|| Journal of ELT and Education || JEE-2(2), June-2019, Page: 90-97
ISSN (Print): 2618-1290, ISSN (Online): 2663-1482, ISSN-L: 2618-1290

English Language Teachers' Requirements to Implement the Present Curriculum at the HSC Level in Bangladesh

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[**Citation:** Rahman, M. H., Obaidullah, Sk., & Noman, M. N. H. (2019). English Language Teachers' Requirements to Implement the Present Curriculum at the HSC Level in Bangladesh. *Journal of ELT and Education*, *2*(2)**:** 90-97.]

RECORDS:

Received:
30.04.2019

Accepted:
26.06.2019

Published:
30.06.2019

Abstract

The present qualitative study aims at addressing the requirements of the English language teachers to implement the present curriculum at the HSC level in Bangladesh. The study conducted semi-structured interviews with twelve experienced English teachers who have been teaching English at higher secondary level in urban and rural areas. Content analysis was employed to analyze the data to show that teachers perceived the features like mastery of the target language, good knowledge of pedagogy, ability to use the technological tools and the ability to use techniques and methods as well as a good personality are the main requirements of an English language teacher. The results suggested that ensuring the fulfillment of the requirements of the language teachers may help the national language curriculum to be more applicable and implementable.

Keywords: *Language curriculum, implementation, requirements, EFL teachers*

1. Introduction

English language has become the most crucial gear of this new communication euphoria. This is high time that we see the future development of English as a world language and take proper initiatives to develop our learners to a global standard. It can be done by upgrading English teaching and learning capacity. The government of Bangladesh is very much concerned with the idea. In the HSC level, the English course is designed following communicative method of English teaching and learning with a view to developing four language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. The objective of the course is to make the students competent in English. But the output is contrary the expectation. So, we can assume that there are some difficulties in implementing the present curriculum. We know

that many stakeholders are involved in curriculum policy making and its subsequent implementation and they all are more or less responsible for this failure. The English language teachers are the most crucial part of this curriculum development and implementation process. Without fulfilling the requirements, the English language teachers, we can never expect the success of the present curriculum. The proposed research work will manifest and reveal some requirements of the in-service English language teachers at the HSC level in Bangladesh.

1.1. Existing HSC Curriculum and its objectives

Across the world the term curriculum is used in several different ways. In some countries 'curriculum' has a holistic meaning encompassing not only subjects, but also the connections between subjects, teaching methods and all aspects of schooling that result in the educational experience the learner receives. In contrast, in other countries a narrower interpretation is used, referring either to a prescribed range of courses or a specific learning program. However, the adoption of the first National Education Policy 2010 added with the changes in different aspects of life, knowledge, and civilization has called for a new English curriculum in Bangladesh. As a result, English curriculums for classes 1-10 have newly been developed following the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach already in practice since 1996. This document i.e. the English curriculum for classes 11-12, is consistent with the curriculum for classes 1 to 10 in respect of content and pedagogy. However, it addresses the concerns of language practitioners, teachers, students, and other stakeholders by including a variety of reading materials, literary pieces, and blending of formal grammar with communicative language practices. The objectives of the present curriculum are given below:

a. To acquire competence in four language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing
b. To use the competence for effective communication in real life situations locally and globally at intermediate level.
c. To acquire necessary grammar competence in English language for better accuracy.
d. To use English literary pieces for enjoyment and language learning.
e. To develop creativity and critical thinking through English language.
f. To become independent learners of English by using reference skills.
g. To use language skills for higher studies and technical education.
h. To be skilled in inter-cultural communications for better access to the globalized world.
i. To use English language skills for lifelong learning where necessary

1.2. Stakeholders in Curriculum Policymaking and Implementation

From curriculum policymaking to its implementation, at each stage there are various stakeholders (i.e., those involved in curricular innovation) at different levels during the process. These stakeholders, identified by Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991), consist of government, trustees, principals, parents and community, teachers, and students. Tanner and Tanner (1995) added other individuals or groups to this list. These included public and private interest groups, media, private foundations, external testing agencies, publishers, business and industry, researchers, and authors of curriculum materials. These combined lists reveal that many stakeholders are involved in curriculum policy making and its subsequent implementation. Markee (1992) mentioned that the actual participants in the implementation of any given curriculum innovation vary from context to context. Under a specific context, participants "tend to assume certain social roles which define their relationships with other

participants" (p. 230). Widdowson (1992) pinpointed the importance of taking into consideration teachers' roles in relation to other participants, such as policymakers, researchers, materials designers, and learners involved in the educational process. He raised the question of what the proper professional role of teachers should be, what provisions should be made to sustain and develop teachers in that role, and whether it is more concerned with the macro-level of curriculum planning or with the micro-level of classroom practices. In fact, the irreplaceable role of teachers in curriculum development, especially at the implementation phase, has been increasingly recognized by policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders. "Teachers make important decisions with consequences for students. In the classroom, they do so behind closed doors. No one can control all of the specific decisions that teachers make, even during a highly specified instructional episode" (Tanner & Tanner, 1995, p. 619). Failure to involve teachers in the formulation of curriculum policy could result in a situation where teachers change, reject, or ignore curriculum innovation when it is to be implemented in their classrooms. Therefore, as in other educational contexts, teachers are definitely the most important stakeholders in carrying out the intended curriculum proposed by the policymakers. They decide if and then how they will implement the required curriculum. So, their roles should not be overlooked and the requirements of the teachers must be fulfilled.

2. Objectives

The general objective of the current paper was to explore the teachers' requirements to implement the present curriculum at the HSC level in Bangladesh. Specific objectives were to examine the overall scenario of teaching English language at the HSC level in Bangladesh compared to the present curriculum, to find out teachers' requirement to teach English language at the HSC level according to the curriculum and to suggest research-based recommendations

3. Literature Review

In second/foreign language education, a large number of studies have been carried out to date so as to investigate the requirements of English language teachers in implementing a language curriculum. Learning to teach, likened to a journey to becoming a teacher (Freese, 2006), is a complex process throughout which necessary teaching knowledge and skills gained and conceptions about the nature of learning and teaching are formed (Collins, Selinger, & Pratt, 2001). That is, a teacher has to learn throughout to fulfill some requirements to be a competent teacher. Teachers' well-developed visions are also very important requirement to be a competent teacher. Vision, though rooted in beliefs, is different from beliefs since it is a teacher's personal commitment to inspire children (Fairbanks, et al., 2010). For example, Shulman and Shulman (2004) describe it as images of particular learning activities that represent how the teacher will teach. Fairbanks and colleagues (2010) further claim that "vision may take teachers beyond knowledge, instilling in them a commitment to inspire students to be something more than just academically competent" (p. 164).

The Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE) initiated a project to restructure education in 1999. Within the scope of this project, national teacher standards have been finalized and endorsed in 2006. The generic teaching competencies have been collected under six basic domains as "Personal and Professional Values-Professional Development", "Knowing the Student", "Learning and Teaching Process", "Monitoring and Evaluation of Learning and Development", "School-Family and Society Relationships", and "Knowledge of Curriculum and Content", which were further divided into sub competencies and for each

sub-competence performance indicators were defined (MoNE, 2006). In a study conducted by Şallı-Çopur (2008) it was found that the EFL graduates perceived themselves competent in most of HEC's competence areas, while they need improvement for competencies of language knowledge, spoken use of English, classroom management, assessment and instruction. In a recent study, Kızılaslan (2011) explored senior EFL student teachers 'competencies regarding teaching of the four language skills and she found a misfit between the competencies required by the Ministry and the competencies exhibited by the student and teachers. Johnson (2001) in his study on the secondary English language teachers in Ukraine finds that the trained teachers are more efficient than non-trained teachers in handling English classes. Teachers who have a very good English medium background are the best for teaching the students to acquire a language. And this brief review of the existing relevant literature is supposed to contribute to conducting the present study, especially by lending support to or contradicting its findings that would lead to inferences, implications and constructive recommendations as well.

4. Methodology

To achieve the research objectives of this study, twelve English language teachers were selected for a semi-structured interview. Those faculty members were selected who had had most vast experience of teaching English at the HSC level and who had participated in different training programs on ELT. For the analysis of data, themes were identified in the interview responses and reported thereon in the study. The interviews were audio recorded and were transcribed the earliest possible time. The earlier interviews provided some additional points that were added in the subsequent interviews. For the purpose of observing research ethics, the names of participants were kept secret. Hence the twelve participants were pseudonym as R1, R2, … R12

Table-1: Demographic information of the interviewees

Sl. No/ Names	College location	Gender	Academic Qualification	Teaching Experience (Years)
R1	Urban	Male	Masters	10
R2	Urban	Male	PhD	12
R3	Urban	Female	Masters	08
R4	Urban	Female	Masters	11
R5	Urban	Male	Masters	11
R6	Urban	Male	PhD	10
R7	Rural	Female	Masters	08
R8	Rural	Male	Masters	08
R9	Rural	Male	Masters	10
R10	Rural	Female	Masters	08
R11	Rural	Male	Masters	10
R12	Rural	Female	Masters	08

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Results of Teachers' Interview

For analyzing the data for this study, the researchers read through all the information gathered from the completed transcripts of the interviews. As the researchers belong to the same professional group and have a similar background as those of the participants, he holds an insider's understanding of the participants' beliefs and perceptions. His teaching

experience in EFL settings was valuable in perceiving and interpreting the significance of the data obtained in the interviews. In addition, the review of the related literature provided guidelines for data analysis. The major requirements that the interview respondents reported in English teaching at the HSC level included: training, ability to arrange proper classroom activities, being patient and flexible, caring about the students' needs, having positive attitudes towards the learners and being smart and creative, having adequate knowledge in using technological tools.

Clearly, teachers of the higher secondary students need the appropriate training to be able to meet their students' language and learning needs and to facilitate academic growth, yet most teachers lack this training. One of the participants from rural area said,

> *… … … Without teacher training, effective teaching cannot be ensured. Though some institutions are training the teachers, most of the teachers teaching in rural areas can not avail themselves of the opportunity.*

Most of the respondents believe that a sound knowledge on language teaching methodologies is required to be a good teacher. One of the respondents said,

> *… … … Effective English language teachers must be open minded and use a variety of methods in teaching without sticking to a particular method. They must also have a positive view toward their students.*"

And a teacher, as an example, commented,

> *… … … A teacher should be optimistic. He should also welcome student's mistakes and try to put himself in his students' shoes*.

Some of the interview respondents also put importance on a teacher being friendly, but at the same time they emphasize on the ability to control a classroom. One of the respondents said,

> *… … … Teachers should be kind and flexible towards students to create a more friendly and non-threatening atmosphere in their classes, but at the same time they should be effective in controlling their class skillfully.*

Teachers also must be aware of the core similarities and differences between first, second language and foreign language development in order to choose materials and activities that promote development. One interviewee said that,

> *… … … I do not design my classroom activities, considering whether I am teaching a foreign language or a second language. I think most of the teachers do not have clear idea about the differences between a second language and a foreign language.*

The teachers must have the ability to make his lecture interesting. One interviewee said,

> *… … … Teacher needs to maintain pleasant and learning atmosphere in the classrooms, barring occasional misunderstanding for the students because of their lack of empathy.*

Many of the respondents associated subject matter with the personality of the teacher, and that the teacher's positive and favorable personality psychologically influences the learners' effective learning. It could even cause the students to decide to choose a particular field of study, as one of the experienced teachers argued:

> *… … … A teacher's personality is very important and could influence their efficacy a lot. When I was in high school, I had an English teacher who was very knowledgeable as well as kind and caring about her students. She was loved by her students and everybody was learning her lessons well. She had such a good personality that I always wished to be a teacher like her. So, I made her a role model for myself and came to university to study English.*

Besides, a teacher needs to plan the lessons according to the students' level, learning pace and needs. Teaching materials and methods to be used in a language classroom should

be interactive, interesting, entertaining and more importantly authentic. One of the respondents said,

> *… … … I like to utilize technological tools in my lessons, because I believe that electronic materials and software will help me actively involve my students into the lesson.*

Moreover, from the analysis of the collected data , it is seen that most of the experienced respondents believe that under the theme of becoming a teacher, the most frequently repeated requirement is "professional development" which is related to the need of being up-to-date and keeping up with the changes and innovations while practicing as a teacher. As one of the respondents said,

> *… … … As a teacher, I know that I should keep myself educated through constant reading and learning about new ways of teaching English. But I am well aware of the fact that reading is not enough, therefore I would like to be more involved in educational activities, attend educational talks and participate in forums or conferences to further expand my knowledge.*

The researchers believe that the teachers must have a working knowledge of academic language and of the particular type of language used for instruction as well as for the cognitively demanding tasks typically found in textbooks, classrooms, assessments, and those necessary for engagement in discipline-specific areas. Thus, the results of the present study show that the successful implementation of the present curriculum at the HSC level is possible if the requirements of the teachers are fulfilled. Teachers' role is no doubt the most crucial factor for teaching and implementing a curriculum. So, the requirements related to their knowledge and training play an important role in the process.

6. Recommendations

As seen in the study, a number of requirements of the in-service language teachers have been related to various teaching competencies with some other areas like "the ability to work with diverse population". Without the complete fulfilment of the requirements, it difficult for CLT to be integrated into English teaching classrooms at the HSC level in Bangladesh. However, the researchers narrowed my focus to the following requirements he believes to be most important. It is simply what he feels constitutes the most important requirements in our profession based on his experience as an English language educator, my observations, and on my research.

6.1. Professional development

In the process of effective integration of CLT into English teaching in Bangladesh and to implement the curriculum, special attention should be paid teacher training. Markee (2001) puts forward that teachers can more easily change their values and help bring about deeper changes if they understand why there is the need to change (p. 120). Therefore, the most effective way to implement the language curriculum is to provide in-service teachers with opportunities to retrain themselves in CLT to ensure their professional development.

6.2. Professional Knowledge

Shulman (1986) has identified seven types of knowledge that highly effective teachers must have. According to him, teachers need knowledge about the content they are teaching, the curriculum, materials, and programs, the broad principles and strategies that constitute classroom management and organization, the student population, the particular educational context they are teaching in, educational aims and values and pedagogical content knowledge. It should be a special mix of content and pedagogy unique to teachers. According

to Pasternak and Bailey (2004), teachers need both declarative and procedural knowledge to function effectively in their classrooms. Declarative knowledge refers to knowledge about the content area they are teaching whereas procedural knowledge refers to the ability to do things in the classroom. The researchers believe that the sound professional knowledge is at the pick of the requirement a language teacher need to develop himself. As a part of sustaining sound professional knowledge, teachers must recognize the importance of professional development and keeping up-to-date with technology.

6.3. Personality

Weinstein (1998) conducted a study which identified 10 characteristics "good teachers" were thought to have (as cited in Brown & Rodgers, 2002, p. 153). Seven out of the ten characteristics related to personality. The Weinstein study found personality factors like patience, warmth, creativity, humor, and outgoingness to be indicative of effective teaching. Considering his research work and the findings of this research, it can be concluded that a good personality is an important requirement of a language teacher.

6.4. Ability to Control the Class

A good teacher is one who can organize and manage his classroom, engage students in the lesson, and keep up a fast-paced momentum. Teachers with this quality are ones who can multitask, use their time most effectively, and adapt to the changing needs and demands of their job and the profession.

6.5. Good Communication Skills

Highly effective teachers must be good communicators as they are required to articulate ideas, talk about issues, and express their beliefs and values about teaching. As the present curriculum aims at developing the communicative competence of the students, the teachers must have the skill of good communication to teach the students effectively.

6.6. Smartness

Smart teachers are those who have knowledge about what is happening around them (knowledge of the students, the school, the community, and the cultural environment), and they combine this knowledge with common sense to solve problems. Smart teachers are also politically savvy in that they are familiar with their institutional culture and they know which materials and topics to avoid both in class and in the workplace, and which battles to fight.

6.7. Commitment to Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is now recognized by educators, governing bodies, accreditation organizations, certification boards, employers and the general public as one of the most important competencies that people must possess (Collins, 2009). This is a requirement that ensures that the teachers are concerned with their self- and professional development and regularly reflect on what they do in their classrooms. They also engage in strategic career planning, which, for many teachers, means assuming a leadership position. If the requirements are fulfilled, the teachers can be considered effective enough to create an avenue of successful curriculum implementation. To summarize, the teachers need to believe in their own ability to make a difference in their students' lives.

7. Conclusion

The present study confirmed that the teachers working in EFL settings felt that their concerns, questions, and English teaching issues pertaining to EFL contexts are not sufficiently addressed in the existing literature. The participants of this study highlighted only their requirements as an English language teacher at the HSC level. Hence, more attention

should be paid to research which primarily deals with the special features of English learning and teaching in EFL situations. As the present study was carried out, it became evident that there were many relevant questions that remained unanswered, which could potentially serve as research questions for related studies.

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