

A Study on Undergraduate English Curriculum of Bangladesh

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Abstract

As curriculum is a cornerstone of education system, it needs to be reviewed and analyzed from various perspectives. It is expected that it should uphold the expectations of teachers, students and job providers. With rapid development in each sector we can hope for unprecedented development in English curriculum at undergraduate level. There was a time when studying English meant only the study of literature. Now this tendency has turned to the study of language teaching and linguistics because of market demand. English graduates are opting for a variety of professions including teaching and civil service. But the existing curriculum at public and private universities are not adequate to meet the demand of job market as opined by country's leading educationists. In such circumstances it is easily perceivable that existing English curriculum needs to be redesigned and skill-based and job oriented curriculum is much sought-after. A theory-based analysis is most effective as it provides an authentic guideline for necessary reformation. This study undertakes an evaluation of undergraduate English curriculum of selected private and public universities of Bangladesh from theoretical perspectives. Based on document analysis and in-depth interview, this study upholds the drawbacks of present curriculum and recommends necessary steps for developing a job-focused, learner-oriented curriculum.

Keywords: Curriculum, Undergraduate education, Curriculum theories, evaluation.

Introduction

For any progress in education curriculum evaluation and renovation is vital. Curriculum is an overall planning of an educational program. Any curriculum is designed keeping in mind the interest, capability of learners, and global and local needs and perspectives. Curriculum incorporates issues like what to teach, whom to teach, how to teach, with what to teach, who will teach and their qualification, where and how long to teach, and how to evaluate. Curriculum theorists do share a common concern and that is a curriculum should be able 'to promote those skills, competencies, understandings and values which will enable him to grow and prosper' (Ornstein, 1989). Components of a curriculum include aims and objective, learning outcome, content, teaching-learning activity, and evaluation guideline. Textbooks are written in accordance with curriculum. All the activities and development in education sector follow the curriculum. So, curriculum is the blue print of any educational system and it needs to be frequently updated to keep pace with fast-changing world.

Today's job market looks for competent graduates. For producing competent graduates a skill-based, job-focused and morality-driven curriculum is required. A curriculum which combines

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knowledge as well as skill is sought-after by employers of today. For such curriculum, developing curriculum in line with curriculum theories is essential. University English departments in Bangladesh are in dire need of such curriculum which will be learner-centered and which will juxtapose knowledge, skill and morality for producing skilled human resources. That is why an evaluation of existing English curriculum is a pressing need. This study will focus on the evaluation and improvement of existing English curriculum at undergraduate level.

What is Curriculum?

Curriculum is a system where objective of curriculum, learning, content, preparing learning materials, teacher training, infrastructural facilities of institutions, teaching-learning aid, evaluation of learners- all work uniformly and in the same direction (Mia, 1999).

Curriculum refers to “planned educational experiences offered by a school which can take place anywhere at any time in the multiple context of the school (Bhalla, 2007).

As cited in Aryal (2010), Curriculum can be formed at societal level, institutional level, instructional level and experiential level and even at subject level. So there can be curriculum for English, Mathematics etc. The basic components of curriculum are 1) aims, goals and objectives 2) subject matter or contents, 3) learning experiences and 4) evaluation approaches (Bhalla, 2007, 2). These four basic elements are closely related to each other and any standard curriculum should have these four elements.

Curriculum Theories in Brief

Franklin Bobbitt (1918) is the pioneer in theorizing curriculum. To Bobbitt, curriculum should outline the knowledge important for each subject and then develop appropriate activities. William Kilpatrick (1925) thinks that curricula are purposeful activities which are learner-centered. The purpose of the curriculum is learner development and growth. Harold Rugg (1930) opines that curriculum should develop the whole learner and it is learner-centered considers students' interests and needs, deals with issues of modern life, enables students to think critically. John Dewey (1920) theorizes that the initial step of formulating a curriculum should not be goal setting rather it should be an examination of the relationship between the child and subject. To him a curriculum should be borne out of the child's "own social activities" and not school subjects nor current whims and needs. Dewey's ideal curriculum is a flexible process in which the child is an active participant and the educator guides and directs the child through carefully selected and organized socially relevant experiences.

One of the best known curriculum theories was introduced in 1949 by Ralph Tyler (1902-1994). He has developed 4 steps of curriculum development:

1. Selection of aims, goals and objectives
2. Selection of learning experiences and content
3. Organization of learning experiences and
4. Evaluation

Hilda Taba (1962): proposed another detailed theory for curriculum development in 1962. She believed that teachers teach the curriculum and that is why they should participate in developing

it instead of higher authority. She proposed a 7-step model of curriculum development which starts with needs analysis.

Ornstein (1987): theorizes that curriculum theory must be blended with practice. Good theory must help practitioners analyze and synthesize data, organize concepts and principles that exist in the field.

Key Facts of Curriculum Theories

- Curriculum planners should take into account learners' interest and local and global needs into consideration.
- Certain steps should be followed while developing curriculum.
- Teachers' participation is necessary in any curriculum development.
- It must have linkage with social affairs and it must be practically applicable.
- Any curriculum should have four elements according to Tyler.

Rationale of the Study

Any curriculum cannot continue for a long time. As curriculum development process is a continuous process, it needs to be reformed in course of time and incorporate various changes to meet the demand of age. Otherwise, it will become backdated and learners will not be able to be benefitted by this. That is why, curriculum should undergo evaluation time to time and necessary changes should be therein. Brown (1989) defines Curriculum Evaluation in this way, "the systematic collection and analysis of all the necessary information to promote the improvement of the curriculum and assess its effectiveness within the context of the particular institutions involved." English studies is a dynamic field and the curriculum should be overhauled every now and then (Alam, 2005).

Undergraduate English Education in Bangladesh: Past and Present

Studying English at undergraduate level has always been considered prestigious to admission seekers. English is regarded as royal department to them. It is widely believed that a degree in English can ensure a good job. The first English department in Bangladesh was established in Rajshahi College in the early 20th Century which was under Calcutta University. The second English department started in Dhaka University in 1921. Then Rajshahi, Chittagong, and Jahangirnagar University English departments came into being in 1953, 1963 and 1970 respectively (Yeasmin, 2011). Almost all the general universities offer 4 year honours and one-year masters in English.

Many English education has undergone changes. There was a time when study of English meant the study of literature only. The study of the syllabuses of the English departments of Dhaka University, Rajshahi University, Chittagong University and Jahangirnagar University of 70's, 80's, 90's and the current years show that primarily a purely literature syllabus has changed to a more comprehensive syllabus containing language, linguistics, phonetics and phonology, cultural studies and many more (juenglish). Now some universities are offering cultural studies and media studies as allied subjects.

Defining “Undergraduate ” Program

Griffith University defines the term “undergraduate” in this way:

An undergraduate is the description given to a student who is undertaking a degree level academic course at a college or university. Following completion of the relevant examinations, you can enter a third level institution as an undergraduate student. An undergraduate course is typically three or four years’ duration. When you undertake an undergraduate degree you benefit by obtaining a comprehensive introduction to your chosen area of study in the first year. This foundation is built on in subsequent years, advancing your knowledge and, depending on the course content, you can gain practical skills that will be required in your future career.

According to National Education Policy 2010 of Bangladesh there are three tiers of Education Level in Bangladesh, i.e., primary level, secondary level and tertiary level (University Education). From the definition provided above it is clear that ‘undergraduate’ refers to the four-year integrated honours program (for MBBS and B.Arch it is 5- year program) offered in various private and public universities from Bangladesh perspective. In this study, 4-year honours program in English taught in private and public universities in Bangladesh has been taken into consideration.

Objectives of the Study

- Examine the existing English curriculum of selected universities in the light of curriculum theories/models.
- Evaluate to what extent the present curriculum matches professional demand and learners’ needs.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following six research questions.

- Does the existing English curriculum cater for the national Education Policy objectives?
- Does the existing English curriculum properly follow curriculum theory?
- Are the steps of curriculum development properly followed?
- Does the existing English curriculum help to promote learners’ values?
- Does the existing English curriculum sufficiently promote language skills development of the learners ?
- Does the curriculum take into consideration students’ academic and professional needs of English?

Literature Review

Kawser (2014) has undertaken a case study research on curriculum development in higher education. This study investigates how curriculum is perceived in history as a discipline and how faculty members engage themselves in its development in History department of Dhaka University. The findings show that the faculty members mainly understand curriculum as syllabus and the curriculum development in History department is focused on the content of the curriculum. So, the teachers are developing a content-based curriculum. The study underpins the

importance of introducing wider and varied pedagogical experiences among faculty members to support fruitful curriculum development for future.

Mamun (2015) conducted a study on designing a needs-based syllabus for tertiary education in Bangladesh by analyzing the target and present situation. The study took into consideration current syllabuses of 8 universities and analyzed those. From chapter outline it is revealed that this study is not job oriented and focuses more on reforming the strategies for developing 4 basic skills.

If there is lack of management in ELT program implementation, students are the worst sufferer which is found in a study. Yulia (2014) conducted a study on 12 selected schools in Indonesia which aimed at evaluating ELT programs in junior high schools. It was found that the decentralization in education created challenges for school authority and individual student. Teachers' limited capacity in teaching was a major finding. A lack of systematic implementation of ELT program and inadequate facilities in school were found.

Fakhrul (2008) in a write-up says that modernization of curriculum in the light of new knowledge is one of the essential tasks of any education system and curriculum of higher education should be regularly updated so that it can incorporate the contributions of modern knowledge and research and make its standard acceptable to the outside world. He accepts that curricular reforms were there in past in Bangladesh but no radical reform was done. He also makes some valuable observations regarding the bottlenecks of curriculum development in higher education.

Choi and Lee (2008) undertook a study which surveyed the current trend and issues in English language education in Asia and surveyed on 16 nations. It took into consideration the following aspects: class hours, national curriculum, textbooks, medium of instruction, university entrance examination, tertiary English education and the use of computer in English education. It found that all the nations use national English curriculum for primary and secondary education which, it says, an effective and efficient means for achieving national educational goals. It says that in Bangladesh university EGP or EAP course are instructed both in English and Bangla. This study shows that tertiary English course are EGP courses in most of the Asian countries including Bangladesh and raises a question on the aim of tertiary education. This study is not a penetrating study, rather a general picture of English language education in Asia has been found.

Alam (2005) in his article pointed out the importance for curriculum renewal at English department of Bangladeshi universities. He is quite vocal in this article about the 'antediluvian English curriculum' at Dhaka University and shows how our curriculum is lagging behind. He emphasized upon the need for curriculum reform to keep pace with job market requirements. Also the position of literary topics in curriculum has been discussed and the decreasing attitude of students towards these literary topics has been focused. He also advised how to make existing curriculum lucrative by introducing some advanced level courses after reviewing top ranking foreign university curriculum.

Research Gap

Based on the literature review conducted, it can be said that hardly any study has been done on English curriculum evaluation at undergraduate level in Bangladesh from a wider perspective taking into consideration the different dimensions of curriculum, curriculum theories and curriculum planning. No study has been found on present demands of English skills required in job market, effectiveness of materials and methods used in English teaching-learning and efficacy of present curriculum. So, there is a huge research gap regarding English curriculum evaluation in the light of curriculum theories and other crucial factors.

Methodology and Research Design

This is a qualitative research based on document analysis and in-depth interview. Both primary and secondary data have been used.

Sampling

For document analysis, English Curricula of two public universities and two private universities have been chosen purposively. As any standard curriculum must have four basic elements, the selected curricula of the universities were analysed to find whether they have those four elements and whether they are developed following curriculum theories.

In-depth interviews of one leading ELT expert and one Professor of English of a leading public university have been conducted for this study.

Research Tools:

A check list has been prepared for document analysis where syllabuses of selected universities have been analyzed. For conducting in-depth interview an interview guideline (see appendix) has been prepared following Chicago Manual (8th Edition).

Findings and Discussion

Findings from Document Analysis: Curricula of selected universities have been analyzed keeping in mind the four basic elements of a standard curriculum: Aims and objectives, course contents, teaching methodology and assessment process. Curriculum of two public universities and two private universities were studied minutely for this research.

Aims and Objectives: It is found that no university had anything as aims and objectives in their curriculum. No terminal competency was found. One private university just mentioned some characteristics of the 4-year BA program in English. Another public university mentioned some code of conduct and rules for registration and examination at the very outset, but nothing was there called 'Aims and Objectives'.

Course Contents: At present all the public universities (except technical universities) and most of the private universities offer 4-year BA in English (UGC Report 2014). In the course content, they put the course code and course title and credit hour. Some reference books are also placed there. Students can choose ELT stream in 4th year in public universities. Private universities offer both language and literature courses, though literature dominates.

From an analysis of course contents it is clear that literature-oriented courses dominate and some language-based course are also there, though not appropriate. 'We are far from achieving the perfect English curriculum for our universities' (Alam, 2005). One private university offers with specialization in language, literature and Media and Cultural Studies. Its courses are a bit different from those of public universities which are intensely literature-dominated. Considering market demand some ELT courses are also offered in private universities. A fully literature-based course content is not needed for students. Alam (2005) has questioned the traditional fully literature-based English education in this way 'In rethinking the English curriculum in our country, we must confront a few questions immediately... what are their needs? How much language work do they require and what should be the size of the literature part of their syllabus?' This shows that Bangladesh needs to rethink about changing the literature-dominated English curriculum. It also proves that language skills of graduates are not fully developed in traditional English course where there are inadequate courses on four language skills development. Course contents are not diversified and skill-oriented. No English departments found offering dual major.

Teaching-Learning: Nothing was found in the public university curriculum about teaching-learning method. Nothing is there regarding the role of teachers and students. Classroom condition, teaching method, teacher-student ratio, class duration, teachers' qualification, admission process and students' educational requirements are totally absent there.

Evaluation: In the document analysis, it is found that public universities are following summative evaluation method where examination is held at the end of the year. Students take it for granted that maximum weightage is on the year-end final examination. At the end of each year tutorial examination and viva-voce are taken.

Findings from In-depth Interview

Regarding existing English curriculum Respondent One said:

English departments in Bangladeshi universities do not have fully developed curriculum. The existing curriculum just focuses on course contents. It does not have any aims and objectives. So, we are heading towards nowhere. Students are learning English for becoming civil servants for four years. While developing curriculum students' interests and local and global needs have not been considered. That's why our students are not getting interest in class. The typical English curriculum has not been developed following curriculum theories where aims and objectives comes first. (R1)

R1 said regarding skill development in this way:

Four language skills are not developed in current system. Speaking is highly neglected. Our students know a lot about Shakespeare but are afraid about presentation before audience. Their inter-personal skills and other soft skills are not developed which are highly sought-after now-a-days. This encourages memorization and suggestion practice. That's why a change is very required. (R1)

Learner satisfaction is vital in any program. R1 said:

Our learners in English department are not getting interest as courses are not attractive to them. One of my students was interested in corporate job, but his literature background

hardly helps him pursue his dream. Students of English are opting for diverse profession now a days. So, their course content needs to be in line with the demand of job sectors they prefer. (R1)

Regarding learner-centered curriculum design, R2 said:

Main defect in the present course design is that it is not learner-centered. Students of today may not have interest in Bewoulf but he will have interest in Basics of Multimedia or journalism. So, in English curriculum dual major or free electives can be introduced which will allow students to have diverse scope to enhance potentiality in job market. So, student involvement is a must in curriculum.(R2)

Major Findings of This Study at a Glance

- Present English curriculum does not concentrate on skill development much.
- English graduates are kept confined to civil service and teaching. They are not prepared to enter diverse work force.
- Encourages rote memorization and ‘suggestion culture’
- Public university’s English curriculum is mostly literature dominated and lack skill, job and morality related courses. Private universities are introducing open electives which open doors to diverse profession choice for graduates.
- Existing curriculum does not fully fulfill the objectives of National Education Policy 2010 and SDG
- No English departments have fully developed curriculum. They use syllabus and curriculum interchangeably. English curriculum has no ‘aims and objectives’ which is a serious flaw. This is one of the major findings of this study.
- More knowledge-based courses and less activity-oriented courses (inspires cognitive development)
- While selecting the courses students’ interests not taken into consideration. No needs analysis has been done.
- The course contents do not reflect the skills highly sought after by employers.
- It does not follow the curriculum development theories. Steps of curriculum development have not been followed.
- It does not take into consideration the professional needs of learners’ and needs of society and global needs as well.

Recommendations

- Before designing a curriculum, situation analysis and needs analysis should be carried out.
- English as a foreign language is very important in Bangladesh and much emphasis should be there on developing communicative competence of learners, development of speech and solid understanding and using the language smoothly in any situation. Equal importance should be given on language exercise and apprehend literature. Course designers should give more focus on this.
- English curriculum has no 'Aims and objectives', so a careful and insightful effort should be given to formulate this most important part of curriculum.
- Teachers' involvement should be made sure in curriculum development process.
- Course contents should be changed and emphasis on literature should be minimized and more skill development courses should be included. Dual major and open electives can be included.
- More real-life and case study based study materials should be used in classroom and instead of year-end examination, more emphasis can be given on tutorials, assignments, presentations and class tests.
- Industry linkage should be given priority and students exposure to real-life situations should be increased.
- Teachers' efficiency can be enhanced through continuous foreign training and research opportunities.

Conclusion

Curriculum remains at the center of education system and any improvement in education must focus upon curriculum evaluation. A better curriculum can lead a country to a better future. Curriculum is basically for learners, not for bureaucrats. Teacher-involvement and student-involvement in curriculum development should be ensured. If policy makers, academics, experts, teachers and students are aware of the need for a revised English curriculum and are able to detect the drawbacks of existing curriculum, they will try together for a massive change. The findings of this study show a grim picture in English education in Bangladesh where memorization is encouraged and skill development is absent. Findings of this study will act as a catalyst for the policy makers and academics to think deeply about the existing incomplete, literature-oriented curriculum and take initiative for introducing and implementing a revised, skill-oriented English curriculum. The researcher is hopeful that this study would add new concepts to the existing knowledge and the findings would be helpful to the policy makers and curriculum developers.

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Appendices

Appendix-1

Interview Guideline

1. What is your comment about present English course design in your university?
2. What are the drawbacks?
3. Do you think students enjoy the program?
4. What is the majority of them thinking about their career?
5. Is there any unified curriculum in your department?
6. Is it revised regularly?
7. Do the teachers take part in revision?
8. Is the course literature oriented or language oriented or mixed?
9. It is found that there is no goals and objective in the curriculum. Please comment.
10. Do you think students of this generation will like to read *Bewoulf* or *The Fairie Queen*? What is your suggestion for improving the situation?

Appendix-2

Checklist for Document Analysis

1. What are the courses that the syllabus contains?
2. Is the syllabus a purely literature one, or a language syllabus, or a combination of both?
3. Does the syllabus suggest appropriate classroom pedagogy for individual courses?
4. Is the syllabus learner-centered?
5. Is there much scope for 4 basic language skill development?
6. Is there goals and objectives at the beginning of the curriculum of the department?
7. Is the curriculum capable of producing skilled graduates for present job market?
8. Are the courses diverse in nature?

Appendix-3

English Syllabuses Evaluated through the Checklist

1. BA Honours Programme, Jahangirnagar University, 2014-15
2. BA Honours Programme, Jahangirnagar University, 2015-16
3. BA Honours Programme, Jahangirnagar University, 2016-17
4. BA Honours Programme, Chittagong University, 2013-14
5. BA Honours Programme, Chittagong University, 2014-15
6. BA Honours Programme, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, 2017
7. BA Honours Programme, East West University, 2016