

ICT - based ELT at Secondary Level Education in Bangladesh

*MD ZAKIR HOSSAIN TALUKDER & SABA**

Abstract

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a vital role in the process of any language teaching programme. Bangladesh has started using ICT in English Language Teaching (ELT) at the secondary level to meet the need of the learners for making the country “Digital Bangladesh”. The purpose of this study is to analyse the learners’ needs in ICT-based ELT at secondary level schools in Bangladesh and highlight the positive effects in order to keep up with the modernized communities in the current digital world.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology, English Language Teaching, National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project.

Introduction

Diversified opportunities of information and communication technology, which are recognised as the driving forces behind development, are now being exploited in various sectors. Many countries of the world have been reaping the benefits of information and communication technology to improve the standards of education. ICT is already in place in Bangladesh with a view to improving the standard of education (Ministry of Education, 2003). Substantial importance has been attached to ICT in education in the National Educational Policy 2010. It is assumed

* Md Zakir Hossain Talukdar (zakirsaba@gmail.com) is an Assistant Professor of English in the Bangladesh Open University, Bangladesh and Saba is in the Department of English in Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India.

that adoption of ICT in English helps develop the communicative ability among the students as the use of ICT offers a facilitative teaching- learning culture.

With the introduction of ICT in education, the secondary English curriculum has been revised in the light of National Education Policy 2010. Recognizing the importance of English language, *The English for Today* textbooks have been developed to help students attain competence in all the four language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. So the book contains a variety of activities for students' practice in these language skills. The main task of the class teacher is to help students participate in these language practice activities. The teacher is expected to facilitate self-engaged, self-directed and motivated way of learning (Volman & Van Eyck 2001; De Corte et al. 2003; Khan 2014).

This paper primarily aims at presenting the existing ELT position at secondary level in Bangladesh. It focuses on ICT in English class based on the needs of the secondary students. Using classroom observation, group discussion and in-depth interviews with secondary school students and teachers, the paper brings to light different aspects of ICT-based ELT. This paper also makes some recommendations for the successful implementation of ICT in English language teaching at secondary level in Bangladesh.

Background of the Study

The 21st century is the age of technological development and this is reflected in all spheres of life, including teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is very common in our everyday life and in the learning and teaching process in most of the developed world. The researchers and linguists are now emphasizing the need for all learners to master what they call "21st century skills" which is also fairly similar to what the Government of Bangladesh declares as 'Digital Bangladesh'. This digitalization of education is important to integrate the communication technology

and classroom activities. Particularly, in teaching English language, modern technological tools are essential, interesting and have proved successful. Language teachers decide to exploit the potentials of ICT as it can easily and effectively promote the language learning at the secondary level in Bangladesh (Islam, 2014).

ICT is provides an interactive media for engaging students, providing opportunities to group analysis and practice. It also provides better access to resource materials (subject content and other related resources) and relevant articles (Khan 2014). Effective use of ICT can facilitate student-centered active learning (Ellis et al. 2008), engage students in collaborative learning as well as enhance their social interaction (Dodge, Colker & Heroman 2003), improve their cognitive development, increase creativity and improve their problem - solving skills (Khan, Hasan and Clement 2012). From the above discussion it is clear that ICT is very much useful for teaching and learning. If ICT is effectively implemented at the secondary level in Bangladesh, students are expected to be able to use English for their real life communication and as such Bangladesh will be able to fulfill the goal of digitalization of education.

English Language Teaching at the Secondary Level in Bangladesh: An Overview

Commenting on the importance of learning English language in Bangladesh, Imam (2005) writes: “In Bangladesh it is now essential for even factory workers, who earn less than the minimum wage, to know some English”(Imam 2005 p.480).The government along with non-government organizations (NGOs) and other educational organisations in Bangladesh have been putting efforts since 1990s to ensure the quality of English teaching in secondary education and increase students’ level of English language proficiency (Chowdhury& Farooqui 2012; Farooqui 2008; Haider & Chowdhury, 2012; Hamid & Honan, 2012). The new curriculum of English language teaching was introduced as part of the English language teaching improvement project (ELTIP) in 1998. This project set out

to bring changes in textbook, examination and in-service teacher training. This new curriculum aimed at relocating the teaching and learning of English from a traditional grammar- based approach to a function- based communicative approach. The textbook which has been published as part of this new curriculum in Bangladesh is the primary instructional resource utilized by teachers and students in language class rooms. A teacher's guide has been published with text to guide teachers in teaching. It is intended that teachers will follow the guide. The importance of teaching English is articulated in the textbook and in the teacher's guide (NCTB). NCTB indicates that one of the main features of the curriculum is to use English as the only language of instruction. There is no option of using native language in any activity and this is essential for the students to practice and develop their language skills. The integration of ICT in secondary education in Bangladesh has brought a significant change in English language teaching. Secretary, Ministry of Education, Bangladesh reports as

The ICT education is already made compulsory in education. Besides, the Ministry of Education is also providing online services for education related issues and implementing its actions of imparting broad use of ICT in classroom teaching. As a result it has brought about significant changes in the field of education' (Ministry of Education, Bangladesh, 2003)

Computers with internet are used frequently for English language teaching at urban areas. Through the internet teachers can collect many resources related to language as text, videos, stories etc and they can use it in the language classroom. This is however, difficult in rural areas owing to erratic electricity supply.

ICT in English Language Teaching in Bangladesh

ICT is the term that is currently used worldwide to describe new technologies which depend mainly on computer and the internet. Even the traditional technologies such as radio, television and telephone are considered as ICTs (Ibrahim, 2010).

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2003), ICTs as include, ‘basically information -handling tools-a varied set of goods, applications and services that are used to produce, store, process, distribute and exchange information. They include the old ICTs of radio, television and telephone, and the ‘new’ ICTs of computers, satellite and wireless technology and the internet. These different tools are now able to work together, and combine to form our ‘networked world’ a massive infrastructure of interconnected telephone services, standardized computing hardware, the internet, radio and television, which reaches into every corner of the globe’. Technological innovation has changed the social, political, economic and cultural fabric of life since the end of cold war (Taylor, 2001). ICT has a considerable influence on the way we teach and the content we deliver. However, ICT as a teaching aid is more complicated in that it demands more specific skills from the teachers (Salehi & Salehi, 2012). The development of ICT- electronic mail, internet, multimedia, possibilities to use collaborative platforms, undoubtedly, influences the process of using them in everyday classroom teaching and learning. ICT no longer serves to be a simple additional means but ICT is an indispensable part of the modern and contemporary learning environment (Kalnina &, Kangro, 2007).

The application of ICT gives more opportunities for communication among peer learners: they can exchange information in real time, they can participate in blog discussions, work in teams on different projects, exchange emails, search for information etc. By using the authentic material provided by the internet we will have a better insight into the culture and people whose language we study (Padurean & Margan,2009;Rozgiene, Medvedeva & Strakova, 2008).Moreover, Audio/video programme of the particular lesson can provide students with extra opportunities to do meaningful language learning tasks. In this context we can mention the Bangladesh Open University which has been providing audio and video-based language learning opportunities to the students ranging from secondary to Masters in Bangladesh since 1992.

Aims and Scope of the Study

In Bangladesh secondary education is one of the most important and biggest sub-sectors in education having huge number of institutions and teachers. The rate of enrolment in secondary sub-sector increased significantly in last decade but in terms of quality, it is not up to the mark (National Curriculum and Textbook Board-NCTB). Too many of our young learners have been dropping out of school each year; too many have been failing. This must be changed. The school has an important role to play in relation to these aspects of students' development (SEQAEP). The similar finding was emphasized by (Begum and Farooqui, 2008)

To reform and bring positive changes in the secondary ELT programme, the government, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and other educational organisations have been putting efforts since 1990s (Begum and Farooqui, 2008) and as a part of the changes, ICT has incorporated in ELT class rooms in 2009. The government has put focus on ICT-based ELT in secondary education rather than only ICT literacy (A2i; PMO 2009) which referred to educational technology integration and adoption. In addition, the education and research objectives of the Bangladeshi government's national policy 2009 (MOICT, 2009) and its strategic themes and action plans guided the scope of current research. Hence the study aims to analyse the students' needs in secondary English language teaching in terms of using ICTs and find out the most useful technological tools for teaching and learning language in secondary English classes.

Research Questions

The Study had the following research questions:

- A. What are the teachers' levels of knowledge of ICT and their use in ELT class room?
- B. What are the attitudes of the teachers toward the most useful ICT tools for teaching language to the secondary level students?

- C. What are the existing challenges which the teachers face in ELT classroom while implementing ICT?
- D. What are the perceptions of the students regarding the use of ICT in developing four skills (Listening, speaking, reading and writing) of English language?
- E. Do the students find any differences between traditional ELT class and ICT-based ELT class?

Research Methodology

Within the qualitative orientation, secondary English class observation, an in-depth interview and group discussion with teachers and students have been undertaken for the study. In order to provide a wider range of perspectives of teachers and students in different contexts, 24 teachers and 150 students from 12 schools situated in urban and rural areas of Bangladesh were randomly selected as participants of this study. These samples were representatives of teachers and students from diverse backgrounds (Teachers' profile with their pseudonyms are given to protect their identity and students' profile are not given as they are large in number). Data were collected through ELT class observation, an in-depth interview and group discussion with teachers and students.

The purpose of the classroom observation was to understand what technological tools teachers use while teaching and their attitudes toward them. At the same time students' perceptions toward ICT were also known. Interview and group discussion with teachers and students were undertaken to get a clear picture regarding the use of ICT in ELT.

Analysis

The findings of the study can be summarised under three headings:..

Teachers' knowledge of ICT & their use in ELT classroom

The use of ICT is new in Bangladesh secondary education. The data shows that the secondary teachers' knowledge on ICT & their successful use in language classrooms are not satisfactory. The most common uses of ICTs- the computer, the internet, e-mail, word processing; education videos & CDs are not regularly used by the teachers due to their limitations. The data reveals that as Manju, an English teacher of urban area says "I feel comfortable to use audio and video in my English language class and students are attentive and interactive throughout the class time but most of the teachers do not use it because they feel shy due to their little knowledge on the use of ICT". Rafiq, a teacher from rural area, says "to run the computer, electricity is required but in many schools there is no electricity connection and computers given by the government is under lock & key only". Haris from urban school says "I personally use internet to collect new resources for my class and use these in developing students' speaking and writing". Most of the teachers from urban areas have knowledge about internet and other technological tools.

Students Perceptions in Using ICT

When the students were shown the video of unit thirteen: lesson 1, they were found motivated and attentive in the class. The author observed the students of 10th class taking interest in learning English in the classroom of Akram, a teacher of the urban school. At the end of the video when the teacher asked the students to do some activities (reading the text and asking meaning of the words) from the lesson, most of the students understood his instruction and responded positively. But for some students, the teacher had to translate it into Bangla and only then students understood his instructions clearly. As a part of this lesson teacher used mobile SMS also and has shown it to the students. When he asked the students to produce similar text almost all of them have produced it correctly. They enjoyed their English class throughout the session

and learnt more than what they would have learnt from the traditional English class. The author observed another classroom taught by another teacher, Mohsin, and found that despite showing interest, most students could not successfully perform the tasks assigned to them. The students produced SMS texts in Bengali using English letters. However, they also showed curiosity and demand more use of ICT in language classrooms.

Data shows that the students of urban areas use emails and chat with their friends, use Skype for exchanging information. A number of students use internet and computer independently for learning English language and as such they develop their language skills-listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They also find the differences between ICT-based ELT class and traditional ELT class and show their positive perceptions towards technology.

Challenges of using ICT in ELT classrooms

ICT revolution in Bangladesh brings about changes in education systems, but it faces a lot of challenges. Most important challenge is the lack of teacher's knowledge of ICT tools. Knowledge of ICT is essential for making English class successful as ICT includes computer, interactive multimedia, audio devices, internet, television, mobile gadget, interactive whiteboard etc. As one Rafiq, an urban school teacher, observed, 'most of our English teachers have little idea about ICT they use audios and videos only for their language classes and they are not aware about other technologies'.

Lack of knowledge in English is another reason for not using ICT in language classroom successfully. Shahin, an urban school teacher, says that an English teacher is a graduate in a different subject and finds it difficult to instruct students in English. Teachers' lack of proficiency in English is identified as a hindrance for ICT-based classrooms because all the materials are written in English. Raihan, a teacher of urban area, teaches both in Bangla and English, says "classes are held in both Bangla and English so that students can comprehend better". Another teacher Rekha, from an urban

school, supports the above view saying, ‘According to the new text book we are supposed to teach English in English classroom and this point is emphasized by ELTIP training too. After taking training when I started class in English, it is found that students are not getting me clearly. So I have left the idea of using only English in my ELT classroom’. Here proficiency of students in English is identified as another barrier for making the class successful. Another teacher, Rina, of urban school says in Bangladesh secondary schools are managed by local committee headed by a member of parliament (MP) or a political leader and teachers are appointed on the basis of political choice. Political leaders do not consider the competency of the appointed teacher. Apart from these deficiencies of teachers and students, inadequate ICT- based infrastructure, lack of availability of resources, and insufficient funds are also viewed as challenges for implementing ICT in ELT classrooms successfully.

Discussion and Recommendations

In spite of such limitations, ICT presents a powerful learning environment for the students in the language classroom. It ensures learner centered classes. ICT enables the students work independently with technologies with a goal of arriving at a specified level of mastery of a given knowledge set. It provides flexibility of learning too. Using ICT, the students can improve their language skills and introduce with new language items easily. Information and communication technology helps the students to perform better in language learning than with regimented traditional classroom teaching. Bangladesh Open University is also providing technology-based English language learning facilities to the students from secondary level to masters’ level.

Realizing its significance, the Government of Bangladesh has organized a seminar on “Future classrooms: Increasing learning achievements” in the city’s Bangbandhu International Conference Centre on 2 December 2011 wherein the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina said “Our goal is to harness the power of appropriate information and communication technology to achieve development

targets in Education, health, employment, poverty reduction and economic development as well as empowerment of toiling masses” (*The Daily Star*, 2 December 2011). Some NGOs and business companies also took interest in popularizing the ICT. For example *Robi*, a mobile company in collaboration with *The Daily Star* organized ‘The day-long English Language Fair’ to improve the proficiency of secondary school students in English at three schools of Barisal, Kishoreganj and Bogra where a movie was screened and later quiz programmes and competitions were held on vocabulary, moral lessons, extempore speech, role playing and writing picture descriptions’ (*The Daily Star*, 29 October 2011). It was reported that at least 200 students took part in the competition from each school and enjoyed their learning.

To sum up, use of ICT in a language classroom is essential to spread the knowledge of English knowledge. However, the task requires huge capital, competent teachers, revised curriculum and institutional readiness. Finally we can say, if the national and international donor agencies come forward with their support the dream of Bangladesh may come true.

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