

English Language Teaching at Secondary Level in Bangladesh: An Unsuccessful Story

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 **Asim Kumar Barman**

Assistant Director, Planning and Development, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Bangladesh.
Email: asimkb07@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The process of globalization has brought a radical change in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Bangladesh is no more far from that transformation and has introduced English Language Teaching based on Communicative Approach. But efforts in English Language Teaching (ELT) still fail to achieve the expected outcome, meaning that, students cannot make effective communication having the four language skills equally to meet the demand of time and motion going on throughout the globalized world. The current study has therefore been aimed to verify how far those claims of communicative textbooks are successful, why the learners still lack in communication in English, what the obstacles are and finally how to remove those barriers. This study has proposed a package of solutions comprises of Changing Marks Distribution, Building Infrastructure for English Classroom, Providing Extensive Training for English Teachers and Mandatory Use of English in ELT Classes which are implementable with available resources in Bangladesh. The present study becomes a significant one as a systematic step in this case. And it is greatly expected that the proposed solutions will result in expected outcome resolving the obstacles in terms of English Language Teaching based on Communicative Approach.

Keywords: *Language competency, English language teaching, secondary education, communicative approach, Classroom settings, Testing system, Poor language performance, Global demand, Quality education.*

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Highlights of this paper

- This is an attempt to explore how English Language Teaching at Secondary Level in Bangladesh is going on, to what extent the claims of communicative textbooks are successful, why the learners still lack in communication in English, what the obstacles are and finally suggest how to remove those barriers.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this globalized world, for the sake of human capital development it is undeniable that English occupies an unbeatable position, especially for the developing countries like Bangladesh. Of course, English is supposed to be the central staircase to have an access to the global economy market. Subsequently, many Asian countries, for example, the South East Asian countries, where English has been used as foreign language over decades, have adopted the teaching and learning of English in their education policies in response to the realities of a more globally connected world. In connection to this apprehension, this paper aims at concentrating on the present scenario of English Language Teaching at Secondary Level in Bangladesh and attempts to pick up the facts. It is perceived that the shift of English Language Teaching Methodology at Secondary Level in Bangladesh from GTM to CLT cannot yield the expected outcome yet. In other words, students' competency in English is not satisfactory at all. This paper proposes the way out based on findings regarding the problem.

1.1. Background

Bangladesh has made a tremendous progress regarding Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth throughout the last decade. Very recently Bangladesh has been adorned with a crown for its achievements in development, World Bank's "lower middle income" category by increasing its Gross National Income. By becoming eligible for graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC), Bangladesh has taken its status to a new height. In order to keep pace with the development stream and meet the radical demand for human resources in increasingly globalized world market, Bangladesh needs to communicate more effectively with the outside world and no doubt, this suggests the improvement of English Language Teaching quality because English has achieved the status of "Lingua Franca". Secondary Level is the gate way to address the issue.

At present English is being taught as a compulsory subject from class 1 to 12 in the national curriculum. [Hamid and Honan \(2012\)](#) that more than 17 million children are learning English in Bangladesh and it is one of the largest primary second language (L2) English populations in the world. Though English has been taught as compulsory subject in schools from primary to secondary level, the performance of students in English is commonly still found to be very poor ([Chowdhury & Kamal, 2014](#)). [Imam \(2005\)](#) reported that the average English language skill level of a university student is equivalent to that of the class 7 level. In response to this problem, the government introduced Communicative English Teaching (CLT) in Class 6 in 1996, which has been extended up to Class 12 on an incremental basis since then ([Mazumder, 2013; Podder, 2013](#)). A large number of projects have been implemented to supplement the government effort. Some of the projects are English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP- 1997-2001) funded by Department of International Development (DFID, UK), the Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project (SESIP-1999-2006) funded by Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Teaching Quality Improvement Project in Secondary Education (TQI-SEP 2006-2016, Phases I & II) funded by ADB and Canadian International and Development Agency (CIDA), in order to train secondary school teachers based on CLT.

But expected results are yet to be achieved. Students are not skilled in the four language skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing. They cannot make effective communication that causes them lagging behind in competing with the globalized world.

English language education in Bangladesh has always been problematic and unsuccessful, despite various attempts to initiate curriculum reform. This paper aims at finding out the major problems associated with ELT at Secondary Level in Bangladesh that have hindered the implementation of the new CLT curriculum, that is, to make the students proficient in making effective communication and eventually to make recommendations for more effective ELT curriculum reform at Secondary Level in Bangladesh.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Students of Secondary Level in Bangladesh are mostly driven by the force of colonial linguistic imperialism. Examination oriented syllabus and teaching system, incoherent marks distribution, improper or poor infrastructure, faulty class set up, lack of skilled teachers, less motivation and weak monitoring are the prime causes of failure of ELT based on Communicative Approach. Students study English mainly to cross the examination barriers rather than to master over it. They hardly think of using English in their everyday activities or medium of instructions. This incompetency engulfs the potentiality of the future generation that tends to throw the prospects of the nation into a dark cave of despair detached from the alluring globalized economy market. If we allow this situation to go on unchanged, it will hamper in ensuring quality education inserted in SDG4.

1.3. Problem Tree

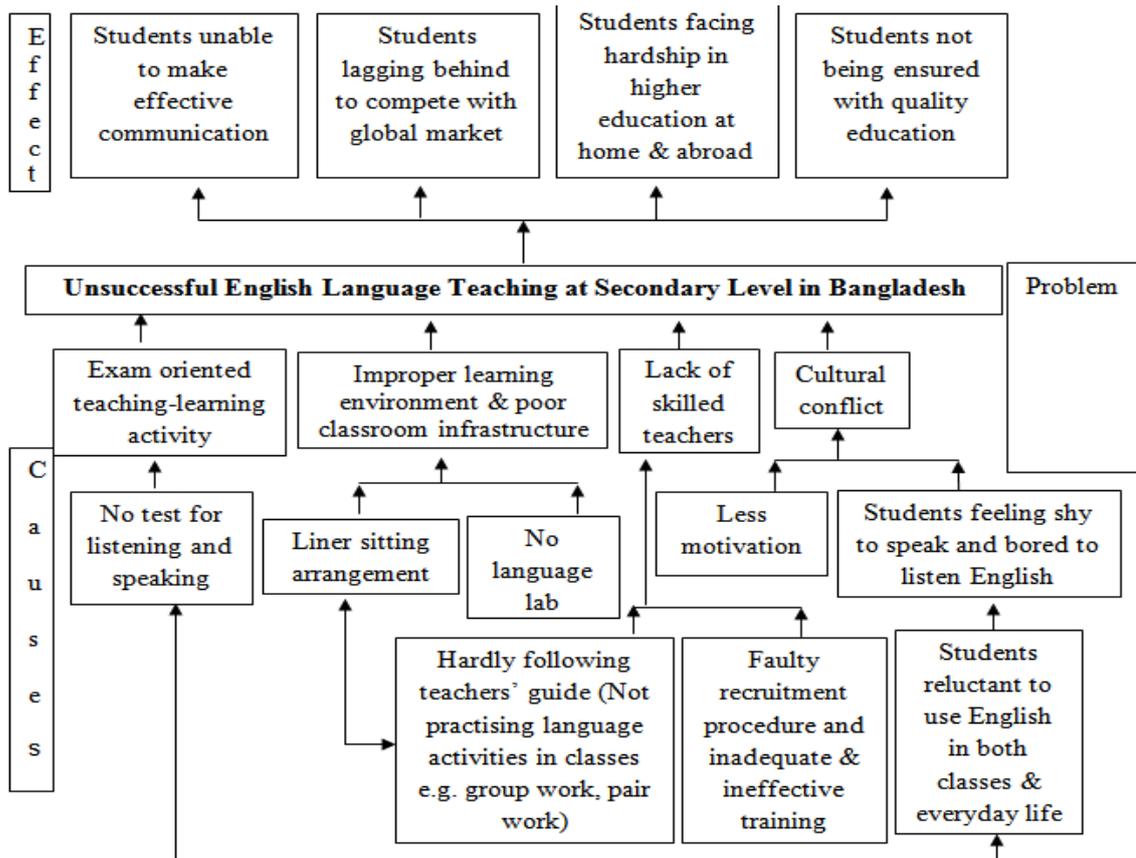


Figure-1. "Conceptual Framework".

1.4. Problem Definition

It is seen that most of the students of Secondary Level in Bangladesh are usually prone to learn English just to pass in the examination or to get better Grade Point Average (GPA). The result of Junior School

Certificate (JSC) and Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Examination of consecutive years 2015 to 2018 vividly indicates that larger part of the total number of students, more than 80%, have passed the examinations getting better Grade Point Average GPA (source: result Statistics; Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Dhaka) though their language performance is not satisfactory. But the aim of English Language Teaching is to make them able to use this very language in different situations appropriately, in other words, in order to build up their communicative skills or language competency so that they may be turned into skilled human resources. A fully English proficient student is supposed to use English to ask questions, to understand the speaker and reading materials, to test ideas and to challenge what is being asked in a given context. The four language skills to be developed for English language competency are:

Listening: It is the ability to apprehend the language of the speaker providing instructions or information and follow the discourse.

Speaking: This skill implies the ability to use language orally appropriately and effectively in learning activities or conversational perspective. It also includes the fluency and accuracy of the language user, that is, pronunciation, accent and intonation.

Reading: It is the skill that indicates that a language user can comprehend and interpret a given written text and act likewise.

Writing: This very ability enables a language user to produce an expected written text with content and format fulfilling given assignment.

Students at Secondary Level in Bangladesh are not found to master over these four language skills. That is why, English Language Teaching based on CLT at Secondary level in Bangladesh is identified as problematic, not completely successful in achieving goals and outcomes of the curriculum. This incompetency results in many drawbacks that make obstacles to ensure quality education. Consequently, in Bangladesh students are not getting prepared themselves to combat with the competitive global market regarding employability, international economic, social, cultural and political affairs. In case of English Language Teaching at the Secondary Level in Bangladesh there exist a number of anomalies that must be addressed immediately otherwise our future generation will be turned into the unskilled. It will be very unfortunate if this huge chunk of population cannot be moulded as human resources and are kept impotent to run the wheel of ongoing development. To achieve the target of Vision 2041 and SDGs, inevitably the quality of English Language Teaching at Secondary Level in Bangladesh must be improved having been reflected in developing the competency of the students.

1.5. Objectives

- To study the present scenario of English Language Teaching based on Communicative Approach at Secondary Level in Bangladesh.
- To identify the problems related to English Language Teaching activities at classroom based on Communicative Approach, that is, practice of the four language skills- reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- To propose the solutions to the problem and recommend necessary suggestions for the improvement of English at secondary level with a view to making the students competent.

2. METHODOLOGY

Methodology plays a very important role in serving the purpose of the study which was to propose appropriate solution(s) to the problem. It was mostly qualitative in nature. This study had used both primary as well as secondary data.

2.1. Primary Data

For primary data a survey had been carried out in different secondary schools through questionnaires. It had to design two sets of questionnaires; for the teachers and for the students. The questionnaires contained the issues that are closely related to the present practices of English Language Teaching based on CLT at secondary schools in Bangladesh. For the study purpose, thirty teachers and fifty learners from secondary schools located at Sadar Upazila, Dinajpur were interviewed particularly. Regarding its conceptual framework, the study has viewed how teaching and learning of English are actually happening based on CLT classroom at Secondary Level in Bangladesh.

2.2. Secondary Data

The secondary source of data includes Board of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Dhaka, the individual research findings, and publications done on ELT in Bangladesh.

2.3. Limitations of the Study

Due to time constraints it was not possible to interview more participants. Moreover, there might be some errors in reply of the students because of their improper understanding of questions.

3. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

All the figures provided below were the results of an unstructured survey conducted in different High Schools under Sadar Upazila, Dinajpur in Bangladesh (thirty teachers and fifty students) where all the figures represent the percentile of the responses for each choice. Studying the finding had brought some interesting facts to light.

3.1. Analysis of Teachers' and Students' Responses

3.1.1. Goal of English Language Learning at Secondary Level

The **Figure 2** exhibited the goal of studying English at Secondary Level in Bangladesh and it was found that 80% (A1) students strongly agreed that they studied English just to pass examinations, 75% (A2) students disagreed that they studied English to improve their language proficiency, 50% (A3) students agreed that they studied English without having a clear aim. On the other hand, 82% (A1) teachers strongly agreed that students studied English just to pass examinations, 65% (A2) teachers strongly disagreed that students studied English to improve their language proficiency, 74% (A3) teachers agreed that students studied English without having a clear aim.

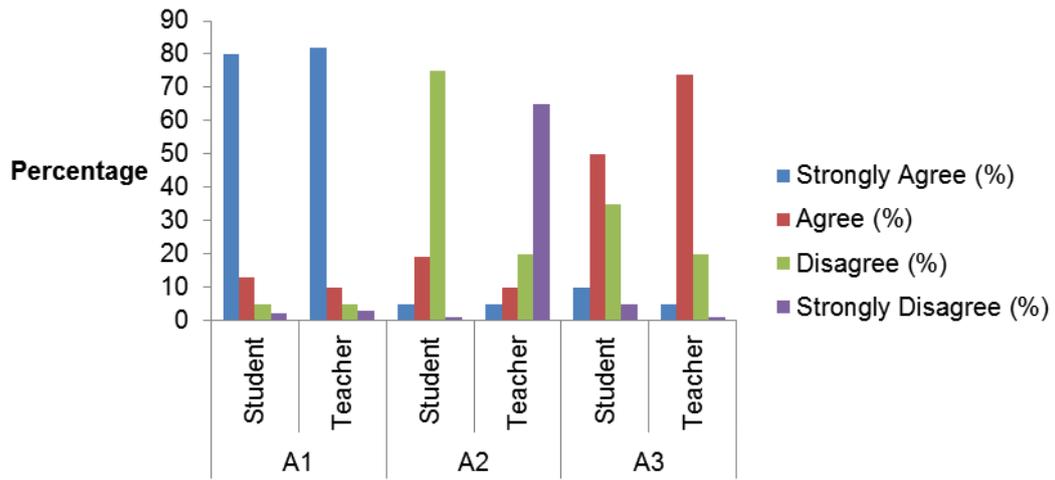


Figure-2. Goal of Studying English at Secondary Level.

Note: [A1. mainly to pass exams, A2. to improve English Competency, A3. Without a clear aim].

3.1.2. Information about English Language Teachers' Role at Secondary Level

Table 1 revealed the information about English Language Teachers at Secondary Level and it was observed that 95% (B1) students answered that teachers very rarely conducted English classes in English, 96% (B2) students answered that teachers involved them very rarely in language activities such as group work or pair work, 80% (B3) students responded that teachers encouraged them to develop language competency, 80% (B4) students answered that teachers were always helpful. On the contrary, 60% (B1) teachers answered that they sometimes spoke in English classes, 80% (B2) teachers answered that they involved students very rarely in language activities such as group work or pair work, 95% (B3) teachers responded that they encouraged students to develop language competency, 90% (B4) teachers answered that they were always helpful.

Table-1. Information about english language teachers at secondary level.

Question Criteria	Participants	Always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Very rarely (%)	Never (%)
B1	Student	2	3	95	0
	Teacher	10	60	20	10
B2	Student	2	2	96	0
	Teacher	5	10	80	5
B3	Student	80	20	0	0
	Teacher	95	2	2	1
B4	Student	80	15	3	2
	Teacher	90	6	4	0

Note: [B1 = Teachers speak in English in the classroom, B2 = Teachers involve the students in language based activities, B3 = Teachers encourage to develop language competency, B4= Teachers are helpful].

3.1.3. Information about Textbooks of Secondary Level

Figure 3 showed the information about English Textbooks at Secondary Level and it was found that 85% students along with 80% teachers answered that current Textbooks were helpful to learn English, all contents were suitable and the Textbooks bestowed equal importance on the four language skills.

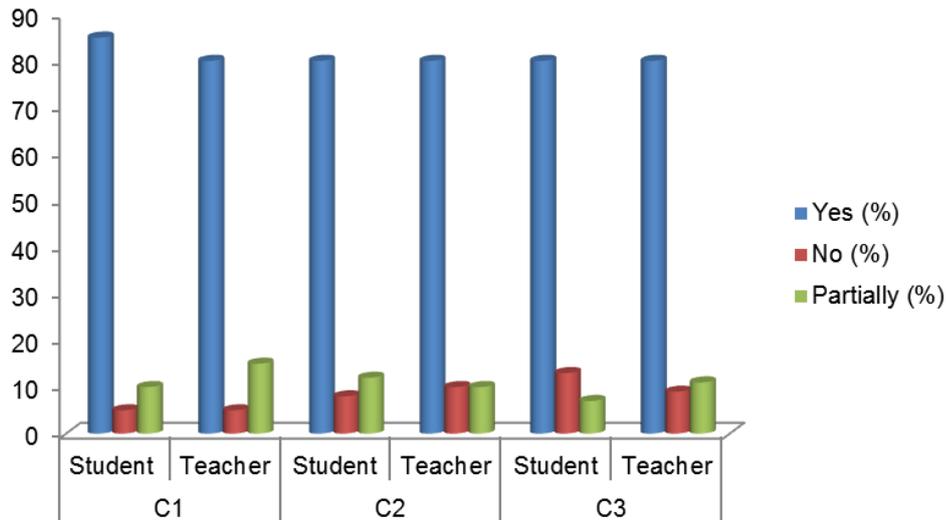


Figure-3. About textbooks of secondary level.

Note: [C1. Textbook is helpful to learn English, C2. All contents are suitable. C3. Gives equal weight to four skills.

3.1.4. Information about Classroom Setup of Secondary Level

Figure 4 revealed the information about English classroom at Secondary Level and with utter surprise it was found that 97% students and 98% teachers (D1) replied that classrooms were not equipped with English language learning facilities, 98% students and 97% (D2) teachers answered that their school had no English language lab, 98% students and 99% teachers (D3) replied that they did not speak English with one another in the classroom, 98% students and 95% teachers (D4) replied that sitting arrangement was not suitable for group or pair work.

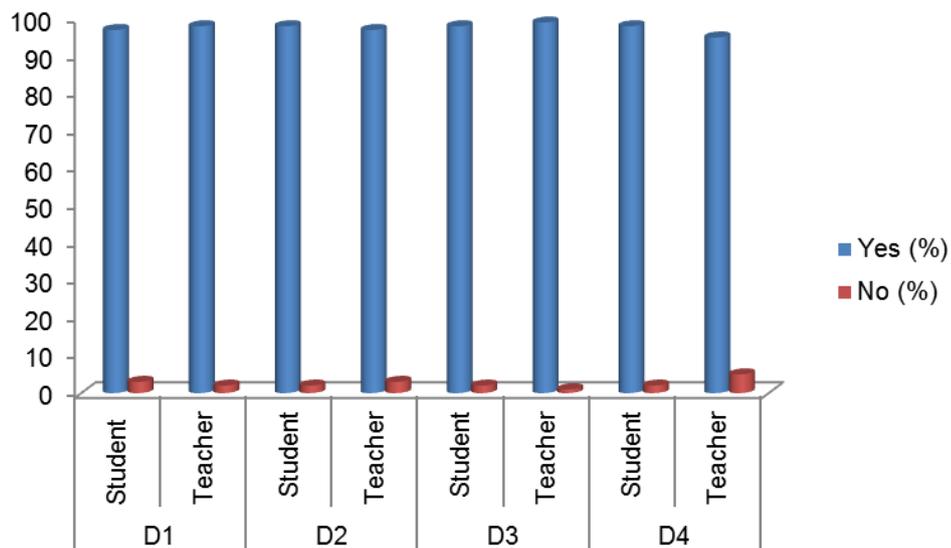


Figure-4. Information about classroom setup of secondary level.

Note: [D1. Classroom is equipped with proper language facilities, D2. School has a Language lab, D3. Students speak English one another in class, D4. Sitting arrangement is suitable].

3.1.5. Test of Four Language Skills at Secondary Level

Table 2 showed the testing system of English language skills at Secondary Level in Bangladesh and it was found that Listening and Speaking skills were not tested in examinations. Only reading and writing skills were tested being given equal weight in the examinations.

Table-2. Test of four language skills.

Skill	Tested (Yes/No)	Weight
Listening	No	N/A
Speaking	No	N/A
Reading	Yes	50%
Writing	Yes	50%

3.1.6. Students' Self-Assessment and Teachers' Evaluation Regarding Four Language Skills

Table 3 showed students' self-assessment and teachers' evaluation regarding four language skills of students and it was found that 60% students and 62 % teachers (E1) thought that students were poor in reading, 80% students and 85 % teachers (E2) considered that students were poor in writing, 90% students and teachers (E3 & E4) assumed that students were poor in listening and speaking.

Table-3. Students' self-assessment and teachers' evaluation regarding four language skills.

Question Criteria	Participants	Excellent %	Good	Fair	Poor
			%	%	%
E1	Student	5	10	15	60
	Teacher	5	10	13	62
E2	Student	3	7	10	80
	Teacher	3	5	7	85
E3	Student	1	3	6	90
	Teacher	1	4	5	90
E4	Student	1	4	5	90
	Teacher	1	3	6	90

3.2. Students' Motivation to Learn English

Figure 5 depicted the information about students' motivation to learn English and it was found that they were motivated by teachers 50%, parents by 30%, by media 15% and by other 5%.

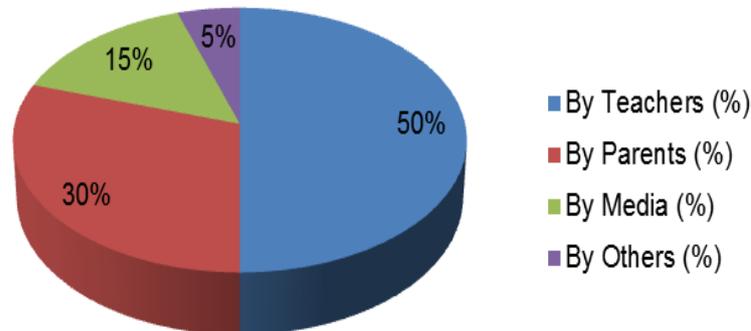


Figure-5. Students' motivation to learn english.

3.3. Use of Teachers' Guide (TG)

Figure 6 demonstrated whether the teachers used Teachers' Guide for the purpose of teaching English in classes based on CLT and it was found that 90% teachers replied they used Teachers' Guide very rarely.

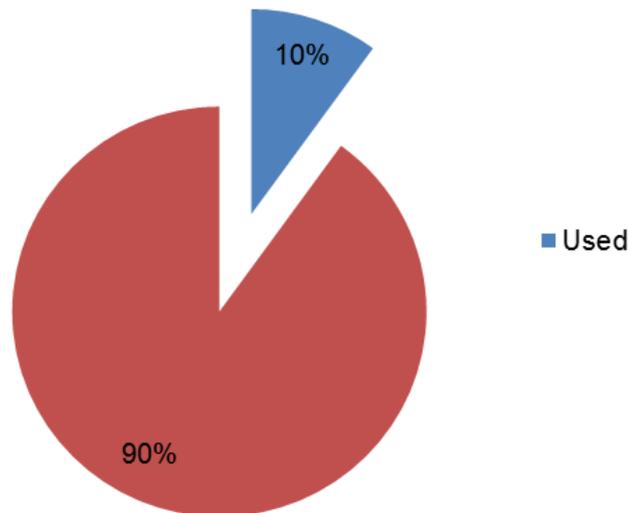


Figure-6. Use of teachers' guide.

4. SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM

Solutions must be linked to the drivers of the problem and identified objectives as well. Moreover, it is expected that a vivid logic should reinforce the intervention under the consideration. The possible solutions to the problem are as follows:

4.1. Changing Marks Distribution of Examinations

As students are accustomed to getting themselves prepared on the examination oriented syllabus, it is rational to involve the four language skills into examination syllabus so that students might be tangled into listening and speaking practice along with the two other skills- reading and writing- that they usually take part. For this purpose current mark distribution for examinations (as per NCTB) shall be reallocated with the consent of stakeholders.

4.2. Building Infrastructure for English Classroom

At present the same classroom is being used for different subjects' teaching-learning. The classrooms are found uneven muddy floored, having insufficient ventilation and light, with faulty congested sitting arrangement and commonly devoid of ICT based language teaching facilities. Without proper English environment, English language cannot be learnt or taught due to cultural variations. In order to get maximum output from ELT classes, building infrastructure for English Classroom is a must. It includes a separate English classroom with ICT based language teaching facilities which may be shared by students of different classes.

4.3. Providing Extensive Training for English Teachers

It is true that English teachers are being provided with a good number of training. About 64% teachers are more or less trained (source: Training Wing, DSHE, Memo No. 37.02.0000.110.18.69.2017-761). Nevertheless, the duration and quality of the training programmes are not up to the mark. Extensive training for English teachers shall be provided and afterwards close monitoring and evaluation must be taken in hand to ensure the expected outcome.

4.4. Mandatory Use of English in ELT Classes

Teachers are very much reluctant to speak English in classes, students usually feel bored to listen English as well. This malpractice hinders the goal of ELT based on Communicative Approach at Secondary Level in

Bangladesh. Students are not found to ask questions in English. Similarly, teachers keep themselves aloof from using English to make students understand the topics. To generate the interest in listening and speaking, mandatory use of English in ELT classes must be ensured.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Government should prioritise the issue and take adequate project(s) in this regard with a view to meeting the SDG4 and Vision 2041.
- Government should increase budget allocation for ELT at Secondary Level.
- Close monitoring and fair evaluation need to be ensured.
- Recruitment procedure should be changed. At the time of recruitment of Secondary School English Teachers, CLT classroom demonstration should be taken.
- Education Boards should more responsibly select question setters and examiners.

6. CONCLUSION

English Language Teaching at Secondary Level in Bangladesh is burdened with a number of problems. The elementary cause of those problems is absence of effective policy intervention. The decisions or strategies taken so far seem to be transplanted ignoring the real scenario. This study comes up with the field level happenings that contradict the goal of ELT based on CLT. Students are kept in the dark without being informed what the main objective of English Language Learning is to build students' language competency based on Communicative Approach. They are being taught English just to jump over the fence of examinations. After completing Secondary Level students get themselves admitted into tertiary level and consequently obtain higher education degree but their level of English competency remains stagnant. They fail to prove their worth as a skilled human resource being devoid of the skill for making an effective communication. In addition, they feel fish out of water whenever they step outside Bangladesh for higher study. This study proposes the skin-tight solutions to the problem that can be implemented with the available resources of Bangladesh. Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education Bangladesh, Dhaka along with the concerned Ministry must play an active role in implementation, monitoring and evaluation process of the way outs. Authority or policy makers are expected to accept the solutions to the problem to make a theory of change. Hopefully successful implementation of the proposed solutions will certainly contribute a lot to make the students of Secondary Level in Bangladesh competent in English and subsequently turn them into skilled human resources who can materialise the dream of Vision 2041.

List of Acronyms:

ELT - English Language Teaching.

GMT- Grammar Translation Method.

CLT- Communicative Language Teaching.

SDG- Sustainable Development Goal.

DSHE- Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education.

NCTB- National Curriculum Textbook Board.

ICT- Information Communication Technology.

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