

Opinion

# BELT—A Programme of BOU

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THE idea of an institutional degree on English language teaching is undoubtedly a novel one in our educational scenario, as the idea of an open university is not much older in our country. For this reason the inauguration of BELT (Bachelor in English Language Teaching) posed as an inspiring news to the English language teaching and learning people of Bangladesh, though, the overall performance of the whole programme, after about two years, proves as a simple failure.

The concept of an open university, where students themselves take responsibility for their own learning under the guidance of the institution, dates back to only 1971 in Britain. Much later in 1993 we decided to establish a university — Bangladesh Open University — having same methods to follow. But as is very usual in any enterprise in our country, Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is failing to fulfil the needs of its large number of students.

Most of the programmes of the university have failed to maintain the time schedule. Supply of books is always uncertain. Inadequate coverage in television and radio programmes are another problem with the university. The staff of the RRCs

(Regional Resource Centres), which are an inseparable components of the open university concept itself, lack everywhere does not provide adequate help to students. Mailing communication between the university and the students also lacks proper attention. The condition of BELT programme is so miserable that it has failed to overcome any of the existing shortcomings of the university.

If we speak the truth we must say that the BOU with introduction of the course on BELT in 1997 has actually started to begetting hundreds of new failures at the same time. The programme, launched in the second half of 1997, was to be finished to 1999. But it is a matter of regret that by April '99 the BOU has only completed the first two semesters out of four. God knows when they will take the first batch of students to their destination.

As BELT mostly emphasizes on the methodology of teaching English, alongwith education in general, all the books of the programme should have their English version. But the BOU has failed to compile and publish all books in English. If we talk about the media programmes we will find them more grievous. The few programmes that have been aired on BTV and

Bangladesh Betar are mostly on the topic how BELT helps one, but not on the subjects of the programme itself.

As regards personal dealings of the office staff we could expect to get helpful behaviour from any one of them. As the students, in need have only one place to go and that is the Regional Resource Centres, the attitude and the behaviour of the staff therein could be all the more helpful. But in reality, students do not get adequate attention.

In the 1st semester examination, where listening test was a part, the authority supplied even to NAEM, the largest and most prominent centre under the BOU a simple cassette player which was out of order. Without a good cassette player how can listening tests go on! And if this is the real situation at even NAEM, what is happening in other centres?

Classes of BELT are scheduled on every first and third Friday of the month. But even such a date is not a rarity on which the RRC people were found going for a picnic without any prior notice to the students about the postponement of classes for that very day.

With all these points of disappointments how can students follow a programme. The consequences can be foreseen right now. The total number of stu-

dents at the time of enrolment has decreased to about a quarter of the number enrolled earlier.

In Bangladesh there is no other curriculum that can be compared to BELT, though training on English teaching is very very necessary and important. We show that we have given much emphasis on English teaching but in reality we have not given the time and money for the upgradation of teaching method of English teachers. Moreover in Bangladesh the teachers who teach English language in different institutions are generally from English literature background. So they need more training on methods of teaching to be good teachers in English. And who does not agree that proper training is a part and parcel of the profession of teaching?

In such a situation in English language teaching — learning BELT is the only hope for teachers of English to learn and use the methods of teaching to convey their knowledge more effectively to their students. But for some unseen reasons, BELT is going to end in smoke. Can't the proper authority come forward and revive this ailing programme, as a healthful one, for the next batches?

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