ICT in Teaching English at Secondary Education of Bangladesh: A Case Study on Two Intermediate Colleges of Narayanganj District

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Abstract

This study explores the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching English as a foreign language at higher secondary level in the context of Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh has formulated two policies regarding ICT (ICT Policy2009) and education (National Education Policy 2010) where the use of ICT in teaching is emphasized. The policies together uphold the importance of English as well the ICT to make Bangladesh a middle-income country by 2021. This study followed qualitative approach of research and employed interviews and observation methods to collect data. Four English teachers' classroom teaching was observed and a total of seven participants were interviewed. The seven interviewees include four English teachers, two head teachers, and one Upazila Secondary Education Officer (USEO). The study showed that the teachers were apathetic towards the use of ICT; there was a lack of ICT equipment in the colleges; and teachers did not have sufficient training on ICT.

Keywords: *EFL, ICT, Teaching English, Secondary Education.*

1. Introduction

The most remarkable components of education nowadays are ICT and English whatever the course is. This is now well recognized that learning through the use of ICT is fundamental to life in our modern technological society. In modern education system, ICT is regarded as a valuable tool to enhance teaching and learning. Therefore, teaching English through ICT is a popular idea in teaching English as a foreign language. Bangladesh government has adopted a policy of teaching using ICT and established multimedia classrooms almost in every secondary and higher secondary school around the country. All teachers including the English teachers in those higher secondary schools are supposed to use ICT in teaching. The government has so far trained around 20000 teachers of different subjects to enable them to use ICT in teaching (http://a2i.pmo.gov.bd). Yet the question is how the multimedia technology is being used to make the utmost benefit for learners of a foreign language. The use of Internet in the classrooms is also questioned.

With the emergence of Internet technology, the citizens are now called as 'netizen' due to their virtual living in the world of global network. Uninterrupted access to 'world wide web' including social network sites has made the life of a fellow being of today's world easier in many ways. To prepare the students to be lifelong learners as SDG 4 indicates and to be the global citizens, our education system must successfully integrate ICT in implementing English curriculum.

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Many experts and practitioners of education strongly support teaching and learning English language through ICT to improve efficiency and effectiveness of learning (Khan S H, 2014). Integration of ICT in the field of language teaching and learning is inevitable as ICT and language learning are the aspects which support each other.

1.1. Bangladesh ICT Education Policy 2010

The government of Bangladesh adopted National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy-2009 considering ICT as an essential means of economic and social development (Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology of Bangladesh, 2009). This policy recommends strategies for integrating ICT into all public sectors of Bangladesh, such as business, social welfare, and education. In regard to the education sector, the policy aims to develop citizens' computer literacy and encourage research and development work through ICT. It advocates ICT courses in primary, secondary, technical and vocational education. With a view to integrating ICT in education, the policy suggests preparing digital learning content, such as e-books in Bengali scripts and disseminating those in schools. The policy mandated the preparation of multimedia-based content and materials for the teacher training programs. To encourage teachers to use ICT in classrooms, the policy advises providing them with ICT loans and incentives so that they can buy ICT equipment and prepare resources for multimedia based classroom environments. It also recommends peer-learning methods and action research as key strategies for teachers to use ICT in classrooms. For building a better infrastructure, the policy proposes setting up a central online database of digitally developed learning materials, e-books, and lesson plans. As the policy considers ICT as a fundamental skill of the 21st century, it recommends developing the infrastructure in schools and teachers' training institutions through the provision of computers, local area networks, and Internet connections.

The National Education Policy-2010 of Bangladesh also emphasizes on the integration of ICT in the education system recommending that ICT is one of the most important elements to enhance the quality of education (Ministry of Education of Bangladesh). In the first chapter of the policy (the Goals and Objectives of Education), it has 30 general objectives of education and the twenty-first objective narrates increase of the use of ICT as a teaching-learning tool in all levels of education (page 2). In chapter four, the policy proposes to introduce ICT as a compulsory subject in the secondary curriculum and recommends that the Government provide the necessary ICT infrastructure in schools. In order to prepare the teachers for teaching with and about ICT, it proposes to modernize the teacher education curriculum and syllabus with ICT knowledge and skills (Chapter 24 'Teachers' Training'). Chapter 12 states two specific objectives of ICT education: creating international standard ICT-experts and prioritization of knowledge pertaining to not only computer science, but also a wide range of communication technologies, such as mobile and telecommunication technologies, radio, and television. In order to introduce ICT to children, the policy recommends including ICT as a teaching-learning tool within primary schools.

The Government of Bangladesh introduced Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach for teaching English at primary and secondary levels of education. This approach requires interactive classroom activities in order to develop the four language skills - listening, speaking reading and writing. But still most schools, especially in the rural settings, do not have the infrastructure to appropriately implement the CLT approach (Sharif, 2012), though, government policy supports the use of audiovisual materials for English classes. National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has prepared textbooks that support communicative English. Additionally, they have uploaded recordings in their website that teachers are supposed to use in the classrooms to practice listening. Along with the government, many donor organizations and NGOs is trying to improve pedagogy of teaching English infusing technology in the classrooms. However, the situation has not much improved.

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1.2. Pedagogical relevance of ICT in language teaching

Time has come for teachers and learners of English to realize the fundamental role of ICT not only in the area of language teaching and learning but also in the global economy where the proficient use of English is an indispensable engine of growth and development. Gone were the days when the teaching of English was restricted to all that the teacher had to say to the learners, a situation which made learners inactive in the teaching-learning situation. But with the emergence of various gadgets in ICT, it has become expedient that the effective teaching and learning of English has gone beyond the stereotypical to regimented/tradition of mere classroom teaching.

So, the main concern of today's teaching method is all about the use of technology to improve language learning. Language experts now believe that schools need to move beyond the emphasis on subject content required by the present language students, but focus more on 21st-century dominant themes, like use various media and ICT in teaching and learning. Besides, English has widely been considered as the medium of global expression and henceforth, learning and comprehending it have been acknowledged worldwide (Hoque M.F., 2002). In this age of information, when a toddler is even familiar with the use of computers and laptops, then it can be more interesting for the learners of a second language to be accommodated with ICT. ICT by this time has been discovered to be a very powerful tool for educational change and reform. English has become the tool of learning, business and most importantly communication. In order to improve the whole experience of English language acquisition, integration of ICT with current learning methodology is a widely accepted pedagogy of teaching second language. It is easier for the faculties of English Language teaching to conduct classes with the help of multimedia-enabled classrooms. Learning a language through multimedia-enabled classrooms can help ameliorate the efficiency and effectiveness of learning process.

An ICT-enabled classroom provides the users a whole new different experience in a very flexible, interactive and rich platform. ICT gives students stimulus to undertake the tasks what may be otherwise evaded. The relevant platform of software facilitates students to conduct the activities in an ICT enabled language learning class without having any sorts of hesitations or inhibitions. Tasks in that way become interestingly more accessible when contents are used in multimedia formats. Besides, it could help create a long-lasting impact on the learners. A teacher in an ICT enabled classroom is not only an instructor, he is a coordinator also. Internet based open source helps the learners create a self-paced independent learning methodology that propagates the learning style of 21st century. According to Herington (2002), ICT facilitates the exposure to authentic language, provide access to wider sources of information and varieties of language, give the opportunity to communicate with other, allows a learner-centered approach and develop learner's autonomy. ICT has been integrated with education with a belief that it is a catalyst of change that can encourage knowledge transformation, critical thinking and student-centered learning (Roblyer&Doering, 2010). Accordingly, governments of many countries are adopting different policies and strategies for integrating ICT into education systems (Kozma, 2008). However, the potential of ICT in education is not yet been clearly realized (Moonen, 2008). One reason for this is that teaching professionals are often not adequately prepared for teaching with ICT (McDougall, 2008). This is more evident in the countries like Bangladesh. School teachers are trained in and prepared for implementing school curricula by a cadre of professionals or teacher trainers who themselves struggle with understanding the full potential of the technology (Swennen& Klink, 2009).

1.3. Global Practices in teaching English Language

ICT is just a bridge between teachers and students in delivering lectures in classrooms to make the lesson better and effective. ICT enabled classrooms turn into a digital platform to teach

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and learn a language and other subjects as well. It provides an unprecedented touch of learning skills which ascertain benefits for the whole nation on an equal basis. In the global context of learning language, ICT as a 'media' plays an important role for learning process and builds a direct communication approach between students and teacher despite being absence physically in the same room or place in a certain time (ACTFL, 2013). A virtual presence in language learning program can be created through ICT to enable students to learn the lessons with guidance, instruction, information and further explanation. A computer can store unlimited lessons or references, which can be accessed anytime, anywhere and accurately. Fitzpatrick and Davies (2002) set out seven ways in which ICT can be used in language learning. They include Presentation, Practice, Authoring, Computer-Aided Assessment (CAA), Publishing, Communications and Simulations.

1.4. Statement of the Problem

The government of Bangladesh has put importance on ICT as a medium of instruction. Government has already trained more than 20,000 secondary and higher secondary schools including intermediate college level teachers on ICT, especially on making digital contents for classroom delivery (http://a2i.pmo.gov.bd). The English lessons in the textbooks have been planned to provide English language skills to the learners. In presenting the lessons having opportunities to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing communicatively, ICT plays an important role. The government has provided multimedia equipment like laptops, projectors, sound boxes, internet connection to about 22,000 schools and madrasa in Bangladesh by 2014. Now, it is time to investigate how many of the English teachers have received training and if these trained English teachers use ICT in developing four language skills of students.

1.5. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this paper is to evaluate the use of ICT in teaching English as a foreign language atintermediate colleges of Bangladesh.
The specific objectives of the study are:

1. to investigate if teachers use ICT in teaching English or not;
2. to find out what kinds of ICT tools are used in teaching English;
3. to identify the challenges hindering the use of ICT; and
4. to examine how the government is overseeing the use of ICT in teaching.

1.6. Significance of the Study

The outcomes of the study will hopefully enhance English language teaching and learning through proper utilization of ICT at secondary and higher secondary education. This study may make the teachers of the two colleges aware of the use of ICT in teaching English; and publishing articles in the research journal and in the newspapers may help government take necessary measures to enhance the uses of ICT in schools and colleges in Bangladesh. The government has already allocated about USD 40 million to establish Multi-media Classrooms (MMCs) in every primary, secondary and higher secondary institutions. In this regard, it has distributed laptops and multimedia projectors in many institutions. However, this study just made attempts to justify the utilizations of this ICT equipment provided by the government in the academic institutions and to realize how these are exerting facilities to teaching specially teching English. The research will also provide new directions for further studies on teaching English as a foreign language through the use ICT.

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2. Review of Literature

Language, one of the most remarkable traits of human beings, has been classified into two different categories as per the way people acquire it. The first one is the acquisition in which people learn a language as their mother tongue. Hence, learning the first language is basically a subconscious natural process, which is synonymous with implicit learning. On the other, the second one is learning in which people have to learn a language consciously – learning vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and context of a language with an explicit manner. English is no longer a language of an aristocracy, but a language of necessity today. On the other, technological development has always been considered a very need of the people and contributed much towards the development of education, especially English. As learning second language is one of the most difficult lessons, the teacher must create interactive teaching and learn to make it interested for the students (Education Policy of Bangladesh, 2010).

The history of development education implies technology is a part of the medium used to convey the message of science to many people, ranging from printing technology, such as printed books to media, voice recorded on tape, video, television, telecommunications and compact disk. The term ICT includes technologies in which the computer plays a central role, i.e. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), the internet, and variety of generic computer application (Fitzpatrick and Davies, 2003).Hartoyo (2008) alleged that a computer is a tool and medium that facilitates people in learning a language, although the effectiveness of learning depends totally on the users. The technology in this era has been grown up not only from the quality but also the efficiency. Every school should use the ICT to facilitate the teacher to teach the students in the classroom. Hartoyo (2008) also asserts that English language teaching has been shaped by the search for the 'one best method' of teaching the language. Regardless of whether the focus of instruction has been reading, the grammatical rules and vocabulary of the target language (e.g. Grammar Translation Method), speaking (how to communicate the target language such as Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, The Silent Way, Suggestopedia, Community Language, Communicative Approach), or other issues (e.g. The Total Physical Response Method), the attempts of the teaching profession have been shaped by a desire to find 'a' better way of teaching than the existing method. The latest method that is developing is Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL).

Some experts and practitioners of education strongly support the utilization of ICT in language learning to improve efficiency and effectiveness of learning that can improve the quality of understanding and mastery of the language studied. Brown (2011) stated communication as transfer of information from one person to another. Information transferred must be understandable to the receiver. 'Techno' means technique, art or skill, and 'logos' means science and they jointly stand for technology defined for scientific knowledge of art or skill. The integration of ICT in the field of language learning is inevitable that the ICT and language learning are two aspects which support each other like two sides of the coin inseparable. This is due to the computer's ability to present material is more diverse ways than either book or video does. In addition, CALL is able to generate interaction and improve communicative competence, including providing authentic material to the class or self-learning. The method focuses on computer utilization to enhance language learning.

E-learning facility has created an opportunity for learning using special kind of called software of learning management system (LMS). Currently running LMS-based Internet technology can have the access facility from anywhere over the world. It enables the learning activities to be managed in the absence of face-to-face between the parties involved (administrators, facilitators, learners or learners). 'Presence' the parties involved is represented by e-mail, chat channel, or via video conference. In the today's era of technology, ICT is being

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developed rapidly and turns to be a lifestyle for people regardless to ages and places. Therefore, command over the technology has undoubtedly become a prior necessity for the teachers of the modern world.

Some NGOs have their own policy to teach English using ICT application in the classrooms. English in Action (EIA) is such a program. It is a major nine-year (2008-2017) development program initiated at the request of the Government of Bangladesh and funded by the Department for International Development (DfID) of the UK Government (EIA, 2009b). The project aims to equip twenty-five million Bangladeshi school children with the skills to communicate in English to levels that will enable them to participate fully in national economic and social activities and global opportunities. The major four strands to the EIA program in Bangladesh are Primary Education, Secondary Education, Adult Learning and Research, monitoring, and evaluation (RME). There are three operational phases in the EIA project are Developmental Research (2008-2011), Upscaling (2011-2014) and Embedding (2014-2017).

Save the Children, an international organization initiated the ICT in an education project in 18 government primary schools and conducted research to monitor the impact of the audiovisual content on learning. However, rigid, unhelpful, old-fashioned and non-active teaching practices, chalk and talk kinds of teacher-dominated lecture-based pedagogy remain the norm in Bangladeshi school culture where students are in a passive role, limited to memorizing facts (Shohel, 2008). This is reflected in learning assessment practices and the use of technologies in education is very low in Bangladesh.

4. Methodology

The study followed qualitative research methodology to investigate if the teachers use ICT in language classes; and if they use, what kinds of ICT they use; what the challenges were; and how the government monitors the implementation of ICT training. The study used observation, and interview methods to collect data from two higher secondary schools of Narayangonj. Seven participants (four English teachers, two head teachers, and one USEO) were interviewed with an interview schedule; and the four English teachers' classroom sessions were observed for two times each. The interviews and the observation notes were transcribed. For giving more input to the study, some secondary data have been used from various sources like National Education Policy 2010, National Curriculum 2012, articles published in different journals, books, newspapers, dissertations along with other literature available in published documents. Finally, the transcribed data were coded and categorized based on objectives of the study. During reading and re-reading the transcribed data, the findings of the study emerged. Then the findings were put under the themes of the research objectives.

5. Findings

While processing the data collected through interviews and observations, the findings of the study emerged. The major findings included teachers' apathy towards ICT; lack of ICT equipment in the institutions; and insufficient training of the teachers. The findings are as follows:

5.1. Teachers' use of ICT in teaching English

It has been found through observations and interviews that ICT was able to engage the young learners more and they were immersed in the learning of the language. The interviewees, though, expressed their high eagerness about accommodating ICT in language teaching and learning, however, they at the same time recognized the limitations in its applications. They claimed that if teachers played audio recordings, learners were exposed to the authentic English

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situation. They further claimed that, video-clips helped students to understand and use English in different situations. It was clear from the observations and the interviews that, the teachers in secondary level who were over 50 were not willing to use ICT; they believed it to be an extra burden to them. However, the young teachers were interested to use ICT but they were not confident in ICT use, as they did not have training. One teacher said, "I like to use ICT in teaching English but I do not know how to use it. Actually, I am not able to insert images and audio-video clips in the slides." They did not have laptops of their own, as they could not operate it properly.

'Though students are much enthusiastic to learn through ICT, and my teachers are also trying to present the lesson with the help of ICT, the facilities provided by the government are too scanty; and I do not have fund to buy so many laptops and projectors for my institution',said the Principal of a college. Among the 19 teachers in his institution, only six had received training on ICT from Dhaka Teachers' Training College and Bangladesh Bureau ofEducational Information and statistics (BANBEIS). Two of them were from English Department. Out of the six, only two teachers could skillfully develop digital contents by themselves, claimed the Principal. Observing the class, it is found that most of the trained teacher had poor knowledge and experience of surfing the net, and therefore incapable of accumulating necessary information from the websites. In some cases, it is noticed that they lack due knowledge on ICT apparatus to harness benefit from multimedia. When asked, they said, they sometimes needed help to make a digital content using Microsoft PowerPoint but there was none to help them. Three of the trained teachers even did not have email accounts, though two English teachers were able to provide their email IDs. Selecting images and inserting them properly or adding video clips in the slides is a difficult job for them. They claimed, they needed more training on ICT, as new techniques and softwares were coming in constantly.

5.2.ICT facilities in the colleges

An administrative head of an institution in Narayanganj categorically claimed that ICT was able to engage students in the process of learning but there was insufficient arrangement in his institution. 'We tried, but most often failed as we have limited resources', he claimed. The observations revealed that the classrooms were not properly equipped with ICT equipment. There was one laptop and a single projector only in the whole college. Moreover, teachers informed the researcher that the only laptop provided by the government was being used mostly in the college office for official purposes. Teachers claimed that it was a financial burden on them to buy a personal laptop. Some of them mentioned that although they had laptops on their own, they might not be able to use the multi-media projector. However, teachers were not found to be aware of the benefits of ICT in teaching English. Using necessary applications through smart phone was unknown to them. ''Net is costly here to manage with the remuneration we get and buying a computer or laptop costs more than the salary we get for a month" they claimed. The above discussion showed that there were insufficient ICT facilities in the colleges. However, the USEO assured of providing more ICT equipment to the schools and colleges from the government so that the teachers could use ICT uninterruptedly.

5.3. Challenges teachers faced in using ICT

Procuring ICT equipment was a huge challenge for the colleges as well as for the teachers. "Unless there are facilities, how can teachers use technology? I cannot blame the teachers", said a Principal. The observation also revealed that there was only one room with the projector and it was difficult on the teachers' part to move to the room with the students and set equipment for the class. Another challenge was that the teachers were not ready for using ICT in teaching and learning process due to some normative barriers, as it initiated a new dimension in the academic progress still mostly unfolded to teachers. The other challenge included poor Internet connection in

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the college. The interviewees claimed that they could not use Internet in their smart phones because of low power of the router. In one of the two colleges, it was known from the teachers that there was a ban on the use of smart phones by the teachers as well students in the classrooms. The study of the class routine and interview with the principals revealed that there was schedule to use the multi-media classrooms by teachers but the a2i provided multimedia classrooms were remaining un-used for weeks in the colleges. However, the USEO claimed that they had reports claiming the multi-media classrooms were being used properly.

5.5. Government overseeing for multimedia classrooms

The USEO informed that the government was working to establish regional training centers for teachers through BANBEIS. A kind of this has already been set up at SonargoanUpazila of Narayanganj district. However, it was learnt from the interviews and observations that if teachers were provided with training and with ICT equipment, the teaching-learning of English language could have been accelerated in the higher secondary institutions of Narayangonj district. The USEO also asserted that the government would provide the schools and colleges with low cost Internet, provide teachers with ICT training, and take necessary measures to remove the prejudice regarding the use of ICT.

6. Conclusion

ICT, as a mode of delivery of education, can undoubtedly have an impact in teaching a language. Teachers involved in teaching English must have a good command over the utilization of ICT. From this study, it has been widely acclaimed that the ICT has many dimensions. It exposes a universal appeal and global application irrespective to race and color, religion and region. Which one can function more for the benefit of students is simply depend on teachers' choice considering the socio-economic perspective of the students.From the view of qualitative analysis, this study just reveals a handy of scanty data where major populations remained unexamined. Limited scope of data field may not represent the overall scenario in this aspect of using ICT in English in Bangladesh, but observations in these two colleges can be regarded as the specimen of the whole. The study shows the importance of ICT in the teaching process. In Bangladesh where digital divide has made a distinctive feature in the education system, usage of ICT in the process of teaching English can certainly contribute a lot to enhance the acceptance of learning a foreign language. ICT can also be used as a catalyst to influence the learning style where a student can devise his dreams to become a global citizen with a thrust for English.In this study, where most of the arguments are put based on observation and interviews, therefore, further study should have been carried out considering the reality at field stage.

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