

State Of English Teaching In Bangladesh—II

—M.S. Haque

SINCE grammar-composition work has been carefully integrated with the text contents, there is no provision in the curriculum for teaching separate grammar-composition books up to class VI. However, the teaching of separate grammar-composition books are allowed for class VIII and onward. These books, as the curriculum provides, are supposed to supplement the learning of the use of the structural and grammatical items and learning of the techniques of doing composition, both oral and written, as practised in the textbooks.

Practice: We who are educated or half-educated but not acquainted with the modern language teaching/learning methods/techniques traditionally believe that learning the English grammar-composition items means learning the English language. This belief is so strong that utmost care is taken to teach English grammar-composition even from the primary stage (though teaching grammar-composition separately is prohibited at this stage). Taking advantage of this situation private publishing houses publish grammar-composition books which are based mainly on traditional contents like defining grammatical terminologies e.g. nouns, pronouns, articles, gerunds, etc and on traditional teaching methods like memorizing grammar rules and making sentences to illustrate rules. These books tend to be fatter and they sell better because they are so, though these books are not approved by NCTB as course books. On the other hand, the smaller books on this subject for class VII and onward approved by NCTB as they are based on the contents and methods spelled out in the curriculum are hardly included in the lists of course books taught in our schools.

The effect is not at all favourable for teaching/learning English. Those voluminous grammar-composition books directly put the learners especially at the primary and lower secondary levels to a disadvantageous situation by encouraging rote-learning only for the purpose of passing examinations in English.

A glaring example of old, obsolete and archaic usages is the model letters given in almost every grammar-composition book intended for the Secondary and Higher Secondary

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classes. Most applications start: 'Sir, I beg most respectfully to state that.. and end 'I have the honour to be, sir, Yours most obedient servant/pupil' etc. Besides, the language use in the so-called model essays given in these books is not guided, and as a result, is often beyond the comprehension ability of the average students.

Recommendations: No separate grammar-composition books should be taught up to class VI and books for the remaining classes should be prepared according to the guidelines provided in the Curriculum and Syllabus Committee report. These books may be written by individual authors or private publishing houses. But only those reviewed and approved by NCTB should be prescribed for use in schools and colleges.

Staffing Primary, Secondary Schools

Teaching posts at these schools are not attached to individual subjects. It is the school authority, more specifically, it is the Headmaster/Headmistress who, considering the qualifications/training experience of the members on the staff decides who will teach what. However, religious teachers teach their respective subjects.

As the number of teachers on an average, is much smaller than needed for effective teaching of English (in fact, many other subjects) in most of these schools, a teacher is often required to teach English together with two/three other subjects. As a result, he does not find enough time to prepare his English lessons before he actually gives it.

Another practice with English teaching is often found in many secondary schools—that is, a so-called senior or influential teacher, even if he is not trained in TEFL, teaches English at higher classes, whereas a well-trained teacher is not allowed to do so only because he is fresh in his job and not so influential.

Recommendations: In each school some teachers on the staff (2/3 at a primary school and 3/4 at a secondary school) should be officially designated as 'English teachers' on the basis of their qualifications training and ex-

perience. These English teachers will specialise in teaching English. However, they may be given to teach another subject like Bengali if needed.

The English teachers in a school will form the English department where they will discuss problems, methods and techniques connected with English teaching at the school, in particular, or in the country or abroad, in general.

Staffing Colleges

Theory: A general pattern has been adopted by the Government in staffing the degree colleges (most of the 600 colleges of the country are degree colleges). According to this pattern provision of 4 teachers (1 Assoc Prof, 1 Asst Prof and 2 Lecturers) for each subject has been made, without any consideration of the number of students in each department.

The 4 teachers in the English department of a degree college have to teach all the 11th and 12th year classes in all groups (arts, science and commerce) plus BA 1st and 2nd year classes offering English as an elective subject.

This patterning of the college staff has given rise to serious imbalance in the teacher-student ratio in the English departments. For example, in a college with approximately 2,000 students the 4 English teachers have to teach about 1,600 students (some BA students and all the B Sc and B Com students being excluded), the teacher-student ratio being 1:400. Whereas in a department like Philosophy or History where the total number of students (both H.S.C. and Degree classes taken together) usually does not exceed 40, the teacher-student ratio is 1:10. This imbalance in the teacher-student ratio in English departments coupled with the problem of large classes (100+ being the normal size) has affected English teaching adversely at the colleges. In fact teaching English as a language for use is simply impossible in the circumstances even though the teachers are highly qualified and trained.

The number of English teachers in each college should therefore be in-

creased. No English class should have more than 30 students.

English At The Graduate Level

English is not a required subject for the B.A. pass course students under Dhaka and Chittagong Universities. And though it is a compulsory subject at this level at Rajshahi University the students can easily get their degree without studying English, as failure in this paper is usually made up with the required pass marks (for a 300-marks language paper) scored in Bengali only. However, these universities offer a 300-marks elective English course at this level.

Neither the 100-marks compulsory English now virtually dropped from all our university courses at the graduate level nor the 300-marks elective English introduced at these universities is what a TEFL course at this level should be. They contain, no doubt, some language items; but their too formal grammar component, their free composition and translation components do not make, by themselves, a TEFL course for this level. The syllabuses for these courses do not prescribe any language teaching methods and techniques for use in class. Neither do the examination questions test students ability in language use. The literary pieces included in these courses are too difficult for the students at this level to understand, and no attempts were made in the texts to teach language through these pieces—rather they were supposed to be taught as literature. As a result, the only skill the students need to learn for passing English at the graduate level is rote-learning (or cheating).

Recommendations: One paper in English of 100 marks should be compulsory in the B.A. pass courses under all the degree-giving universities. This will be a language paper containing some important language elements and items (at an advanced level) already taught at the S.S.C and H.S.C. courses. A small literature section may be added, but the section must contain modern writing suitable to the students in terms of linguistic and thematic difficulties. The section should be mainly used for teaching language—not literature as such. (To be continued)