

Preference of the Learners towards Literature Based Materials in the Present Textbook of Classes IX and X in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The present study aims to emphasize the effectiveness of using literature in the textbook of classes ix-x in Bangladesh. It reviews the arguments for using literature in the language classroom. It is found that literary texts provide wide scope to explore multi-dimensional use of the language in the classroom. The study seeks the preference of the learners' towards using literature based materials in their present text book. In the empirical study the data is collected from five different schools through questionnaire survey. To analyze the data Likert's scale is used. The major findings indicate that learners like to deal with literature based materials like short stories, poems and simplified versions of literary pieces. The study also finds that huge amount of group work and pair work that are provided by the present textbook of classes ix and x are not done in the classroom. In the last the study recommends some suggestions in order to make the teaching-learning process more effective in Bangladesh.

Key Words: EFL, Bangladesh, textbook, literature, CLT

Preliminaries

As a result of globalization, it has become the basic need for all of us to be competent in English. Now it is used as a means of world communication, diplomacy, science and technology, trade and commerce, research and information. Like many other non-native English-speaking countries English education in Bangladesh is marked by several problems. Teaching materials or textbooks play an important role in English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly in a context where English is used as a Foreign Language (EFL). In such a context, a textbook provides the primary (perhaps only) form of linguistic input. It meets a learner's needs or expectations of having something concrete to work from and take home for further study. It is very important to make the

textbook effective with selective contents in the teaching-learning process. But the current textbook of class ix-x in our country is not found effective due to wrong selection of contents.

Like many other countries English language teaching-learning process in Bangladesh is running based on the conventional concept of method. With the introduction of CLT, the textbooks from primary to higher secondary level in Bangladesh have been written following the principles of this new approach. But, most of the contents of these textbooks do not appear to be effective for classroom teaching. Learners cannot exploit these contents properly due to lack of their effectiveness. To improve the quality of English teaching in our country, it is necessary to make the English textbooks effective. Many teachers and experts are now of the opinion that the English textbooks of the secondary level of education do not have enough reading texts and whatever amount they do have are not much appealing to the learners. These materials do not appear to be attractive to them and they do not feel interested to read them or participate in the activities designed on them. That is, the materials do not sound effective to engage learners in practicing the language. If their preference towards literature based materials becomes positive, it can be thought that it will be effective for them.

Again, they also complain that the textbooks contain only one unit of literary texts and that too is placed at the very end. As the literary texts are placed at the last portion of the textbook, teachers very often do not get chance to teach them in the classroom. For want of literature learners do not get pleasure in dealing with the textbook in the classroom. Many ELT practitioners now think that the textbook in Bangladesh need to be vigorously revised and the amount of literary contents should be increased.

For and Against the Use of Literature For ELT

It should be admitted that there are arguments for and against the use of literature for ELT. Most common argument against the use of literature in language classroom is the structural complexity and uniqueness of its language.

But there are so many experts who argue for using literature in the language classroom. Daskalovska and Dimova (2012) worked on the causes of using literature as a tool of language

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teaching. They argued that inclusion of literature in language teaching materials will provide students with the opportunities to experience and use the language more creatively and to develop greater awareness of the language they are learning.

Khatib & Teimourtash (2012) proposes using abridged short stories in the EFL classroom settings of Iran and finds that literature is the best to open the critical thinking faculty of the learners in language classroom.

Rana (2009) works on teaching language through literary texts in ESL classroom. He emphasises on the use of literature in the communicative classroom and especially, on the Indian classroom. Widdowson (cited in Rana, 2009) claimed that ‘study of literature is fundamentally a study of language in operation’. His view is based on the realization that literature is an example of language in the use and is a context for language use.

Mixon and Temu (2006) argue in their essay that there is strong support for story telling in pedagogical theory. Stories that are based on real-life incidents experienced by students themselves can help the learners appreciate and respect the culture and the values of various groups. Krashen (1982) also supports this view that stories lower the young learner’s affective filter, allowing them to learn more easily.

According to Kohan and Pourkalhor (2004), literature plays a motivating role in the classroom and holds high status in many cultures and countries. For this reason, students can feel a real sense of achievement at understanding a piece of highly respected literature. Also, literature is often more interesting than the texts found in course books. As a result, instructors should agree that literary texts encourage students to read, and most literary texts chosen according to students’ language proficiency levels and preferences will certainly be motivating. In most of the EFL context young or secondary level learners feel a kind of frustration towards the language. Pleasure of literature will remove the fear and frustration towards the language and the learners will be motivated using the language.

Research literature shows that literature helps to achieve linguistic competence, facilitates communicative activity, motivates the learners towards the target language, promotes critical and analytical ability, enhances emotional intelligence, helps to achieve vocabulary and pronunciation etc. However, all literary texts are not appropriate and the amount of literature to be used has to be decided on the basis of the level of the students and also of the nature of contextual demands.

Learners' and teachers' preference towards literature based materials plays a major role to make the teaching learning process effective (Farjana 2014) in an effort to find the effectiveness of literature based materials in relation to the various aspects of the Communicative Language Teaching at the secondary level in Bangladesh. As part of that larger study, this article presents the collected data especially on teachers' and learners' preference to literature based content in the textbook.

Objective of the Study

The present study aims to identify the preferences of the secondary students to the literature based materials in the English textbook. This study presents an estimated picture about the students' likings, disliking and preferences to literature based materials. As the primary sources of data are the subjects' own insights into the learning process, the focus is on the actions that the learners consciously employ to facilitate learning, and, as Oxford (1989) suggests, make it more enjoyable.

Methodology

The study has made a questionnaire survey based on the preferences of the learners in order to investigate whether learners of Bangladesh prefer literary texts in their present textbook of classes ix and x. For this purpose, 100 students of classes ix and x from five schools of mainstream education situated in the district of Mymensingh and Netrokona were taken as respondents. Of these five schools, three were Non-Government and two government schools. Since the number of the Non-Government school is larger than that of the government school in Bangladesh, three Non-Government schools were taken against two government school.

The questionnaires used in this survey consisted of 14 and 13 items. The statements of the questionnaire were presented both in English and Bangla for easy understanding of the participants. In order to capture the responses of the respondents, a Likert scale with five options (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree) indicating the extent of their agreement or disagreement with the statements of the questionnaire was used.

Table 1: List and Type of the schools:

Names and Locations of the Schools Selected	Types of the Schools Selected	Number of the Learners Surveyed
Mukul Niketon High School, Mymensingh	Non- Government	20
Biddamoyee Government Girls' High School, Mymensingh	Government	20
Gouripur Pilot Girls' School, Gouripur	Non- Government	20
Netrokona Govt. Girls High School, Netrokona	Government	20
Dutta High School, Netrokona	Non- Government	20

The participants were asked to answer all the items of the questionnaires honestly, giving their preferences and views regarding using literature-based contents in the English textbook of classes ix-x. The participants were randomly selected from the target population. In case of the students' questionnaire survey English teachers in the selected schools were requested to explain the statements of the questionnaire to the participants. Respondents were asked to mark the extent to which they agree or disagree with the items of the questionnaire.

Results of the Questionnaire Survey of the Learners

Table 2: Statements of the questionnaire, and Percentages, Means and Standard Deviations of Responses of the Learners (Total number of Students=100)

There were 14 statements in the learners' questionnaire and all the statements were intended to know about learners' views and preferences regarding different aspects of the use of literature in their textbook. The Mean scores and the SDs of their responses are presented in the table 2 below.

In respect of the Mean score of the respondents' responses on the statement has been worked out. In this respect, strongly agree = 5, agree =4, undecided =3, disagree =2 and strongly disagree =1 point or points have been counted as the values of the responses. The Mean scores above 4 are regarded as 'very high', above 3 but below 4 as 'high', above 2 but below 3 as 'low' and below 2 as 'very low' level of preferences. To show the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the learners' preferences, standard deviation is also measured.

Table-2**The Results of Learners' Questionnaire Survey**

SL. No.	Statements	Mean Score	Standard Deviation (SD)
1	I think in our context reading text can play a vital role to learn	4.1	0.18
2	I think our textbook of classes ix & x should include more amount of reading texts than it does at present	4.2	0.14
3	Story based texts will be more enjoyable to me than knowledge- based or information based texts	4.6	0.28
4	If presented in simplified version, some extracts from famous novels or dramas can prove very interesting and attractive as reading text	3.72	0.14
5	A poem gives us pleasure and stimulates our imagination	4.2	0.20
6	I think whole class interactions such as asking and answering questions, debate or discussion on some topic are very useful in our context	4.55	0.14
7	I think a literary text contains various kinds of linguistic elements and therefore, we will get better exposed to language when we will read it	3.9	0.15
8	I think there should be a significant amount of literary texts in the textbook for class ix-x	4.2	0.20
9	I get much pleasure to read a text if it is about a fairy tale, or a myth or any kind of story	4.05	0.15
10	I like to participate in a activity if it is guided by my teacher	4.52	0.25

11	I like to do activities on such texts as are interesting to read	3.7	0.13
12	I do pair work and group work as per the instructions given in my textbook.	2.11	0.18
13	I will feel freer to talk about a literary text than to talk about knowledge-based or other kind of text.	3.6	0.15
14	I think reading a text helps me to learn new words and new grammatical rules.	4.36	0.21

Statement 1 has ‘very high’ Mean score (4.1), which indicates that reading text can, according to the opinions of our learners, play very vital role in our context.

Similarly, ‘very high’ Mean score (4.2) of statement 2 indicates that the present textbook of classes ix-x does not include significant amount of reading text at present and therefore it should include more amount of reading texts.

Statement 3 has 4.6 Mean score which falls to the category of ‘very high’. Statement 3 signifies that our learners will enjoy story-based texts far more than knowledge-based or information-based texts.

Statement 4 has ‘high’ Mean score (3.72) and suggests that some extracts taken from famous novels or dramas and presented in simplified version can prove attractive reading texts to our learners.

Statement 5 deals with poems as reading texts and has ‘very high’ Mean score (4.2). Therefore, the ‘very high’ Mean score of this statement indicates that our learners very strongly like to see poems in their textbook as the poems give them much pleasure and stimulate their imagination.

Statement 6 has the highest score which is 4.55. This statement signifies that according to the opinions of our learners' whole class interactions are the most suitable activities for our context.

Statement 7 has 'high' Mean score (3.9) which means that students believe that literature contains varied kinds of linguistic element and therefore, they can get better exposure to English by reading literary texts.

Statement 8 has 'very high' Mean score (4.2) which signifies that learners strongly support the idea that their textbook should contain significant amount of literary texts along with other kinds of texts.

In the statement 9 the Mean score is 'very high' (4.05). According to the learners' response to the statement, it can be said that the learners of our country will get much pleasure in reading some texts if the texts are about some story, may it be about a fairy tale or a myth.

In the statement 10 the Mean score is 4.52 which signifies that the learners strongly agree to participate in the classroom activities under the guidance of their teacher. That is, teacher-centered classroom is strongly preferred by them.

Statement 11 has 'high' Mean score (3.7) signifying that learners like to participate in such activities as are interesting to read. That is to say, if the texts are interesting, they like to participate in the tasks and activities made on these texts.

Statement 12 enquires whether the learners participate in the group or pair works as per the instruction of the textbook. It has 'low' Mean score (2.11) which signifies that though the textbook has lots of pair and group work these are not done in the classroom

Statement 13 enquires whether learners feel freer to talk about a literary text than to talk about a knowledge-based or other kind of text. The mean score 3.6 of their statement indicates that they have higher preference' for literary texts than other kind of texts.

Statement 14 deals with the potentiality of the reading text in enabling learners to learn vocabulary and grammatical rules and has ‘very high’ Mean score (4.36). The Mean score signifies that the learners strongly believe that reading text helps them to learn new words and new grammatical rules.

Discussion on the Overall Results of the Students’ Questionnaire Survey

The overall results of the students’ questionnaire survey show that the students of Bangladesh at the secondary level want more reading texts in their textbook than they do have at present (statement 2, Mean 4.2). They think that in the context of Bangladesh reading text is very much useful for learning English (Statement 1, Mean 4.1). They also think that story-based reading text in the form of short stories, poems, and extracts from novels and dramas will be more attractive than other kinds of texts such as knowledge-based or information-based texts. (Statement 3, Mean 4.6, statement 4, Mean 3.72, statement 5, Mean 4.2, Statement 9, Mean 4.05). It is so because literary reading texts give them much pleasure and comfort, which they do not get in other kinds of texts.

The results also show that the learners of Bangladesh like to learn under the guidance of their teachers (Statement 10, Mean 4.52). They think that under teachers’ control whole class interaction like discussion, debate, asking and answering etc. will be more useful in our context (statement 6, Mean 4.55). They also think that activities like pair work and group work are not suitable in our context. That is why though there is ample presence of pair work and group work in their textbook; these kinds of work are not done in the classroom practices (statement 12, Mean 2.11). The learners think that the literary reading texts help them to learn grammatical rules and new words since literary reading texts contain grammatical rules, vocabulary and other linguistic element abundantly. If reading texts are sufficient in amount the learners can learn the language more effectively (statement 14, Mean 4.36). They again think that the whole class interactions will be better effective if they do get literary subjects as topics for their discussion. In that case they will feel free and interested to talk about the topic (statement 13, Mean 3.6).

The results show that the learners of Bangladesh think that they can be better exposed to the language through reading their texts. They also think that reading texts contain various kinds of

linguistic element (statement 7, Mean 3.9). The learners of Bangladesh have very little scope for exposure to English other than through their textbook. That is why they think that their textbook should include significant amount of literary texts (statement 8, Mean 4.2).

The standard deviation of the results shows that the highest standard deviation is .28 and the lowest is 0.14. The other numbers are in between the highest and the lowest. Therefore, it can be said that the learners of the secondary level of Bangladesh are mostly homogenous in their preference and opinions though sometimes the variations are a little bit wider.

Discussion on the Overall Results of the Students Questionnaire Survey

The learners of Bangladesh strongly believe that reading texts play very vital role to learn the English Language and there should be more amount of reading texts in the textbook (Means 4.1 and 4.2, statement 1 and 2 respectively, table 2).

The data shows that if story-based texts are used in the textbook they will be more enjoyable to the learners than information or knowledge-based texts. The learners show very strong preference towards story-based materials (Mean 4.6, state 3, table 2). In the EFL situation it is difficult for the learners to deal with the knowledge-based texts. The learners strongly believe that the textbook should give priority to story-based texts.

The result shows that the textbook should have variety in the contents. Along with the short stories there can be poems and extracts from novels and dramas. In this regard the learners emphasize on the properly chosen poems and simplified versions of stories (Mean 3.72, state 4, table 2). They also think that poems can be effective tool of stimulating imagination and providing pleasure while reading. (Mean 4.4, state 5, table 2). The language of the stories or the extracts should be easy so that the learners can easily deal with them. The learners think that if different kinds of literary texts like fairy tale, myth or other stories are included in the textbook they will get much pleasure (Mean 4.05, state 9, table 2).

The result shows that in Bangladesh English is not learnt through group work and pair that the textbook contains (Mean 2.11, state 12, table 2). Actually, they do not enjoy reading information or knowledge-based texts and do not participate in the pair and group work. Besides, large class size, insufficient class time and cultural factors impede pair work and group work. Therefore, the learners believe that whole class interaction can be very much effective in our context. (Mean 4.55, state 6, table 2). They think that asking and answering question, debate and free discussion can be very much effective than pair and group work in the context of Bangladesh. In this case the reading materials should be interesting so that the learners like to participate in the task and activities set on these interesting texts. (Mean 3.7, state 11, table 2). Learners even feel free to talk about the topics or subjects if they are the topics or subjects of literary texts (Mean 3.6, state 13, table 2).

The result shows the textbook should include such tasks and activities that can be done under the guidance of teacher. Instead of doing group and pair works, the learners like to participate in classroom activities under the guidance of teachers (Mean 4.2, state 10, table 2). Therefore, pair works and group works should be avoided and arrangements should be made for whole-class interactions. In this regard, the textbook should include interesting reading texts in significant amount so that the learners feel interested to participate on whole class interactions on these texts under teachers' guidance.

In the EFL context learning a language means learning grammar, vocabulary and different aspects of language. The learners think that they will be better exposed to various kinds of linguistic elements if they read a literary text (Mean 3.9, state 7, table 2). Like the students he teachers also think that literary texts is very rich in various kinds of linguistic elements and therefore learners can learn these elements of language while reading those texts (Mean 4.2, state 8, table 3). To develop their writing skills grammar and vocabulary should be emphasized.

The result shows the learners strongly support using literature in the textbook. But what should be the amount of literary texts in a textbook? The learners believe that there should be a significant amount of literature in the textbook. Here the phrase “significant amount” signifies that

the major of the learners' textbook should be literature-based. There can be other kinds of texts in their textbook, but the literary texts should be dominant. It should be mentioned that the Mean score on this point are 4.2 and 4.5 which are very high score (state8, table2).

In this chapter the results of the empirical study have been presented, analyzed and discussed to find principles for designing literature-based materials for English language teaching in Bangladesh. The results show that some aspects of beliefs and preferences of the learners are similar with the present teaching-learning practices of the country.

Summary and Recommendations

The study started with the objectives to investigate the views the learners regarding the use of literature in the textbook of classes nine to ten as well as to provide recommendation for further research.

- 1) The English textbook of classes ix-x should include more amount of reading text.
- 2) Three fourth of the English textbook should be literature-based.
- 3) There should be variety in the topics of the text and literary items like, short story, poems, fairy tales and extracts from novels and dramas should be included.
- 4) Teacher-centered classroom is appropriate for English language teaching in Bangladesh.
- 5) Instead of pair work and group work the textbook should include interesting reading texts and whole-class interaction should be arranged.
- 6) In case of using original form of literature simplified versions should be used.
- 7) Literature should be used to teach writing skill and for this reason grammar, vocabulary and different areas of language should be taught.

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