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Teaching English Pronunciation to The H.S.C level students of Bangladesh: Constraints and Considerations

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Abstract: Pronunciation is one of the most significant parts of EFL teaching and learning process. Notwithstanding, pronunciation scarcely gets sufficient importance in teaching as well as learning English at any level in Bangladesh. Hence, teaching pronunciation to the higher secondary level students in Bangladesh is one of the most challenging tasks. This study tried to find out the EFL teachers' realization of the significance of pronunciation and the ways they teach pronunciation to the HSC level learners. It also aimed to find out the problems that the teachers faced while teaching English pronunciation. This mixed method research used questionnaire survey, in-depth interview and classroom observation to collect data. 16 English teachers were randomly selected from four government and four non-government colleges located in Dhaka city. Collected quantitative data were analysed using the computer software 'SPSS', and qualitative data were analysed by a contrastive and comparative method. This paper revealed the existing teaching pronunciation scenario at the HSC level. The research showed that the learners emphasized practicing reading and writing skills more than speaking and listening because of the present English curriculum at the HSC level where speaking and listening have no scope to be tested. As pronunciation was related to speaking and listening, the students remain reluctant during teachers' lectures on pronunciation. Based on the findings, some recommendations have been presented for the students and the teachers to overcome teaching pronunciation related problems at the HSC level.

Keywords: HSC, RP, Challenges, Pronunciation teaching, EFT, Policy

1. Introduction

Pronunciation teaching is one the most significant tasks for the teachers in EFL teaching. For the past three decades, there has been a renewed interest in pronunciation in second language learning and teaching, and its role and importance have been increasingly recognized (Couper, 2003, 2006; Gilbert, 2010; Isaacs, 2009; Penington, 1998). Pronunciation belongs to great importance in terms of successful communication is only possible when there will be correct pronunciation. Bad pronunciation will be presented wrongly which will discourage the speaker. So, pronunciation is considered as an integrated and integrated and integral component of second/foreign language learning as it influences learners' communicative competence and performance (Maniruzzaman, 2008).

Although Morley (1991) insisted that it is necessary to teach English pronunciation in the ESL or EFL class room, nevertheless, this important area is still neglected or ignored at many universities and colleges around the world. Because of both shortage of time and exclusion of pronunciation in curriculum, pronunciation is avoided at the HSC level in Bangladesh. However, these reasons do not rationalize the negligence for teaching pronunciation, as teaching itself is obligatory for achieving intelligible and comprehensible speech production (Fraser, 1999).

In Bangladesh, a monolingual country, English is dominating but at the HSC level attention is largely paid to grammar and vocabulary in English language learning and teaching. Teachers teach the students to make a good result is board exam. After passing HSC level, learners have to attend at the tertiary level of education where the medium of education is English. So, correct pronunciation rather than native like pronunciation is expected from the learners for better communication. Nunan (1991) has mentioned that only gifted learners can attain the mastery over pronunciation, though they start learning language after puberty. In Higher Secondary Level (HSC) pronunciation is not focused to be tested. Moreover students in EFL context get scanty opportunity to practice English outside and inside classroom.

This paper mainly deals with the situation of teaching pronunciation at the HSC level students. The problems that our teachers face are discussed in this paper. Afterwards this study tried to find out the EFL teachers' realization of the significance of pronunciation and the ways they teach pronunciation to the HSC level learners. It also aimed to find out the problems that the teachers faced while teaching English pronunciation.

2. Literature Review

English is taught as a compulsory subject at the HSC level. English taught in Bangladesh at the levels mentioned aims at developing students communicative competence keeping in mind, especially the four skills, namely listening speaking, reading and writing which would enable them to communicate with people in

different situations using the language approximately (Munibur, 2015). It is clearly perceived that learners' communicative competence and performance depend on their command of all skills of the target language (Moniruzzaman, 2007). Most of the teachers teaching at different colleges in Bangladesh focus on enabling students to learn grammar rather than focusing on an overall development of the English language.

Pennington and Richards (1986 as cited in Nunan: 1991) narrates teaching pronunciation on the basis of communicative language teaching. They emphasize on a long-term goal for teaching pronunciation which should be taught as an integral should aim to reduce the amount of native language influence. But in Bangladesh, as Sultana and Arif(2007) have said that Bangladeshi learners are not aware of the difference between sound and spelling and knowledge of the syllabic or phonological divisions of words. They have also added that the influence of local dialect has a great impact on the use of English (as cited in Azizul, 2010, P199).Jenleins(1998:121) said that, teaching second language pronunciation should focus on "Core areas". She identifies these as certain segmentals, nuclear stress and the effective use of articulatory setting.

Some researchers said that some learners would be benefited if they were trained properly focusing on particularly in the area of segmental phonology. Learners may improve their pronunciation substantially emphasizing on consonants and vowel sounds and being aware of the suprasegmental features of English. As Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) said that, phonological features are among the most salient linguistic dimensions used by speakers to create a sense of personal identity. Teaching pronunciation may not ensure all the same time. Learner's improvement may improve in different areas, at different rates and at different times. Though some learners show immediate improvement, others improve after a certain period. As in Bangladesh, It is not feasible to expect that a non-native speaker will achieve the native like English. Rather they should be expected to communicate appropriately by producing comprehensible and intelligible pronunciation sounds (Howlader, 2011).

For better teaching pronunciation, Penny Ur and Harmer suggest that imitation or recorded model of sounds ,recording of learner speech and contrast with native model of sounds ,recording of learner speech and contrast with native model and choral repetition of drills can be effective techniques of teaching pronunciation as a part of communicative language teaching (CLT): listening and imitating, phonetic training ,minimal pairs, Visual Aids(e.g. sound-color chart, Fidel wall charts, rods, pictures, mirrors etc.) and tongue twisters.

Listening and speaking facilitate communication develop confidence among the learner through interaction with fellow learners (Rehman, 1991; Rehman, 2010). This conversation is unavailable at the HSC level in Bangladesh. This scenery is also same in other countries where English is taught as a second language or a foreign language. According to Fraser (1999) there are several reasons of negligence of avoiding teaching pronunciation like: lower possibility of achieving native like pronunciation, less opportunity of interacting with native speakers. Exclusion of pronunciation in HSC syllabus becomes another reason.

Therefore, this study has designed to mostly explore the nature of teaching pronunciation to the students at the HSC levels in Bangladesh and factors related to these problems.

3.Study Methodology

In order to collect data, mixed-research method was used and for the questionnaire survey sixteen English were randomly selected from four government and four non- government colleges from Dhaka city. At first permission was sought formally from the teachers to collect data. Teachers were assured that their identities would be kept confidential. The teachers interviewed were involved with teaching English to the HSC level students. Participated teachers' list is given below-

Sl no	College Name	Designation	Training experience	Extra Qualification
T1	RajukUttara model college	Assistant professor	19 years	M.Ed.
T2	RajukUttara model college	Assistant professor	17 years	MA in ELT
T3	Milestone college	Assistant professor	16 years	M.Ed.
T4	Milestone college	Assistant professor	8 years	M.Ed.
T5	Dhaka college	Associate professor	27 years	M.Ed.,MA in ELT
T6	Dhaka college	Associate professor	28 years	M.Phil
T7	Govt. ShahidSharawardi College	Assistant professor	15 years	M.Ed.
T8	Govt. ShahidSharawardi College	Lecturer	11 years	M.Ed.
T9	Dhaka Commerce College	Associate professor	27 years	M.Ed. and MA in ELT
T10	Dhaka commerce College	Associate professor	25 years	M.Ed. and MA in ELT
T11	BAFShaheen College	Lecturer	3 years	M.Ed.
T12	BAFShaheen College	Lecturer	5 years	MA in ELT

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T13	AbujarGhifari College	Assistant professor	18 years M.Ed. and MA in ELT
T14	AbujarGhifari College	Lecturer	5 years M.Ed. and MA in ELT
T15	Adamjee Cantonment College	Assistant professor	27 years M.Ed.
T16	Adamjee Cantonment College	Assistant professor	13 years M.Ed.

To collect data questionnaire and classroom. Observation were used. A questionnaire was served for taking in depth interview to be informed about their suggestion and experience in this regard.

3.2 Instrument

Eight Classrooms were observed on a self-made checklist to find out teaching methodology of teacher for teaching pronunciation. The study used classroom observation outcomes as the reference to gauge whether the teacher used any special technique like imitation, repetition, reinforcement, description of vocal organ system and sound articulation mechanism. While observing classroom, teacher's proficiency in speaking English was also examined by noting down and analyzing mispronounced words during the class. In-depth interview was taken and all data were transcribed. In-depth interview was audio recorded and backed up by jotting down all the information. The questionnaire served to the teachers contained 8 open ended questions. Before taking interview and observing classrooms, at first permission was sought.

4.3 Data Analysis

In order to investigate the study, qualitative research method was applied. To know the real condition of the teachers teaching pronunciation, a questionnaire was developed. Collected quantitative data were analyzed using the computer software 'SPSS' and qualitative data were analyzed by using a contrastive and comparative method. The remarks and assertions made by the interviewed teachers during the various interview sessions were constantly compared and contrasted throughout.

4. Findings

The findings of the study are presented on the basis of the objectives of the study. The findings of the study are presented in the following sections:

4.1. Findings of Teacher Questionnaire

Sl.

No.		Frequency	Percentage		
01.	1. Inclusion of EFL pronunciation in curriculum	Agree	00	00	
	Neutral	02	12.5%		
	Disagree	14	87.5%		
02.	2. The text "English For Today" (EFT) includes pronunciation exercise	Agree	09	56.25%	
	Neutral	03	18.75%		
	Disagree	04	25%		
03.	Class test includes EFL pronunciation	Agree	02	12.5%	
	Neutral	03	18.75%		
	Disagree	11	68.75%		
04.	Final examination includes EFL pronunciation	Agree	00	00	
	Neutral	02	12.5%		
	Disagree	14	87.5%		
05.	Teachers teach pronunciation in the classrooms	Agree	02	12.5%	
	Neutral	04	25%		
	Disagree	10	62.5%		
06.	Pronunciation being important	Agree	13	81.25%	
	Neutral	03	18.75%		
	Disagree	00	00		
07.	Conducting explicit pronunciation teaching	Agree	03	18.75%	
	Neutral	04	25%		
	Disagree	09	56.25%		
08.	Teachers having training on pronunciation	Agree	07	43.75%	

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Neutral	03	18.75%
Disagree	06	37.5%

The above figure explains that 87.5% teachers disagreed and 12.5% teachers were neutral about the inclusion of EFL pronunciation in curriculum. In reply to the question regarding the inclusion of pronunciation exercise in the text English for Today (EFT), 9 teachers 56.25% agreed, 3 (18.75%) teachers were neutral and 4 teacher (25%) disagreed. Regarding the question whether class test includes EFL pronunciation or not, most of the teachers which were 68.75% disagreed, 18.75% teachers were neutral and 12.5% teachers agreed. More over 87.5% teachers disagreed and only 12.5% teachers were neutral regarding the inclusion of EFL pronunciation in final examination. 10 teachers among 16 did not teach pronunciation in the classroom whereas 2 teachers notified that they taught pronunciation. Most of the teachers which were about 81.25% (13 out of 16) believed that pronunciation was important and 18.75% (3 out of 16) were neutral. In terms of conducting explicit pronunciation teaching, 9 teachers (56.25%) disagreed, 3 teachers (18.75%) agreed and 4 teachers (25%) were neutral. In a reply to the question of having training, 37.5% teachers (6 out of 16) disagreed, 43.45% teachers (7 out of 16) agreed and 18.75% teachers (3 out of 16) were neutral.

4.2 Findings of Classroom observation

Teacher's interest teaching EFL pronunciation was hardly found during my observation in 8 classes. Duration of most of the classes was about 40 minutes where explicit teaching pronunciation was not possible as teachers had to accomplish a large syllabus that was mostly related to grammar and writing. Though EFT had some exercises on teaching pronunciation, teachers hardly focused on that exercises. On the other hand, only 2 private colleges, authorities had introduced a pronunciation class on a particular day where students learnt pronunciation. Classroom environment was up to mark which was conducive for learners as there was no tumult and outcry. Few teachers came up with specific textbooks for teaching pronunciation though I found most of the students were unobservant and inattentive. Few teachers used videos and pronunciation software.

4.3 Findings of In-depth Interview

In reply most of the teachers said that they encouraged the students to practice pronunciation by exercising the exercise provided by EFT. Some other teacher teachers informed that they followed Audio lingual method to teach pronunciation one of the teacher said that-

“In this respect, I would like to follow Audio lingual method. I must make the students habituated with the pronunciation of some certain words by making them pronounce repeatedly. In addition, most importantly the students may encounter speaking test arranged in EFT lessons. In this process they first listen and then they try to pronounce just the same way they listened to”.

As EFT provides scanty exercises for improving students' pronunciation, teachers prepared self-made exercises similar to other exercises or related to the text they are teaching.

At HSC level, there is no scope for teaching testing that makes the teacher reluctant to teach pronunciation. Both in English 1st and 2nd paper learners usually sit for grammar and composition part. One of the senior teachers said-

“Testing at HSC level with a view to teaching pronunciation may count a lot as there is no opportunity to do so directly. Students may fine interest coming into contact with the competitive environment. The students who are reluctant to learn pronunciation may begin to reduce the importance of it. Testing is a must to push the students back to learning pronunciation. They will get the opportunity to find out their short coming in this regard”.

Because of faulty English syllabus at HSC level students become exam oriented. Another teacher said that-

“Actually in Bangladesh learning is mainly exam based though it should be knowledge based. That's why as there in no marling or testing system, students and teachers are not that much interested in pronunciation”.

Most of the teachers were not satisfied with present teaching pronunciation system as they thought that teaching pronunciation was nothing but wastage of time. They added that inspite of teaching pronunciation to the students, it is better to teach them grammar. Few teachers arranged supplementary test on pronunciation and students took part eagerly in this exam.

Most of the teachers told that pronunciation should be added to the syllabus so that students could emphasize on pronunciation. Most of the teachers got training for teaching pronunciation. One of the exprened that-

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“First, before teacher recruitment teachers having good pronunciation should be recruited. Secondly, pronunciation (speaking test) may be included in final examination. Moreover topics related to phonetics may be included in syllabus.

Few other teachers suggested that phonetics and phonology can be added and transcription correct pronunciation can be taught in order check learners’ proficiency. Another teacher narrated that classroom activities should be conducted using target language so that students can get used to listening the right pronunciation from the teachers.

5.Recommendations

By analyzing above findings, it can be said that teachers can play significant role to develop learners’ pronunciation. Only teaching grammar and vocabularies will not develop their speaking. Without understandable utterance, all the efforts of learning speaking will be meaningless. On the other hand, learners may put on and endeavor to have better speaking. On the basis of above analyses, some other recommendation are:

- i) As teachers have to use EFT in their classes, they may put extra emphasis to teach pronunciation. Teachers can analyze difficult words. If necessary, learners may correct their pronunciation with the teacher.
- ii) Training should be given to the teachers on pronunciation. This training can be arranged by respective college. They have to know IPA symbols and its phonological aspects.
- iii) Teachers should be updated and equipped with recent technologies and apply those while teaching pronunciation.
- iv) Teachers may focus individually and they have to keep patience.
- v) Teachers should drill the students again and again and students may learn stress and into nation as a property of individual words.
- vi) Authorities can introduce pronunciation learning during vacation as teachers hardly get time outside the classroom.
- vii) Teachers have to be aware of correct pronunciation by participating pronunciation training.
- viii) EFT may provide correct transcription of the tough and unknown words through which students will be benefitted.

6.Conclusion

This study emphasized on the teacher’s pronunciation teaching scenario to the HSC level students in Bangladesh. Teacher’s expect mutual intelligible pronunciation from the students. Bangladeshi teachers at the HSC level have had many obstacles on the way to teach pronunciation, most of which are due to shortage of time and syllabus of HSC. Therefore they should have a balanced idea in terms of teaching pronunciation to the students at the HSC level. In spite of many limitation regarding data collection, analysis findings and recommendations, I hope that this study will encourage the teachers to take proper steps to teach pronunciation effectively which will assist the learners to develop their pronunciation.

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