

Poor language skills affect higher edn, job

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Poor efficiency of students in both Bangla and English languages significantly affect their tertiary education and job performances in Bangladesh.

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Although both languages are taught from Class I to Class XII, students remain weak in these languages due to crisis of skilled and motivated teachers, relevant education plan, and policy and faulty learning process.

Eminent educationists and government officials also observed that lack of linguistic efficiency had been a socio-political problem rooted in the history of Bangladesh where rulers always neglected the Bangla language.

In the changing socio-economic situation, teachers also do not get respect and proper salaries for doing their work properly, they added.

In these circumstances, the country is going to observe International Mother Language Day tomorrow.

In Bangladesh, the students have to complete 12 years of education with Bangla and English as two compulsory subjects studied all the way from primary to higher secondary levels.

Still, many of them do not achieve the desired skills in these languages as in the later part of their academic life or professional career, they continue to commit silly mistakes in answer scripts for academic entrance examinations, official letters and documents, posters, banners, media productions, novels and even in textbooks.

In the job market, many jobseekers are rejected for not being fluent in speaking English or writing English correctly.

As a result, many offices hire workforces from other countries, including China, India, and Sri Lanka.

Dhaka University professor emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury, one of the country's most prominent public intellectuals, said that the main reason behind this situation was a lack of qualified and motivated teachers.

While teachers are not trained properly for their jobs, many secure jobs by bribing, he said adding that these teachers were rather interested in private tuitions and coaching centres instead of classroom teaching.

'We are a nation where most people's mother language is Bangla, but still this language is being highly neglected here,' Serajul said, adding, 'This is the total failure of the state.'

The National Assessment of Secondary Students--2023, conducted by the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education on 60,000 students of Class VIII and X in 999 secondary schools and madrassahs showed that many students remained weak in Bangla and English languages.

Renowned educationist, author, and former Dhaka University Bangla professor Abul Kashem Fazlul Haque said that during the British and Pakistan periods the priority was given on learning the English language.

Following the Language Movement of 1952, more emphasis was given by intellectuals, especially university teachers and students on the Bangla language in next years, but deep linguistic thinking behind language learning was absent, he said.

After the Liberation War of 1971, instead of giving emphasis on language teaching, developing and creating literature and practice of knowledge with the Bangla language the wealthy group of people -- who included ruling-class people -- started sending their children abroad, Fazlul Haque continued.

'When these people were in the country they talked about patriotism but their minds were in foreign countries,' he said, citing that this was a national problem. 'We lack patriotism,' he added.

The former DU professor added that along with the crisis of competent teachers Bangladesh also did not have a language policy.

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The government on December 23 issued a gazette notification, raising the salaries of the head teachers of all government primary schools to the 10th grade. However, till now, out of about 65,567 government primary schools, the positions of head teachers remained vacant in 32,000 ones.

According to Dhaka University professor Shamsad Mortuza, also vice-chancellor of the University of Liberal Arts, students do not have access to trained teachers.

The classrooms are usually large -- not conducive to learning four skills of writing, reading, speaking, and listening, he said.

'The national curriculum is not ambitious and aggressive enough to teach students at desirable levels,' he said, adding, 'It doesn't dumb the teaching materials down keeping the teachers in mind, allowing the shadow coaching business to thrive.'

The three-medium system, Shamsad also said, is also responsible for learning discrepancy while the government's 'Bangla only policy' has also downgraded the needs of using English at all levels.

Serajul Islam Choudhury also said that teachers in general did not get respect as in the past and they did not get proper salaries as well.

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'In our country, students are not taught literature but people learn language through literature,' he said, adding, 'Literature is entirely neglected here while only grammar and translation are taught here.'

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He also mentioned that students usually got admitted to the Bangla department after not getting chance to any department.

'They have no interest in Bangla as this subject is not helpful in securing jobs,' the professor emeritus observed.

About the wealthy section of people, he said that these people study in English medium schools and they were not bothered about poor language skills.

'This is a socio-political problem,' he added.

International Mother Language Institute director professor Mohammad Ashaduzzaman said that the first problem started at the primary level which has many faults, including lack of education planning and policy, skilled and subject-wise teachers, lack of awareness and problems in curriculum.

'During our time there were some very good teachers who taught grammar by combining relevant history and traditions which made students learn properly and keep them interested,' he said.

English, he also said, is a second language and many students learn it as it is mandatory.

'In remote areas, there are subjects but no teachers,' he said, adding, 'Remote areas also lack skilled teachers as they prefer to stay in the capital for earning more.'

The director said that frequent changes in curriculum and lack of proper training, facilities and salaries for teachers were also deepening the problem of lack of linguistic efficiency.

Mentioning the Bangla Language Introduction Act 1987 and Supreme Court directives issued in 2012 and 2014 requiring the use of Bangla in all spheres of life and stopping distortions of the mother language, he said that these were not being followed.

'We got our language through the Language Movement of 1952 but we are not giving emphasis on Bangla accordingly,' he said, adding that the country needed a language commission.