order to cope with the ongoing economic and financial policies/programs everywhere. But the question lies: how far are we ready to activate this specific need of English and eventually create a suitable workforce that would contribute to our national progress? Given the facts that the standard of English in our educational lives has been consistently under question, one cannot expect to generate any dramatic improvement in the tertiary level. The reason is, all the facets of ELT are inextricably inter linked, and so development of Basic English education is the key to the sound teaching-learning of purpose-oriented ELT activities in the later stages. Unfortunately, regarding our education in general, and English education in particular, the ongoing ELT policy will hardly do any favor to our efforts of coping with the global economic trends as far as English skills are concerned. This article is an attempt to firstly, investigate the problems of our Basic English education along with the adverse effects they are causing in the Business English education at the tertiary level; and secondly, the probable remedies so that an effective Business English education can be implemented.*

## **Introduction**

Admittedly, the prime avenues of human society in the present global context are influenced, and controlled, by the language called English. Specifically due to its intrinsic attachment to international trade and commerce, English has turned out to be the most effective means of business communication. As regards the business arena, English is the

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key language of international banking, economic affairs and trade, insurance, advertisement of global brands, audio-visual cultural products (e.g. film, TV, CDs, popular music), international tourism, international safety (e.g. 'air speak', 'sea speak'), technology transfer, internet communication and so on. It is also a 'relay language' in interpretation and translation. Half of Europe's business is carried out in English, and more than 70% of the world's business professionals read English. Eighty percent of the world's electronically stored information is in English. World's 40 million internet users mostly communicate in English (Duignan, 2000). English has replaced its archrivals, like French and German, in World Organizations and Financial Bodies. 85% of international organizations (including the UN, the World Bank, the IMF) now use English as their working language (Crystal 1997). This role and function of English in the contemporary global financial avenues have been steadily implanting its value in the Bangladeshi socio-economic plus educational scenario. English for Business Purpose, i.e. Business English has thus become fundamentally crucial in our English Language Teaching (ELT) field in order to cope with the ongoing economic and financial policies/activities everywhere. But the question lies: how far are we ready to activate this specific need of English and eventually create a suitable workforce, which would contribute to our national progress?

### **Business English and Basic English**

When it comes to the issue of ELT, we find a diverse variety of aspects. Since we are dealing with the issue of Business English and Basic English, let us first have a brief idea of these terms before moving on to our core issue. Here we are using the term 'Basic English' (*BcE*) to refer not only to the fundamental knowledge and structure of the language, but also — importantly — to the pragmatic or real-life interpretation of that knowledge and structure. Let us put it more clearly. Suppose, a person K has the **knowledge** of the pronoun '*he*', the verb '*is*' and the adjective '*smart*'. K also knows that '*he is smart*' is a syntactic representation of his knowledge which is in the **structure** of simple present tense. Now, K meets someone who is attractive in his attitude and convincing in his utterances. K realizes, i.e. **pragmatically interprets** that this is the person who fits into the structure of '*he is smart*', that such smart person exists in reality, and that smartness is a good virtue, and eventually, K too feels the need to become smart etc.

Business English (*BsE*) is the branch of ELT that involves the teaching and learning of English for all types of business and commercial purposes. Correspondence is the key. Be it an inquiry/complaint, or quotation giving, order placement, accounts settlement, or be it a report writing, one requires possessing the essential English language skills related to correspondence. All sorts of transactions have their roots in effective correspondence done in the medium of English. So, *BsE* is quintessentially need-based. This 'need' has stemmed from the knowledge, structure and pragmatic interpretation of English language, i.e. from *BcE*. Human brains are capable of generating infinite number of structures on the basis of finite number of rules. In this respect, the proper learning of *BcE* would help to grasp the forms and functions of *BsE*. The relationship between *BcE* and *BsE* is thus obvious.

### ***BcE* and Bangladesh: the question of standard**

The issue of English education in Bangladesh, with all its ramifications, has been a subject of never-ending debates and discussions for long. Eyebrows from all quarters have remained raised over the alleged decline in the standard of English. The term 'standard of English', however, has been ambiguously over-generalized by almost everyone, thus specifying nothing at all. Still, we may get an understanding of it from the following events. For example, people point their fingers at the standard of English seen in Civil Service Examination scripts, SSC/HSC examination answer sheets, administrative paper work and documents, job interviews and so on. The 'types' and 'uses' of English in all these sectors are obviously different. Yet, when one generalizes the issue, it may be assumed that the declining standard relates to the poor quality of written English, and in some cases, of spoken English.

We may look at two recent instances. The first instance of the decline in the standard of English can be apprehended from the following report published in 'The Daily Star', a leading national English daily of Bangladesh, on 7 June 1999. The report mentioned:

A total of 3,295 or 20.11 percent of candidates appearing at the 18<sup>th</sup> BCS examination got 'zero' marks in English, the Public Service Commission said in its report for 1998. Five of them [out of these candidates] have been qualified for BCS

jobs, three in the education cadre and one each in health and agriculture cadres.

This may be a better indicator of the gradual downfall of English proficiency than any other instances, say of secondary or higher secondary students. Because, the BCS candidates – being the seekers of the most secured prestigious and powerful sector of service – are expected to be the better-qualified ones. The second instance is taken from a report in the New Delhi edition of the prominent daily 'The Statesman' which carried a small item in its 'International' page on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2001. Reporting on the start of the SSC examination in Bangladesh, the item mentioned that 8000 students across the country had been expelled on the first day for copying, while 25 teachers had been suspended from their jobs for helping the students by providing 'answers' of the questions (The Statesman, 17.3.2001). And it was the day of the English examination. The news itself is self-explanatory. These types of examples also prove how erosion in the field of education has reached its peak.

### **The 'surrender value' of English in Bangladesh**

Now, here is a point that we need to keep in mind while talking about the 'English issue' in Bangladesh. Since post-independence, English in our country has lost its 'surrender value', i.e. its social communicative use. Rather it became the predominant foreign language of our country — unlike India or Pakistan where it is the second language (i.e. a foreign language having 'surrender value' as well as official function vis-à-vis mother tongue). The status and use of English in our region have undergone changes in different periods as shown in the following table (Islam and Jahan, 1999):

**Table 1: Status and use of English in Bangladesh at different periods**

Period	Status of English	Use	Used by
British period	As a foreign but royal, prestigious and dominant language.	Administrative, educational and commercial works, job communication between rulers and their representatives.	Rulers, their local representatives, official servants, educated people, businessmen and elites.
Pakistani period	As a foreign but government, prestigious and dominant language.	Official, administrative and business works, countrywide communication, international communication and academic works.	Rulers, government officers, educated people, professionals, businessmen and elites.
Bangladeshi period	As a foreign and international but essential language of modern life.	Partially official/government works, international business and communication, higher education, research works, job in foreign companies.	Services holders of higher or foreign offices, educated people and elites.

This author, in course of his Doctoral research, conducted a survey among a large number of randomly selected students of different schools and colleges in Dhaka regarding the extent of their English use in daily lives. These are shown in *table 2*, which would provide a clear cut picture of the lack of the 'surrender value' in the lives of our school-college students.

**Table 2: Students' extra curricular domains of English**

No	Items	Always	Often	Sometimes	A little bit	Not at all
1.a	Using English within family	1.8	1.4	4.7	6.7	55.4
1.b	Using English outside family	3.2	4.3	8.2	12.5	71.8
2.a	Using English inside classroom	5.9	3.2	2.3	42.4	46.2
2.b	Using English with teacher	6.7	11.8	6.4	33.7	41.4
3	Using English in letter writing	3.8	6.2	23.4	33.7	41.4
4	Using English in diary	20.3	45.8	18.2	7.2	8.5

	writing (for those applicable)					
5.a	Watching English news on TV (local channel)	Nil	Nil	Nil.	1.4	<b>98.6</b>
5.b	Watching English news on TV (foreign channel)	12.7	<b>25.3</b>	<b>30.2</b>	15.1	16.7
6.a	Listening English news on Radio (local station)	Nil	Nil	Nil	1.4	<b>18.6</b>
6.b	Listening English news on Radio (foreign station)	Nil	Nil	23.8	<b>45.9</b>	<b>30.3</b>
7.a	Watching English movies on TV	<b>92.3</b>	4.2	1.9	1.6	Nil
7.b	Watching English movies on VCD	11.2	18.7	<b>38.1</b>	19.5	12.5
8.a	Reading English daily newspapers	12.7	23.2	<b>50.8</b>	4.9	8.4
8.b	Reading English magazines (local)	1.6	1.8	2.9	13.2	<b>80.5</b>
8.c	Reading English mags (foreign)	14.1	9.6	20.7	2.4	<b>53.2</b>
9.a	Reading English fiction books	2.8	10.5	7.8	12.3	<b>66.6</b>
9.b	Reading English non-fiction books	Nil	3.8	7.2	15.6	<b>73.4</b>
10	Reading English comic strips	<b>52.9</b>	31.4	11.5	4.2	Nil
11	Listening English songs	19.7	23.6	<b>38.4</b>	10.2	8.1
12	Watching sports programs in English	<b>87.2</b>	12.8	Nil	Nil	Nil

The lack of any 'surrender value' of English in our country has created a difficult situation as far as the teaching-learning of *BcE* is concerned. As would be evident from the following discussions, our *BcE* has been — and is being — totally classroom oriented. If we fail to realize this reality, our *BcE*, and consequently our *BsE* education would be clueless.

### The use of English by Bangladeshis

There is no denying that English is used in different fields by a considerable number of Bangladeshis for various purposes. Unfortunately, the data regarding the extent of use of English are not readily available. And it is not even known what percentage of the population has a working knowledge of English.



The participants at a workshop for English language teachers, organized by Bangladesh Education Extension and Research Institute, identified three kinds of needs for learners of English in Bangladesh, namely, social, occupational and academic (Harrison 1976:1). Since the natural medium of social interaction among Bangladeshis is Bangla, people hardly use English except situational and occupational needs. Yet for most of the English knowing persons, they do not normally get any social opportunity to practise, or increase skills in, English. As a result, many forget the skills they had acquired (Islam and Jahan, 1999).

Occupational needs are few and can be met through specialized training. Academic needs or study skills are the ones, which affect the learners most acutely. These include: reading books in English, listening to lectures and writing essays, term papers and dissertations. The students, after undergoing a long period of Bangla medium Secondary and Higher Secondary education find it difficult to cope with the English books and journals in the tertiary level. In most cases, the quality of English used by the tertiary or even by the Masters level students is often far from satisfactory. The sentences spoken and written bristle with common errors. Yet, even a slipshod knowledge of poor English seems to offer better job opportunities than not (Chowdhury: 1994).

Probably due to this reason, in recent times there has been a trend of using more English as encouragement for learning English is provided both at university and at home. As more and more Bangladeshi students are seeking admission into universities of USA, Canada, Australia and the UK, the urge for acquiring English proficiency is on the rise. There has also been a corresponding increase in the number of students taking IELTS, ACCESS and TOEFL.

Side by side, there has been a rapid increase in the number of English medium schools in Bangladesh since independence. The total number of English medium schools in Dhaka city is near about 100. Accurate figures of the number of students studying in those are unavailable. According to an unpublished data prepared by Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), there were 17138 students in 67 such schools in 1996. But many of them are kindergarten schools, other schools prepare students for 'O' and 'A' level examinations of London University.

According to 1991 census, Bangladesh had a population of 109.9 million on 11 March, of the same year (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1992:1) with a literacy rate of 24.82% (ibid: 285). The literacy rate included people who could read or write Bangla only. The census did not provide any statistics about the number of bilinguals or people who could read or write English. According to a 1995 estimate, the number of people capable of using English in some form in Bangladesh was 3,100,000 (Crystal, 1997:57).

The state-run general education system is however turning out people with different degrees of proficiency in English. Their English proficiency can be classified in terms of a rating scale as follows (Carroll 1975: 134).

- **Extremely Limited users:** The ones who leave primary school or drop out before completing the cycle are at this level. Having a rudimentary knowledge of English, they are possibly able to read an address or a signboard in English and follow very simple instructions but are not really able to participate in communicate interaction apart from using a few set phrases.
- **Marginal users:** People who complete the secondary and higher secondary levels of education belong to this category. A considerable number of them are able to read simple texts and understand them, write messages and letters, but in general have difficulty in communicating freely or exchanging information with others. Most of their learning has been bookish, i.e. memorization-oriented (for examination purposes), resulting complete deletion from memory.
- **Modest users:** The ones who complete their graduation or post-graduation may be called modest users. They might have used English in different measure during their academic careers. They are generally able to communicate but often use inaccurate or inappropriate language. Some of them who have an English medium background or have passed out from top quality private universities are more competent in English. The number of expert users (native-like fluency) among them would be limited.

Regardless of these categories of English proficient Bangladeshis, the number of users of English has been increasing gradually. Prof. Dil



**Afroze Quader** of the Institute of Modern Languages, Dhaka University, sums up the reason for the present emphasis on English in Bangladesh:

The library language in this country is uniformly English, particularly at the tertiary level. Our penal code was formulated in English, and even now requires knowledge of English on the part of people studying it. Translations of academic and technical papers are few, so access to any publication made outside our country requires the reader to know English well. Even far accessing information through the internet, one of the deepest and most efficient ways of getting information in our country, one needs English. This shows clearly that far doing well academically and for conducting one's work well in Bangladesh, one has to depend on English even though it now has the status of a foreign language in Bangladesh.

(Quader, 1999:187)

A substantial number of students undergo graduate and post graduate studies in teacher education, chartered accountancy, cost management and accounts, business administration, medicine, nursing science, and computer-oriented studies at different institutions — all of which involve English for academic purposes in various degrees.

In this respect, the gradual increase in the volume of trade and cooperation with the outside world has created an unprecedented demand for learning English. Leading Bangladeshi enterprises use English in their official business. Business firms linked with international trade have to use English. Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industries arranges special English courses for business executives and entrepreneurs. Major NGOs organize courses in English for their employees. Government agencies dealing with external aid and expatriate advisors need people who can adequately communicate in English. A considerable number of Bangladeshi government and non-government officials, scientists, agriculturists, engineers and doctors go to Western countries every year for training in their respective fields of work. They cannot do without English for specialization. Apart from news bulletins three times a day and an hour-long program called 'Music Around the World' thrice a week, English is hardly used in radio broadcasts. The national TV channel BTV broadcasts English news twice a day besides showing English serials two times a week. Ekushe TV, a

private satellite TV channel, has started telecasting English news owing to this demand of time.

There are quite a good number of English language dailies and weeklies with substantial readership — especially in the urban areas. Among the 1601 registered newspapers countrywide, there are 128 dailies within Dhaka out of which 11 are English. Outside Dhaka, there are 6 English dailies out of 233 dailies (Source: Dept of Films & Publication, Ministry of Information 1999). The readership of the three leading national English dailies are around 35,000, 21,500 and 20,000 respectively (ibid). These are quite satisfactory if one keeps in mind the vast readership the Bangla dailies enjoy. There are 14 English weeklies in Dhaka with the top two enjoying a circulation of 14,000 and 12,000 respectively (ibid).

As regards literary works in English, the percentage of publications is still not worth mentioning. To be honest, there is almost no readership for English fictions and non-academic books written by Bangladeshi writers. However, literary features and essays appear regularly in the weekly supplements of the English dailies. In contrast, publication of English books on administrative, social, political and historical aspects are gradually on the rise. However, the buyers are mostly the ones who are engaged in these respective fields who buy these for their academic or professional purposes.

From a social perspective, English in Bangladesh is mainly restricted to the urban educated class. In some western-educated wealthy families, English, along with Bangla, is liberally used at home as the language of normal conversation. Many of these upper-class families send their children to expensive English medium schools, and maintain an English language environment in their homes.

For the majority, the situation is confusingly mixed. On the one hand, the absence of a definite English language policy, as well as appropriate Mother Tongue policy, has affected the country's education system heavily. On the other hand, despite the gradual demand for English for Specific Purpose (ESP), the learners and public have been suffering confused states of mind — resulting in indecision about learning English. Hence, most of the people just feel or realize that English is essential, but never comprehend why (or in which way), and how to learn what type of English.

The opportunities for learning real and need-based English are severely limited. The good number of English teaching centers and academies seldom have qualified and proficient teachers. The 'most trusted' center for English learning has been the British Council — which has successfully developed among the public the 'myth' of genuine English teaching. But few people can avail of the opportunity, as the fees are too high to afford. And also, how far the British Council possesses the intention and ability to teach English in accordance with the Bangladeshi realities is a matter of argument.

Hence in overall terms, it means that despite numerous kinds of demand for English, there is no adequate delivery system — either at the state level or at the private sector. 30 years ago, English was the official language and the medium of education. Now, English is a foreign language, precisely the most essential foreign language, learnt at schools, colleges and universities unsuccessfully.

In this context, neither Bangla nor English has gained a firm footing in the education system of Bangladesh. And hence, the controversies surrounding the use and status of English in the Bangladeshi socio-cultural set up prevails.

### **The ground realities concerning *BcE* context**

The following discussion would help us to have an idea of the realities concerning *BcE* that have engulfed our academic atmosphere.

### **The English classroom**

"One will find an average urban English classroom in Bangladesh full of students of with apparently homogenous facade. A little acquaintance with the students will reveal that this homogeneity is actually deceptive. The students bring to the classroom not only a variety of attitudes and expectations, but also varying degrees of proficiency in the English language. Above all, the students bring to the classroom what seems like an almost insuperable fear of English language" (Rahman, 1999). A number of researchers have agreed that second language learning involves a fundamentally traumatic experience for the individual (Clarke, 1976:377). Now, this is not only the result of any intrinsic aversion for

the language itself. In most cases, this fear of the language also arises from the past failures, and the dread that it is a subject in which a student is likely to fail in the future as well (Rahman, 1999).

Given such a situation, the need for upgrading and modifying the classroom environment regarding its physical settings and teaching styles becomes very crucial. But instead, situation has been prevailing as it was without slightest concern from any quarter.

Bernard Shaw once remarked that his education had been continuous from childhood except for a brief interruption in school! Much as it may sound queer, Shaw's comment seems to be ironically true far as our school system, as well as our classroom context, is concerned. Inconvenient classroom conditions with overcrowded pupils, lack of proper ventilation and light, followed by inconsistent syllabus pattern and teaching styles by unskilled / semi-skilled teachers have only added to the misery of the learners as a whole.

Barring a few exceptions in the urban areas (that too largely in Dhaka and Chittagong), most of our schools countrywide are plagued by pathetic disorders. This is what has been remarked in the 'Bangladesh: Country Profile 1997-98' by the Economist Intelligence Unit of London:

The main complaints raised about schools include poor quality of education as a result of badly trained (or absent) teachers, large classes and shortage of books, and the lack of responsibility of schools towards the pupils.

Precisely speaking, neither the classroom size nor the physical environment permits the ideal teaching-learning situation. Shortage of classrooms compels the students to be squeezed into one class, and inevitably disturbance and discomfort ensue. In Bangladesh, the number of students in a secondary classroom is usually 60, with space constraints a major drawback (Haque, 1989). The teaching shortcomings and syllabus inconsistency only add to students' woes in the English classroom which is already marred by psychological fear on the students' part. The extent of time allocated for teaching English in the class routines (by the National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee) is as follows: 3 periods per week in classes 1 and 2; 4 periods per week in

classes 3, 4 and 5; 5 periods per week in classes 6 and 7; and 6/7 periods per week in classes 9 and 10 (ibid: 136).

There exist many debates whether or not the time allocated for English is adequate, but the point is, regardless of the allocated time, the physical environment of English classroom hardly permits any sound teaching-learning to take place.

### **Stress in the Classroom**

In course of this author's personal discussions (as a part of the qualitative survey of his Doctoral research) with several randomly selected students of Dhaka, almost everyone maintained that their overall school environment was 'demanding' and 'competitive' — both in the negative sense of the terms.

'Demanding' because, they were expected to perform beyond their natural cognitive abilities, whereas little was being done to upgrade and nourish their abilities in order to enable them to perform better.

'Competitive' because, with their limited abilities, they were in a serious mental stress to cope with the system where difference of one or two marks meant a lot for them.

In simple words, our students in general were hardly prepared to keep up with the pace which made them more and more frustrated.

The students further said that they found their classroom atmosphere 'lacking in warmth' and 'lacking emotional support'. The attitudes of their teachers and the burden of homework were the chief causes of academic stress.

The homework given in schools were deemed as 'too much', plus 'monotonous and boring'. The reason, they felt, was their teachers never taught them properly as to how the lessons should be done at home. As for example, the English teacher would read out a piece of prose, gives somewhat a small description of it, and ask them to do all the exercises at home without explaining or guiding them properly. This virtually left no recourse for them except to follow and complete the homework by



themselves. Consequently, they depended heavily on private tutors. They also said that the volume of their homework notebooks was three-four times larger than that of their classroom notebooks.

In several cases, some students had to rely on their parents or elder brother-sisters as they could not afford private tutors. Agony was what they had to face. Due to the lack of any clue, their guardians sometimes failed to help them do the homework properly. And not completing the homework meant punishment and humiliation in front of the classmates which led to heightened stress.

In short, the mindless attitude of the teachers, their constant threat of punishments, verbal insults and bias towards 'good' students are to blame for the stress the students endure. The problem is compounded by poor teaching, incompetence and acute shortage of skilled teachers.

### **Teachers and their teaching**

There exists a common allegation both among our students and guardians that teachers are not student-friendly. Students are afraid of their teachers, so much so that they hardly have the courage to ask them for any help in front of other students. No doubt, this is an unhealthy situation that has been in operation inside the English classroom. English is not just a 'subject' like mathematics, geography, history or accounting which are taught and learnt in Bengali. English is a subject which itself works in an alien language, and students have no other choice except coping with it in their examination scripts in that alien expression. It is in this context that the English teacher's role becomes really crucial and fundamental.

The teacher's goal is just not to teach the language. He has to keep in mind that the moment he calls the people in front of him a 'class,' he accepts for himself the role known as 'teacher' and along with it the obligation to help his students to move forward toward the goals that they had brought with them. Thus the teacher should ensure that by the end of the course, students will feel more at home with the language than they do before the start of the course (Stevik, 1988:6). Moreover, 'they will prefer to concentrate on the work at hand rather than on the clock' (ibid), and 'they will throw intellect and imagination into the lesson, and not just go through the motions with their voices and their pencils' (ibid).

Therefore, it has been rightly maintained that,

In the long run, the quantity of one's students' learning will depend on the quality of the attention they give to it. The quality of their attention will depend, in turn on the degree to which they are able and willing to throw themselves into what is going on. And they will throw themselves in only to the extent that they feel secure in doing so.

In this respect, they are something like a turtle, which moves ahead on its own power only when it is willing to stick to its neck a little.  
(Ibid)

However, there is one basic fact to consider. That is, the socio-economic backgrounds of the learners are never on the same level. Therefore, the teacher has every chance to misinterpret individuals unless he has reasonably good picture of the background out of which the individual has come.

Unfortunately, such issues as stated above are hardly ever taken into account as far as our overall teaching system is concerned.

### **The learners are the ultimate victims**

We may look into the issue of learners in the following way:

The learners are provided the **input** (i.e. *knowledge*) in a **learning environment** (i.e. *classroom*) by **technical engineers** (i.e. *teachers*) with the aid of some **device** (i.e. *textbooks, blackboards, chalks*) framed as a **scientific system** (i.e. *curricula and syllabuses*) by a **group of scientists** (i.e. *education managers of the Ministry, Textbook board etc.*) added with the support of **external catalysts** (i.e. *parents and guardians*) in order to get the deserved **output** — both short-term (i.e. *public examinations*) and long-term (i.e. *contribution to the society*).

(Shahed, 2000: 6)

Thus, it is the learners who come to acquire something — which automatically implies that they are the ones who are at the receiving end. Before the students get the chance of receiving the 'input' or knowledge, a wide variety of functions has to be operated by a large number of people and organizations. It connotes that irrespective of those people

and organizations related to the machinery, nobody could wash his hands off by arguing this or that, or by blaming others. Unfortunately, this is what has been the normal practice since long. There is actually no immaculate co-operation among the numerous facets under the education sector. This has put a direct bearing on the teaching-learning system.

The dismal picture of the high percentage of failures in all the education boards during the past few years has marked a new low in the gradual degradation in our educational arena. There were no shortage of arguments and counter arguments in newspapers, electronic media and seminars, thereafter putting a big question mark on the quality of education imparted in schools.

But very interestingly, most of the educational administrators showed a general tendency of putting blame on 'today's inattentive students' who 'could not pass because they did not study'. Herein lies the issue: why blaming the students when firstly, the entire teaching-learning process is a part of a massive inter-related infrastructure, and secondly, the students are at the receiving end who have no power to decide on their own what to learn and how to learn? When a school kid tells that he faces such and such problems inside the class, should we point our fingers at him as the culprit, or should our duty be to scrutinize the real reasons behind his feelings?

As Prof. Sadrul Amin puts it,

There should not be any excuse for the disappointing outcome of English language learning if we consider the years of formal education the students have had. Certain things must be responsible for such senseless waste of time, money and energy. The socio-political unrest which is yet to part company with Bangladesh and the lack of proper, pragmatic education policy are the main reasons for her lagging behind in the field of education. Till today there has not been any well-defined EFL/ESL curriculum and detailed syllabuses for different stages to give a sense of direction to English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh.

(Amin, 1997:40)

### **The adverse effects on *BsE* education**

Due to these unavoidable facts in the arena of *BcE*, there is hardly any doubt that severe hindrance has been put against attaining proficiency in need-based English education at the tertiary level. As we have already pointed out the inevitable importance of *BsE* owing to the tremendous demand and challenges in the global trade and financial sectors, we need to focus our attention in the development of a sound and systematic *BcE* education at the Secondary and Higher Secondary levels. How can one expect to develop one's business letter writing skills if one has some fundamental flaws in one's knowledge of basic letter writing? It goes with each and every aspect of business communication.

The scenario in the tertiary education in our country has undergone gradual change over the past several years. The once-upon-a-time 'craze' for Engineering and Medical studies has shifted to Business Administration and various Business Management-oriented programs. This has come as a natural phenomenon — owing to the need of the hour. This need has been generated by the massive economic and commercial activities globally. Our efficiency to meet these challenging international — and consequently national — demands largely depends on our ability to produce effective communicators and presenters in the medium of English. And that would never be possible in this present *BcE* context.

Four years back, this auhtor conducted a survey among the high school students randomly selected from 10 high schools in Dhaka. The survey, which was a part of this writer's M. Phil. research, was based on a questionnaire comprising questions and statements on those students' English language skills. In response to the item where students' errors were measured, it was found that students had severe weakness in the areas of tense and verbs, prepositions and syntactic structures (table 3).

**Table 3: Students' errors/mistakes that occur while writing essays and compositions**

Classes 6, 7 & 8			Classes 9 & 10		
S. No.	Types of Error	%	S. No.	Types of Error	%
1.	Tenses/Verbs	84.38	1.	Syntactic	59.6
2.	Prepositions	75.0	2.	Structure	37.5
3.	Syntactic	59.38	3.	Tenses/Verbs	37.0
4.	Structure	53.13	4.	Phrases	34.38
5.	Phrases	37.5	5.	Prepositions	12.5
6.	Spellings	12.5	6.	Articles	10.46
7.	Articles	9.38	7.	Pronouns	7.5
8.	Numbers	6.25	8.	Vocabulary	6.63
9.	Pronouns	4.5	9.	Numbers	2.5
	Vocabulary			Spellings	

From the analysis of the findings, it was revealed that for classes 6, 7 and 8, *inadequate knowledge of the formation of rules in English* led them to commit these errors. It proves that there exist some serious flaws in the teaching and learning of 'rule formation' at this stage. Interesting was the case with the students of classes 9 and 10. The reason why they committed 'syntactic errors' more was, they needed to write paragraphs, comprehension pieces, letters and essays more frequently unlike their counterparts in the lower classes. As a result, syntactic errors occurred more — which in turn had their roots in inadequate knowledge of rule formation. All this proves the acute situation in teaching and learning of *BcE*. Due to professional involvement and having some teaching experience in the areas of Business Communication and Technical Writing, this writer has been encountering numerous errors and flaws that students regularly produce in business writing. And then, the most important truth is, the students' drawbacks has their roots in their faulty *BcE* education.

### Conclusions and recommendations

In such context, we must adopt a rational approach toward framing a sound and suitable ELT policy concerning *BcE* and *BsE*. There is no denying that an appropriate language policy is the need of the hour. English has been taught over the years simply as a 'vague and general



cultural subject' (to use Michael West's words) and that has resulted in the lack of analysis of our precise need of English. We have to determine first our categories of need-based English education, and then we need to go for setting up the infrastructures.

We should not forget that once language becomes an object of attention and people develop opinions about it, it is not only a means of communication but also a social or societal resource. It can be manipulated to have certain effects on the society in which it is used and in which people express their ideas about it. Hence *BcE* education needs to be appropriated and manipulated in a way that they become tremendously useful resources for each and every Bangladeshi. The knowledge of *BsE* is essential basically for: (a) effective internal administration related to international business and commercial aspects and (b) effective trade relations with other countries. These two functions would in turn develop our national standard of living, as well as project our society and culture positively among the outside societies.

Our development planners, unfortunately, have to still realize that by keeping the mass illiterate, development can be neither broad-based nor sustained. Education is the only way for building human capabilities. In terms of human development objectives, education is an end in itself, not just a means to an end. It is the passport to accelerated economic growth, particularly in the context of a rapidly globalizing world economy. Societies that have acquired the relevant knowledge and skills can compete successfully in global markets. A proper *BsE* education, through the way of a sound and creative *BcE* education, would enable us to create an effective workforce of Bangladeshis that would be able to keep pace with the current international business, commercial and financial functions. And consequently, it would enhance further national growth in the changing and challenging global scenario.

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