

## Review Article

# Dissonance between Syllabus and Testing: Reason of Weak Efficiency in English at SSC Level.

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**Abstract:** Since English is an international language, various attempts have been taken to make the citizens of Bangladesh competent in English. Several education commissions and education policies have been formed and therefore, syllabus has been designed, modified or changed with the needs of time to get the maximal output in English learning. The present (2015-2016) English syllabus designed by NCTB and testing system approved by NAPE at SSC level in Bangladesh. The main aim of this paper is to find out whether the testing system would carry on the goals and objectives of the syllabus properly or not. The investigation attempts to show the teachers ability and their lack of competence, students' poor performance, and lack of teacher-student interactions, traditional teaching system and above all, some poor implementations of the syllabus and testing system, are the major problems in teaching and learning English at the secondary level of education in Bangladesh. So, the paper will recommend a co-relational alliance between the teaching materials and the testing methods to attain the goal of the curriculum.

**Keywords:** Secondary Curriculum, ELT Materials, Communicative Competence, Language Skills, Teaching Techniques, Testing Methods

## Introduction

Today is the age of globalization and information communication where English has recognized as the common international language, so its demand is growing up and up. To keep cope with the world, NCTB has designed a syllabus for class I to XII in order to provide a communicative teaching and learning programmed in English for secondary level in Bangladesh. It aims to give guidelines for textbook writers, teachers, students, and all those who are concerned with the teaching and learning of English. English in Bangladesh is being taught and tested with a certain objective to improve the communication ability, so the English language syllabus aims to focus on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing as learner-centered activities within communicative contexts. It is expected that students should achieve an elementary level to intermediate command of the four language skills at the secondary level. In the introduction to the syllabus document, NTCB specifies the objective of the syllabus as follows:

“English needs to be recognized as an essential work oriented skill that is needed if the employment, development and educational needs of the country are to be met successfully. Increased communicative competence in English therefore constitutes a vital skill for learners at this stage (NCTB, p.136).”

The syllabus document identifies ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ as the two vital skills needed by the students who will progress

through secondary to higher secondary level. It recognizes

‘listening’ and ‘speaking’ skills as ‘two necessary fundamental skills’ which are to be achieved for both effective learning and for use. Unfortunately, in Bangladesh in many cases teaching and testing English mostly depend on memorization. Many of our students show good performance in the course that is measured by achievement tests based directly on that course but they remain far from being proficient in English in their practical lives. (Sinha, 1998) While this is the case, it can be said that our examination system is measuring something else rather than ‘Communicative Competence’. ( Akter , 2002). On the other hand, it's not possible to cover all the topics of the syllabus in a short period of time, typically lasts for 6 months or probably 1 year. So as the scale of brilliance of a student only measured by the outcomes or results of the students in a particular examination system so the students only memorize the topics which are covered up by the teacher in classroom arena .the students for most of the cases don't even aware of their syllabus and all the topics which are need to be taught in their classes. They blindly follow their classes and focus only the topics which are given importance in their examinations. The other issue, which remains as a stumbling block in our assessment system, the system is based on theories but never justifies the practical and innovativeness of a student. Rather it take randomly selected topics to measure students' proficiency level. The students have clear idea about the question paper so they only take preparation based on that particular segments and ignore the rest topics which are not included in the testing system.

Though it has been almost thirteen years since CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) was introduced in

Bangladesh in replacement of the long-standing GT (Grammar-Translation) Method. But the focus of teaching and learning, however, has changed little. While GT Method was preoccupied with reading and writing skills only leaving listening and speaking almost neglected, CLT was supposed to emphasize on a balanced development of all the four basic skills. But, the pictures of English language classrooms still reflect the traditional teaching style. Teachers still stress the development of reading and writing skills for the purpose of getting good results in examinations (Hasan, 2004). The teaching and learning process has again centered on the concrete and easily tangible end products, for example, the grammatical items and score in the final exams, gradually making the score obtained in the final examination of SSC and HSC potentially unreliable. (NCTB Curriculum 2015- 16).

Akter (1999), Hasan(2004), and Haider(2008) conducted systematic researches in the context of Bangladesh and showed that our existing language testing system ( testing items, question patterns etc.) cannot measure the actual level of communicative competence of our students. On the other hand, Islam and Ahsan (2005), Islam (2004), Hoque (2005) suggested from their personal teaching experiences that our language testing system must be changed to improve the communicative competence level of our students.

Islam and Ahsan (2005), from their professional experience of English language teaching, found that many of their students, who obtained GPA 5 in SSC, even in all subjects, are failing to manifest the expected level of proficiency in English at HSC level. Disappointedly, they fail to produce correct phrases or sentences of their own without reproducing something, which had been, memorized by them earlier. According to them, "There can be various reasons behind this failure of the SSC and HSC marks scored to achieve reliability and to become the successful indicators of proficiency in English. Firstly, our education system still has not so far been successful in effectively encouraging proficiency-oriented education in opposition to result-oriented education. Secondly, since scoring higher GPA in SSC and HSC increases and/or ensures admittance to reputed colleges and universities, our learners get naturally obsessed with obtaining it and they look for some shortcut to get that magic score without being concerned about the proficiency achieved. Thirdly, guardians of the learners also possess the same outlook. Fourthly, our testing system at secondary and higher secondary level education itself encourages little to change the outlook of the learners and guardians. To score well, students follow the readymade guidebooks competitively available in the market, ignoring the NCTB prescribed material. They can manage fairly well even without consulting the NCTB textbook. Fifthly, there is a wide gap between the objectives of the curriculum and the assessment system. It instructs to teach many things (e.g. speaking, listening items, etcetera) that never appear in the final assessment and, as a result, not only students but also the teachers become interested in teaching items that directly resemble question items in SSC and HSC.

Regarding testing system which is the only way to evaluate a

student's scale of brilliance in Bangladesh, the test of English language in SSC final examinations in Bangladesh which is the central focus of this study is an achievement test. An achievement test in Andrew Harrison's words (1983, P.7) "looks back over a longer period of learning for example, a year's work, or a whole course, or even a variety of different courses- it is intended to show the standard which the students have now reached in relation to other students at the same stage" (cited in *ibid*). Again, as CLT prevails in the ELT situation in Bangladesh, the English language test in SSC final examinations is a communicative language test.

From analysis of the existing testing system and evaluation policy of ELT in secondary level of Bangladesh it is found that the general education boards and the schools affiliated under these boards adopted an examination format that matches the one provided in the NCTB curriculum guidelines. But examination questions were mostly set from the set textbooks. So, the students always had a chance to memorize the answers to questions before. As a result, these examinations failed to evaluate students' ability to use English in communication.

Thus, it is clear that there is acute deficiency in learning English and the country has been failed to provide efficient English learners. The present syllabus at S.S.C level emphasizes on learning the language through interactive and communicative process but never follow the path in reality even in testing process is flawed some. So the result remains the same because our educationalists, designers, teachers mostly failed to give a supplementary language learning process which combine the fulfillment of the goals and objectives of syllabus and the actual and effective reflection in testing system.

Though, the present syllabus is introduced from the failure of the past syllabus which was content-based, emphasized on memorization, but not on comprehension and oral practice of the learners. Consequently, a large number of students memorized English without understanding and did badly in the public exam; because many could not memorize and some of those who could memorize could vomit in the exam hall and some could not even do that. Those syllabuses failed to make the students creative and imaginative and competent in communication. It was seen that a huge number of students failed in the public exam and most of them failed in English. On the other hand, CLT approach is a communicative based approach which emphasizes learners to internalize a second language, to be creative and imaginative in real-life situations, and competent on oral practice. After the introduction of the CLT approach based syllabus at the SSC level, students are expected to acquire competency in English, to use it effectively outside the classroom. The memorization depended part, from it, has been reduced. For example, in English first paper of SSC, a student has to comprehend a passage given in the question paper and then answer the question from no.1 to 8 by understanding the passage. Again, he has to be creative in answering question 9, 10, 11 and 12. Only question no. 13 and 14 (paragraph and letter of 20marks) depend on the free hand

writing. So this syllabus does not force on the depth of knowledge only; rather on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language. But the problem which works as the obstacle to implement such effective syllabus is the failure to set the harmony between the present syllabus and the existing testing system.

With a view to analyzing and evaluating the English Syllabus at the SSC level, it can be stated that the testing system has undergone a very rigorous journey. With a view to implementing and upgrading the present syllabus in order to get the maximal benefit from it as well as to reduce the rate of failure in English:

□ Teachers should be trained so that they can come out of the back-dated attitude, can make the class lively, interactive and follow the four basic language skills. Because many teachers in rural areas and also in urban areas are not familiar with CLT approach and do not know how to teach CLT approach.

Enough teaching materials should be provided for the teachers and students. At the same time teacher-student ratio should be reduced. In communicative language teaching, teacher-student interaction is a must. If the ratio is much, the interaction will not be successful.

□ Teacher should play role as a researcher and as a learner. So, with the change of teaching and learning system, the role of the teacher should be changed. He should try to present the new language items, structure and vocabulary clearly in English.

□ The teachers have to plan an organized lessons taking consideration of the students' interest and level.

□ Duration of class hour should be extended and group work, presentation etc. should be done. English learning is learning a foreign language; not like other subjects. Hence it requires more time.

□ Viva-voce examination may be introduced to test speaking skill. Here, starting English Language Club can be very helpful in increasing speaking skill and can remove students' fear and nervousness of English.

□ The less important or non-important lessons may be omitted from the text in order to remove the students' fear of huge syllabus in English and to provide them more interest in reading. The lessons should be designed in such a way that each lesson should contain a variety of activities and skills with maximum student-involvement.

□ The teachers should help, praise and encourage their students to improve and should not be fussy about minimal points of grammatical accuracy. They should remember that their main goal is to create and sustain the students' motivation and interest in learning English.

□ Field-work related lessons can be included in the text. Two things will be gained then: a student will learn English and they will know about our culture, society and economic condition at the same time.

After a vast exploration, it is scrutinized that the importance of English as a means of communication is increasing rapidly. Hence, we need an appropriate English syllabus designing and teaching method or approach and a successful and accurate testing system based on practical application and authenticity. It is clear that this study has prompted in finding out the effectiveness of the present S.S.C syllabus in learning English as a foreign language as well as a second language. The researcher has observed, analyzed and evaluated the syllabus and the testing system thoroughly and minutely and tried to find out its merits and drawbacks. Then having analyzed the drawbacks, the researcher has attempted to provide some suggestions for modification to make the syllabus more effective and upgrade. Data collection finds out the reasons why a huge number of students fail in English every year and the ways to come out of this. It has been found from data that untrained teachers, lack of teaching material, lack of teacher-student interaction, huge lessons and traditional testing system etc. are responsible for the downfall of the S.S.C students in English. By removing these shortcomings, we can hope our students to be competent and better performers in both the exam and in the real-life situations. Hence, there is a crucial need for individuals, institutions and forums to raise voices of concern in order that English language teaching and learning should move in an appropriate direction. In this regard, we need to learn from past mistakes in our attempts to curricular change. Moreover, the on-going professional development of teachers needs to be given priority and we need to be aware of the pitfalls of the changing process. We have to take into account contextual factors, the local learning culture and the attitude of the teachers and the students. The authority concerned about this regard should be aware of all these facts and take vital initiatives to achieve the goal ultimately.

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