



Independent Language Learning (ILL): A Post-method Strategy for the Remote Learners of Bangladesh

Opinion Paper

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[Citation: Nessa, M., & Fardos, M. (2020). Independent Language Learning (ILL): A Post-method Strategy for the Remote Learners of Bangladesh. *Journal of ELT and Education*, 3(3): 99-105. Retrieved from <https://jee-bd.com/journal/33142020>]

Abstract

The paper presents an easy-going English language learning strategy for the remote learners of Bangladesh. Learning a foreign language takes place gradually through different stages of learners' ages in which several factors play a significant role. This study intended to shed light on the situations of English language teaching and learning at the secondary and higher secondary levels in the educational institutions in Bangladesh, particularly in the remote areas. However, the researchers took interviews of 27 school and college teachers from the rural areas of three different districts of Dhaka and Comilla Division in Bangladesh. According to the opinions of the teachers, the researchers found out several significant drawbacks of English language learning situations in the rural areas of Bangladesh. In learning English as a foreign language (EFL) context of Bangladesh, the learners usually face anxiety while practicing and using English language in a formal situation. Hence, this paper intends to propose an Independent language learning approach entitled 'Independent Language Learning (ILL)' especially for the English language learners of the remote rural areas of Bangladesh.

Keywords: ILL, EFL, syllabus, role of teachers and students, remote learners

1. Introduction

Teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Bangladesh is always a challenging issue. There exist lots of methods and approaches in English language teaching and learning for the use of English language teachers and learners. Some put emphasis on the development of all the four skills of English language learning while some others focus especially on the development of listening and speaking skills. Still, every method or approach has its advantages and disadvantages and limitations. Grammar translation method (hereafter, GTM) has already been observed backdated in context of Bangladesh, though most of the teachers in the field of the English language teaching of our country are still in practice with GTM, especially in the rural areas. However, English is used as a foreign language in Bangladesh and the teachers and the learners face difficulties in both teaching and learning this language. Consequently, the remote learners of Bangladesh suffer a lot in learning and using this language.

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A few years back, the communicative language teaching (hereafter, CLT) approach has been considered a successful approach in this regard. But it is also a fade dream at present as many scholars opine that CLT needs modification (Mahbub-ul-Alam, 2014) or the tactic of its implementation might not have been acceptable (Poddar, 2016). In this condition, there needs another method for remote learners where they can learn English easily in an independent way. The learners may have a friendly environment in this approach. The researchers have proposed this approach as 'Independent Language Learning (ILL)', may be applicable for the remote learners only. The current approach of English language teaching, all over the world is communicative approach but the world has modified CLT with a mingling of self-developed tactics that shows the importance of post-method. However, CLT requires interactive classroom activities with the integration of the four language skills such as, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Nevertheless, for the construction of sufficient interaction and quadruple- skilled integration in classrooms there await some barriers and challenges for the teachers of rural areas of Bangladesh. Rahman (2005) mentioned that "Bangladeshi students are learning English from a utilitarian point of view, instead of integrator motivation". Hence, this study is a proposal to consider and address Bangladeshi English language teachers' probable barriers in making the classrooms interactive and integrative with the tasks and activities engaging the four language skills along with their compatible pragmatic solutions. The key objective is to present a new language learning approach for the remote learners of the English language in Bangladesh which is supposed to be effective and flexible in action.

2. Objectives of the study

The objective of the study was to depict the current English language learning (Hereafter, ELL) situations in the remote areas of Bangladesh and propose a model for language learning considering the collected data.

3. Literature Review

3.1. The Present Role of English in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the current role of English language is of two types: a) Educational and b) Social. It is instructed for a long tenure of ten years as a compulsory subject in schools and colleges. Presently, it is a compulsory course of higher studies in the colleges and universities. In the undergraduate and postgraduate study, English is one of the foremost prestigious subjects. Even though it has been ceased to be the medium of instruction in the tertiary level institutions, except some technical universities, teachers and learners have to go through English course books and journals to figure out the lessons in approximately all the disciplines of study. It is considered to be a required subject for all the competitive examinations for securing a good job in the government and non-government organizations. Socially, English is appreciated as a prestigious means of communication considering national and global requirements. Despite the government's attempts to replace English communications with Bangla at levels of the administrative task, it is still used broadly in civil and military organizations, in courts, counting the high Court and Supreme Court, in trade and commerce, in communication with foreign nations, in banks and tourism sectors.

3.2. Importance of Learning English

The capacity to communicate in English language appropriately, is regarded as a vital efficiency skill in numerous employment sectors. It is regarded as the sole medium of communication with non-natives and foreign countries. An individual with a good command of the English dialect tends to be idolized more than others indeed by the common people of Bangladesh. In this way, both educationally and socially English encompasses a very significant

role to play. Hence, the current study is an effort of the authors to explore a new approach for the teaching and learning English language in remote areas of Bangladesh.

3.3. The Drawbacks of Existing ELT tactics for ELL

Bangladesh experienced two notable language teaching strategies since its inception. One is grammar translation method (GTM) and the other is an approach called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Though CLT is the existing tactic but it became unsuccessful in our country (Huda, 2013). However, Poddar (2016) mentioned that the teachers might need more training to deploy CLT approach properly. And the teachers are still using GTM. From the ground of history, GTM is the foremost conventional of all the strategies of foreign or second language teaching scope all over the world. As eluded prior, it had been a significant strategy within the ELT field of the common pedagogical context of Bangladesh.

Larsen-Freeman (2000) clarified that the elementary purpose of GTM is to be able to read literature and pupils are asked to translate from one language to another language (also mentioned in Biplab, 2018). Indeed, the ultimate objective of learning English was used to be the ability to peruse and comprehend the writing of the target language in GTM. What the learners utilized to study was the culture of the English language as it was displayed through the literature and fine arts of the formal written books. In an ELT classroom of GTM, the students exploit to have English knowledge with the help of the demonstrative and deductive learning of the commandments of English grammar used to take after by the application of these formulas in translating disconnected sentences and the parts of the given books from the primary language (L1) of the learners (which had been, of course, Bangla) to the target language (TL) (which had been, clearly, English). Accuracy, not fluency, was used to be given the prime consideration. The vocabulary was instructed fundamentally through the bilingual records of words, through the attribution of bilingual dictionaries as well as through the direct memorization of English words with their Bangla complementary meaning and interpretations fostering the explicit and rapid immediate interruption of L1 within the entire teaching and learning areas. In this way, the students learnt a lot but could not achieve the ability to communicative in real life situation.

4. Methodology

The idea of introducing a new approach for the remote learners came to the researchers' mind after observing the condition of the students' English language proficiency in some educational institutions in rural areas. A questionnaire survey and direct interview methods were used as data collection tools. 27 teachers of different rural secondary schools and higher secondary colleges were randomly selected to collect data for the existing ELT situations of rural educational institutions. Interview method was used to collect information about the current drawbacks of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning situation.

5. Findings: Major Limitations for EFL Learning in remote areas

5.1. Lack of Linguistics and Physical Facilities

CLT is the existing language teaching method in Bangladesh which has, to some extent, lost its significance for many years, particularly in rural areas. But the world is following post-methods to facilitate the teaching and learning process. However, the participants were interviewed to know about the current problems they face to teach English language. Many teachers opined that they can afford very few linguistic supports to teach English to the students in a rural context. Sometimes, the favorable teaching -learning environment is not ensured by the authority. Other than that, the educational institution buildings are not always built and furnished properly.

5.2. Lack of Technological Support

We can see considerable practical problems have been experienced and there exists lack of technological support in the teaching and learning sector in Bangladesh, which is prominent in rural areas. It includes poor infrastructure, inadequate technical equipment and materials, insufficient training for the users. In Bangladesh, the scenario of remote areas about using technology is undoubtedly very poor. Even some teachers cannot use multimedia properly, some teachers do not have English language efficiency to encourage English classes using the technology. The attainment of the project depends on how the technology is outlined and how the instructors are trained to utilize it (Mahruf and Kirkwood, 2012).

5.3. Lack of practice

The students of remote areas do not practice English regularly because they believe that English is a difficult subject and do not get interested in learning English. Moreover, Students of rural area claim that teachers do not give regular writing exercises; no listening practice is done in the classroom because there are no listening materials for the teacher to use it; furthermore, speaking activities are treated as if those were not the part of the syllabus. Most of the time teachers involve students with reading activities. Consequently, it is found that the teachers are used to focus on reading and writing while listening and speaking skills are being overlooked. In this concern, it is clear that the proper practice of English is absent specially in the institutes of rural areas.

5.4. Lack of English teachers

Well-trained qualified English language teachers are usually unwilling to go to the remote areas. The reason behind it is, that rural areas do not have the facilities like the urban areas. Sometimes the salary structure is not good enough as per their qualification. Moreover, teachers are not interested in teaching in rural educational institutions as they think it may affect their future growth of professional and personal life.

5.5. Lack of interest among the young learners

Some teachers opined that students are not at all interested to learn English. It is because, many students think about their financial limitations, as a result, predicts their future discontinuation of study after primary schooling up to class five or after tenth grade of schooling. In some cases, students are not concerned about the importance of learning English even.

6. Proposed ILL Approach

6.1. Theory of Language

- a. In this approach, "Learning of Tense" is considered to be an important factor. Learners should learn all the twelve kinds of tense at first step. It should be introduced to the learners in an easy way.
- b. Language must be related to their real life situations to help the learners produce new sentences.
- c. Not only the target language but also the native language will be used in the classroom according to necessity
- d. Primary function of this approach will be interaction and communication.
- e. Not isolated grammar, vocabulary with context will be the focusing point.

6.2. Theory of Learning

- a. In this approach, teachers and learners are very friendly while teaching and learning. Their relationship should be as parents-children relationship. Teachers will behave as the parents behave with their children. Tutors should not be very rough to teach the

learners. If the learners make mistakes, the teacher should make the correction patiently. They should show enough sympathy to the learners and appreciate the learners while necessary.

- b. Memorization and habit formation are also important in this approach. Some vocabulary must be memorized to help the learners for further production of sentences independently.
- c. Language games can be used to practice new vocabularies, language structures, grammar and core skills of English language. Jigsaw activities, brainstorming, drilling activities, role playing, miming games can be some useful weapons in improving students' English language ability.
- d. Activities will involve real communication in this approach to carrying out meaningful tasks.

6.3. Objectives

- a. This approach will make the learners speak fluently as it suggests very few rules.
- b. To teach practical application of four basic skills is the principal objective of this approach, with special emphasis on the speaking skills.
- c. Oral skills are more important than written excellence. Writing skills will be developed gradually but the learners can speak fluently than other methods and approaches.
- d. This approach will focus on correct pronunciation and also will contemplate on providing beginners and intermediate learners basic communicative skills.

6.4. Syllabus

There is no particular syllabus in this method as it is related to practical situations. Yet some vocabularies can be taught. A list of selected vocabularies related to the learners' academic needs and real-life situations can be collected and given to them. Selection of communicative activities and topics can be executed according to needs of the learners.

6.5. Activity Types

- a. Tense should be explained and understood very clearly for all, especially for the rustic learners. Vocabularies must be memorized by them through writing for several times.
- b. Learners can make mistakes in this method and tutors take those mistakes easily and correct those on the spot.
- c. To engage learners in some communication activities like interaction, repetition, pair work, group work and extensive drills can be helpful for their learning.

6.6. Learners' Role

- a. Learners must be respectful to their teachers in all regards.
- b. They should respond to questions and commands of their tutors to make the session interactive and effective.
- c. They should try to engage themselves in activities with meaningful communication.

6.7. Teachers' Role

- a. As the tutors perform the role of parents for the learners, they should always be friendly to their learners.
- b. Tutors will correct errors without any bitter attitude and will be sympathetic to the irregular learners and eager to find out the reason behind it by building up a supportive relationship.
- c. Tutors should test the progress of the learners continually.

- d. The teacher needs to use a needs analysis on the students to reflect upon their language needs, learning style, learning enjoyment, learning strategies, learning strengths and weaknesses.

6.8. Role of Materials

- a. As this method is independent the learners and the tutors will have the liberty to select the teaching learning materials from various authentic sources in addition to their text books for practicing the learning activity.
- b. Tense sheet can be helpful for the learners and the tutors.
- c. Some authentic texts and grammar books can be used as reference.

7. Discussion

Since English is a foreign language for the individuals of Bangladesh, students of this country discover it a complicated task in their study. Considering the worldwide necessity, English language deserves appropriate implementation as a compulsory subject at primary to higher secondary level in Bangladesh. Lack of effective teacher training, qualified teacher-student ratio, insufficiency of language learning materials are the most problematic causes behind the unsuccessful implementation of English curriculum effectively in remote areas. Organizing English subject-oriented training for the teacher and accurate management of classroom may enhance the classroom environment. Encouraging and motivating the students to do exercises based on four skills, that is listening, speaking, reading and writing; and by providing sufficient teaching aids for the teachers may raise the proficiency level of rural area students.

8. Conclusion

This study proposed a model of English language teaching and learning approach named 'Independent Language Learning (ILL)' and its techniques of implementation in the English curriculum in rural areas of Bangladesh. As the GTM and the CLT approaches have not been able to establish themselves effective throughout the country, ILL may be considered a suitable approach for the rural students. The study sums up with the positive idea that this new approach can be beneficial to the remote EFL learners in Bangladesh. There are still scopes for more research on implementation of appropriate teaching-learning techniques in relation to the curriculum, and to encourage the students to become active learner in the classroom and stimulating the favorable atmosphere to enhance the quality of English language teaching and learning in rural areas of Bangladesh.

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