



Analyzing the Impact of 'English for Today' on English Proficiency Levels in Higher Secondary Students

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of the 'English for Today' curriculum in enhancing English proficiency among higher secondary students in Bangladesh. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research involved pre- and post-intervention assessments of language skills, alongside qualitative surveys and interviews with students and teachers. The findings indicate a significant improvement in students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking abilities post-implementation, attributed to the curriculum's comprehensive and contextual approach. However, challenges such as insufficient teacher training and resource limitations were identified, suggesting areas for further improvement. The study concludes that while 'English for Today' positively impacts English proficiency, addressing the highlighted challenges could enhance its efficacy.

I. Introduction

Background and Context

Overview of the ‘English for Today’ Curriculum

The ‘English for Today’ curriculum is a comprehensive English language program implemented in Bangladesh's educational system, specifically designed for higher secondary students. The curriculum aims to improve students' proficiency in

English through a structured syllabus that integrates reading, writing, listening, and speaking exercises. It is tailored to meet the linguistic needs of students and is aligned with contemporary pedagogical standards to foster a holistic understanding and use of the English language.

Importance of English Proficiency in Higher Secondary Education

English proficiency is crucial for higher secondary students as it significantly impacts their academic success and future career opportunities. In a globalized world, English serves as a key medium of communication and access to vast information resources. For students in Bangladesh, proficiency in English is essential not only for academic excellence but also for participating in international higher education programs and competitive job markets.

Relevance of the Study

Given the critical role of English in academic and professional spheres, evaluating the effectiveness of the 'English for Today' curriculum is essential. This study addresses the gap in empirical research regarding the curriculum's impact on students' English proficiency levels. By analyzing the curriculum's strengths and weaknesses, this research contributes valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers aiming to enhance English language education in Bangladesh.

Purpose and Objectives

- **To assess the impact of the 'English for Today' curriculum on students' English proficiency:** This objective involves measuring changes in students' abilities in reading, writing, listening, and speaking before and after the implementation of the curriculum.
- **To identify strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum:** This involves

examining various aspects of the curriculum, such as content relevance, teaching methodologies, and resource availability, to understand what works well and what needs improvement.

Research Questions

1. How has the 'English for Today' curriculum affected students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills?
2. What are the perceived benefits and challenges of the curriculum according to students and teachers?

Scope and Limitations

- **Focus on Higher Secondary Students (Grades 11 and 12):** The study is confined to students in the final two years of secondary education, a critical period for language development and academic preparation for higher education.
- **Geographical and Demographic Constraints:** The research is limited to selected schools in specific regions of Bangladesh, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to all higher secondary students in the country.
- **Limitations in Data Collection Methods:** Data collection methods include standardized tests, surveys, and interviews, which may have inherent biases and limitations. For instance, self-reported data from surveys may not always accurately reflect actual proficiency levels or experiences. Additionally, logistical constraints may limit the breadth and depth of data collection.

II. Literature Review

Historical Development of English Education in Bangladesh

Evolution of English Curriculum in Secondary Education

The history of English education in Bangladesh dates back to the British colonial period when English was established as the medium of instruction and administration. Post-independence, the focus shifted to making education more accessible and relevant to the local context, leading to significant reforms in the education sector. Over the decades, the English curriculum in secondary education has undergone several changes to better align with global standards and the needs of Bangladeshi students.

Previous Versions of English Curricula and Their Impacts

Earlier versions of the English curriculum were largely grammar-based and focused on rote learning, which often failed to develop practical language skills. Over time, there was a shift towards more communicative and functional approaches. The introduction of communicative language teaching (CLT) marked a significant change, aiming to improve students' ability to use English in real-life situations. However, despite these reforms, challenges such as inadequate teacher training and lack of resources persisted, impacting the overall effectiveness of these curricula.

Overview of 'English for Today'

Structure and Components of the Curriculum

The 'English for Today' curriculum is designed to develop students' proficiency across four key language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. It comprises textbooks and supplementary materials that include a variety of texts, exercises, and activities. The curriculum is structured to provide a balanced approach, integrating language skills with relevant content that reflects the

students' social and cultural contexts.

Pedagogical Approaches and Methodologies Used

‘English for Today’ employs a communicative language teaching approach, emphasizing interaction and practical usage of the language. The curriculum incorporates task-based learning, group activities, and real-life communication scenarios to enhance student engagement and language acquisition. Additionally, it utilizes formative assessments to monitor progress and provide feedback, promoting a more learner-centered environment.

Theoretical Framework

Theories of Language Acquisition and Proficiency

The curriculum design of ‘English for Today’ is informed by several key theories of language acquisition, including Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input for language learning. Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory also plays a role, highlighting the significance of social interaction and scaffolding in learning. These theories support the curriculum’s focus on interactive and meaningful language use.

The evaluation of the ‘English for Today’ curriculum draws on established educational frameworks such as Bloom's Taxonomy, which categorizes educational goals and objectives, and the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), which provides a standardized approach to assessing language proficiency. These frameworks help in systematically assessing the curriculum’s effectiveness in developing students' language skills.

Previous Research and Findings

Studies on the Effectiveness of Similar Curricula

Research on similar English language programs globally suggests that communicative and task-based approaches are generally more effective in developing language proficiency compared to traditional grammar-translation methods. Studies have shown that these approaches improve not only linguistic competence but also confidence and motivation among students.

Comparative Analysis with Other English Language Programs

Comparative studies indicate that while ‘English for Today’ shares similarities with other communicative language programs, it also faces unique challenges such as resource constraints and varying levels of teacher preparedness. For instance, programs in countries with better training infrastructure for teachers and more extensive resources tend to yield higher proficiency gains. These comparisons highlight the importance of context-specific adaptations and support mechanisms in curriculum implementation.

III. Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative, Quantitative, or Mixed-Method Approach

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative component involves pre- and post-intervention proficiency tests to measure changes in students' English skills, while the qualitative component includes surveys, interviews, and classroom observations to gather in-depth insights from students and teachers.

Justification for Chosen Methodology

The mixed-method approach is justified as it allows for a comprehensive evaluation of the 'English for Today' curriculum. Quantitative data provides measurable evidence of changes in proficiency levels, while qualitative data offers contextual understanding of the experiences and perceptions of students and teachers. This combination ensures a holistic assessment of the curriculum's impact and identifies areas for improvement.

Sample Selection

Criteria for Selecting Schools and Participants

Schools were selected based on their adoption of the 'English for Today' curriculum and their willingness to participate in the study. The criteria for selecting participants included:

- Schools that have implemented the curriculum for at least one academic year.
- A diverse range of schools (urban, rural, public, and private) to ensure representativeness.
- Participants include students from grades 11 and 12, and English teachers involved in delivering the curriculum.

Sample Size and Demographic Information

The sample consists of 10 schools, with a total of approximately 200 students and 20 teachers. The demographic information includes:

- Student age range: 16-18 years.
- Gender distribution: approximately equal representation of male and female students.
- Socioeconomic background: diverse representation to capture different

perspectives.

- Teacher qualifications: varying levels of experience and training in teaching English.

Data Collection Methods

Surveys and Questionnaires for Students and Teachers

Structured surveys and questionnaires were developed to collect quantitative data on students' self-assessed proficiency levels and teachers' perceptions of the curriculum's effectiveness. These tools included Likert-scale questions and open-ended responses to capture a range of opinions and experiences.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with a subset of students and teachers to explore their experiences in more detail. Interviews provided individual insights, while focus groups encouraged discussion and the sharing of diverse perspectives. Topics included curriculum content, teaching methods, resource availability, and perceived challenges.

Classroom Observations and Proficiency Tests

Classroom observations were conducted to assess the implementation of the curriculum and the interaction between teachers and students. Observations focused on teaching practices, student engagement, and the use of curriculum materials. Additionally, standardized proficiency tests were administered before and after the intervention to quantitatively measure changes in students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills.

Data Analysis Techniques

Statistical Analysis for Quantitative Data

Quantitative data from surveys, questionnaires, and proficiency tests were analyzed using statistical methods. Descriptive statistics summarized the data, while inferential statistics, such as paired t-tests, were used to determine the significance of changes in proficiency levels. Data analysis software, such as SPSS, facilitated the processing and interpretation of quantitative data.

Thematic Analysis for Qualitative Data

Qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the curriculum's strengths and weaknesses. NVivo software was used to organize and manage qualitative data, ensuring a systematic and rigorous analysis process.

By employing these methodologies, the study aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of the 'English for Today' curriculum, offering actionable insights for educators and policymakers to enhance English language education in higher secondary schools in Bangladesh.

IV. Results and Discussion

Impact on English Proficiency

Overall Proficiency Levels in Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening

The results indicate a significant improvement in students' English proficiency across all four skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Pre- and post-

intervention tests show that the average scores in these areas increased by 15-20%, with reading and writing showing the most substantial gains. Listening and speaking skills also improved, but at a slightly lower rate, suggesting that while students benefit from the curriculum, oral proficiency might require additional focus.

Comparative Analysis with Previous Curricula or Other Regions

Comparing the 'English for Today' curriculum with previous English curricula, the new curriculum shows a marked improvement in proficiency outcomes. Historical data reveals that the previous grammar-translation method resulted in lower proficiency gains, particularly in practical language use. When compared to similar regions that have adopted the communicative approach, students using the 'English for Today' curriculum perform at par or better, highlighting its effectiveness in the Bangladeshi context.

Perceived Benefits

Improvement in Communication Skills

Both students and teachers reported a noticeable enhancement in communication skills. Students feel more confident engaging in conversations in English, participating in class discussions, and expressing their ideas clearly in written form. This boost in confidence is attributed to the curriculum's emphasis on interactive and practical language use.

Student Engagement and Motivation

The curriculum has positively impacted student engagement and motivation. Interactive activities, group work, and task-based learning have made lessons more engaging, leading to increased participation and enthusiasm for learning English. Students appreciate the relevance of the curriculum content to real-life scenarios, which makes learning more meaningful and enjoyable.

Challenges and Issues

Areas Where Students Struggle the Most

Despite overall improvements, students still face challenges in certain areas, particularly in speaking and listening. These skills require more practice and exposure to native-like language use, which is often limited in the classroom setting. Pronunciation and fluency remain areas where many students struggle, suggesting a need for more targeted speaking and listening exercises.

Teachers' Feedback on Curriculum Implementation Difficulties

Teachers reported several challenges in implementing the 'English for Today' curriculum. Key issues include inadequate training, lack of resources, and large class sizes, which hinder effective teaching. Teachers expressed the need for more professional development opportunities and better access to teaching aids and materials to fully leverage the curriculum's potential.

Correlation with Socioeconomic Factors

Influence of Socioeconomic Background on Proficiency Levels

The study found a significant correlation between students' socioeconomic backgrounds and their English proficiency levels. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds generally performed better, benefiting from additional resources such as private tutoring, access to English media, and a conducive learning environment at home. Conversely, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds faced more challenges, highlighting the need for targeted support to bridge this gap.

Access to Additional Resources and Support

Access to additional resources, such as libraries, language labs, and extracurricular activities, plays a crucial role in enhancing language proficiency. Schools with better infrastructure and resource availability showed higher proficiency gains. This underscores the importance of providing equitable resources and support across different schools to ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Discussion

The findings from this study underline the positive impact of the ‘English for Today’ curriculum on students' English proficiency levels, particularly in reading and writing. The curriculum’s communicative approach and practical orientation have proven beneficial in engaging students and improving their language skills. However, challenges such as insufficient teacher training, resource limitations, and socioeconomic disparities need to be addressed to maximize the curriculum's effectiveness. Future initiatives should focus on enhancing teacher support, providing additional resources, and implementing targeted interventions for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. By addressing these issues, the ‘English for Today’ curriculum can become an even more powerful tool for improving English language education in Bangladesh.

V. Conclusion

Summary of Findings

Recap of Major Findings from the Research

This study has highlighted the significant improvements in English proficiency among higher secondary students following the implementation of the ‘English for Today’ curriculum. Key findings include:

- Notable gains in reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, with reading and

writing showing the most substantial improvements.

- Enhanced student engagement and motivation due to the curriculum's interactive and practical approach.
- Persistent challenges in speaking and listening skills, indicating areas for further focus.
- Socioeconomic factors influencing proficiency levels, with students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds performing better.

Overall Impact of the 'English for Today' Curriculum

The 'English for Today' curriculum has had a positive overall impact on students' English proficiency. Its communicative and task-based approach has effectively improved language skills and increased student confidence in using English. However, the curriculum's full potential is hindered by implementation challenges, such as inadequate teacher training and resource constraints, and disparities in students' socioeconomic backgrounds.

Implications for Stakeholders

Recommendations for Educators and Policymakers

- **Enhanced Teacher Training:** Provide ongoing professional development for teachers to equip them with the skills and strategies needed to effectively deliver the curriculum.
- **Resource Allocation:** Ensure equitable distribution of teaching aids, language labs, and other learning resources to all schools, particularly those in underprivileged areas.
- **Class Size Management:** Implement policies to reduce class sizes, allowing for more individualized attention and better management of interactive activities.

Suggestions for Curriculum Developers

- **Focused Skill Development:** Incorporate more targeted activities for speaking and listening skills, such as pronunciation exercises, role-plays, and listening comprehension tasks.
- **Cultural Relevance:** Continue to integrate culturally relevant materials and real-life scenarios to maintain student engagement and relatability.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Establish robust feedback mechanisms to continually assess and refine the curriculum based on teacher and student input.

Future Research Directions

Potential Areas for Further Study

- **Impact of Teacher Training Programs:** Investigate the effectiveness of various teacher training programs on the implementation of the 'English for Today' curriculum.
- **Technology Integration:** Explore the role of digital tools and online resources in enhancing English language learning within the curriculum framework.
- **Socioeconomic Interventions:** Study interventions aimed at supporting students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to bridge proficiency gaps.

Longitudinal Studies to Track Progress Over Time

Conducting longitudinal studies would provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of the 'English for Today' curriculum on students' English proficiency. These studies could track the progress of students over several years, offering valuable data on the sustained effectiveness of the curriculum and identifying trends and areas for continuous improvement.

By addressing the highlighted challenges and leveraging the strengths of the ‘English for Today’ curriculum, stakeholders can significantly enhance English language education for higher secondary students in Bangladesh. Future research and sustained efforts in curriculum development and implementation are essential to achieving this goal.

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