

English teaching should be in focus, not English version

AN INCREASE in the number of students in the English version of the national curriculum, offered by both government and private aided and unaided, schools, beyond what is offered by privately-run English-medium schools that follow foreign curriculum, is concerning in itself as much as it is in its reinforced introduction in 2010 with the textbook board starting to print translation of Bangla-version textbooks into English. While this stands in breach of the promises of history to impart education through mother tongue and the nation's commitment, as set out in the constitution, towards establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education, this stands chances to create a further division in the education system already divided into the Bangla medium, English medium and two types of madrassah education. In the changed context since 2010, the number of students taking the Primary Education Completion Examinations has more than doubled in the past five years, reaching 10,500 students in 2016 from about 4,700 in 2012 while the number of students taking up secondary education in the English version in 2016 was about 54,000 while the figure was about 33,000 in 2014, based on the demand that the secondary and higher education directorate sent to the textbook board for printing textbooks in English.

A growing preference for the English-version education, as many educationists, teachers and guardians seek to express, results from the 'fast growing demand' for the English language, the assumption that this would open up wide job and tertiary education opportunities to the students and comparatively lower expenses involved in it as opposed to English-medium education proper. While there is no option for students but to learn and master the English language, or any foreign languages for that matter, as it leads the students into a hugely vast repertoire of knowledge, the introduction of English-version education could be no royal road to learning English better. When managers of national education fail to teach students the English language properly — with a paper or two in English spanning all the classes of primary, secondary and higher secondary education for the duration of 12 years — mostly because of flawed teaching method, lack of teacher training and classroom teaching by people who, mostly again, are not adequately proficient in the English language, it is highly unlikely that an English-version system will do the job. Yet what it shows is education managers' neglect about the already existing English course as set out in the national curriculum of the general education system.

Such a failure in the education of English in the general system has made the way for the English-version education, which till date has been mired in problems, where teachers are often reported to give lectures in Bangla for lack of the required proficiency in English. The government, in what has thus come about, must rethink its offering national education in English and instead, must bolster the teaching of English, by revising the syllabus, improving on the teaching method and classroom teaching now employed and arranging for adequate training for the teachers concerned.