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2016-09-01

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Center for Pedagogy (CP) Established under the Sub-project Titled “Pedagogical Development at Undergraduate and Master’s Level” (CP3357), Independent Univeristy, Bangladesh (IUB)

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Challenges of Teaching Pronunciation at the Tertiary Level in Bangladesh

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Importance of pronunciation cannot be denied as receptive and productive skills like listening and speaking heavily depend on intelligible pronunciation. However, pronunciation hardly receives adequate importance in teaching and learning English at any level in Bangladesh. The EFL teachers of Bangladesh in some cases tend to be not willing to teach pronunciation. Khan (2007) mentions that most of the EFL teachers of Bangladesh do not know what strategies are appropriate to teach pronunciation. As a result they simply avoid teaching pronunciation. The major reason behind the negligence of teaching pronunciation is that the correlated sub-skills of pronunciation like listening and speaking also get very little emphasis in the syllabus and curriculum (Jahan, 2008). This paper, therefore, aims to explore the challenges of teaching English pronunciation at tertiary level in Bangladesh. The purpose of this study is to find out the extent to which English pronunciation is taught at tertiary level and what main challenges of teaching pronunciation are there in private universities of Bangladesh.

Keywords: *Pronunciation, tertiary, triangulation, bottom up, top down.*

Introduction

Pronunciation is an inseparable part of language. The comprehensibility and intelligibility of the spoken language is highly dependent on its pronunciation (Khan 2007). Gilakjani (2011) focuses on the point that English has a number of sub-skills among which pronunciation is the most important. Despite the fact that pronunciation is an integral component of oral communication and communicative competence, this sub-skill of English has always been neglected in Bangladesh (Moniruzzaman 2008, Khan 2007, Hoque 2010 and Howlader 2010). In this regard Moniruzzaman (2008) states that pronunciation hardly receives sufficient importance in teaching and learning English at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels in Bangladesh.

The EFL teachers of Bangladesh in some cases tend to be unwilling to teach pronunciation. Khan (2007) mentions that most of the EFL teachers of Bangladesh do not know what strategies are appropriate to teach pronunciation as a result they simply avoid teaching pronunciation. The major reason behind the negligence of teaching pronunciation is the correlated sub-skills of pronunciation like listening and speaking which also get very little emphasis in the syllabus and curriculum (Jahan 2013). Bangladeshi learners' average communicative competency in English is not up to the standard; most of the students can hardly exchange few words in English even after the prolonged formal education of twelve years

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(Howalader, 2010).The negligence of teaching pronunciation might be considered as one of the main reasons of students' failure to achieve the communicative competence in English.

At tertiary level in most of the private universities some fundamental English courses are offered to improve students' speaking and listening skills. Inspite of that, English pronunciation practice appears to have inadequate attention in both teaching and learning. Therefore, this study aims to explore the challenges faced by the teachers while teaching English pronunciation at the tertiary level in Bangladesh.

Objective of the Study

- To find out the extent to which English pronunciation is taught at the tertiary level.
- To find out the reasons working behind the negligence of teaching pronunciation at the tertiary level.
- To investigate the difficulties faced by the teachers while teaching English pronunciation at tertiary level.

Literature Review

English Pronunciation Teaching in Bangladesh

Pronunciation is an integral part of language learning as learners' communicative competence and performance highly depend on it (Moniruzzaman 2008). Despite the fact this skill hardly receives any importance in the planning and execution of English teaching in Bangladesh (*ibid*). Teaching pronunciation is being neglected at every level of education in Bangladesh (Moniruzzaman 2008 and Tahereen 2015). In term of English language teaching (ELT) in Bangladesh among the four skills listening and speaking skill is always been neglected as a result pronunciation is also being neglected (Tahereen 2015). In this regard Howlader (2010) argues that pronunciation is also neglected in the syllabus, materials and classroom activities.

Primary Level

In Bangladesh there are about 90,000 primary schools where approximately 17 million students are enrolled (Hossain, Nessa and Kafi 2015) . Teacher population is 264177 and teacher student ratio is 1:56 (*ibid*). According to Unicef (2002) 84 % primary school teachers are only completed their SSC (Secondary School Certificate) or HSC (Higher Secondary School Certificate) (in Hossain, Nessa and Kafi 2015).

English is a compulsory subject at the primary level of education in Bangladesh. The objective of teaching English at primary level is to enable students to understand simple commands, instructions and requests in English and carry them out (Hossain, Nessa and Kafi 2015). However, at primary level the speaking and listening skills of English is never been the focus to be taught and tested (Tahereen 2015). In term of ELT at primary level little or no room is given to pronunciation as oral skills are not being tested (Sultana 2013).

Secondary Level

Pronunciation teaching is also neglected in the secondary level (Moniruzzaman 2008). Even though the current curriculum is based CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) method which's main goal is to improve the communicative competence of the students (Sultana 2013). In term of ELT at secondary level the main emphasis is always given to the reading and writing skills therefore speaking and listening skills are remain neglected (*ibid*). In this regard Maniuruzzaman (2008) says that in Bangladesh listening and speaking skills for English language learning are not tested at all in SSC or HSC or any other public

examinations (in Sultana 2013). As a result like these two skills pronunciation is also being excluded from ELT at secondary level (*ibid*).

Tertiary Level

Teaching English pronunciation at the tertiary level is become very challenging as it was neglected at the previous levels of education (Tahereen 2015). At the tertiary level very little emphasis is given to teach pronunciation (Sultana 2013). At the tertiary level in both public and private universities, the English departments offer a course in English phonetics and phonology besides one or two courses are designed to teach speaking and listening (*ibid*). However, English pronunciation appears to receive inadequate attention in both teaching and learning at tertiary level (Moniruzzaman 2008).

Challenges of Teaching English Pronunciation at Tertiary Level

At the tertiary level, the teaching of English pronunciation does not get proper emphasis (Moniruzzaman 2008). (Khan, Rana and Haque 2014) mention that most of the students of tertiary level are not able to attain the primary English language competence due to prevailing challenges in the education system. One of the major objectives of English curriculum at tertiary level is to enable the students to speak and understand simple English according to their age level (Jahan 2013). The major problem faced by the teachers at the tertiary level is improper implementation of the curriculum (Hoque 2010). The high ratio of teacher-student, small size of classroom, insufficiency of teaching aids and lack of teachers' training are the leading causes for the improper implementation of the curriculum (*ibid*). Tahereen (2015) mentions that university teachers mainly focus on teaching reading and writing skills. In ELT in most of the universities sufficient teaching aids and materials are not available (*ibid*). At the tertiary level as the teaching and testing of oral skills are ignored as a result teaching of pronunciation also remains neglected (Moniruzzaman 2008).

Inter Language Effect

Bengali speaking EFL learners face problems in ELT especially in pronunciation because of the distinct positions of phonemes and other aspect of English phonology (Hoque 2010). According to Kenworthy (1991) , the more differences there will be between the target language and native language , the more difficulties the learners will face in achieving the correct pronunciation (in Tahereen 2015).

Interference of L1

In Bengali and English languages there are some similarities but mainly dissimilarities which create problem for the Bengali speakers to learn English pronunciation (Tahereen 2015). Hai and Ball identified some differences in both segmental phonemes and supra-segmental features of these two languages (in Haque 2010). They show that there are some distinct and some common vowels in these two languages. In Bengali there are 7 vowels and 12 in English. The chart (Appendix-D) shows that that there are only two common vowels (/e /and /æ/). According to their observation Bengali speakers usually get confused with 4 English vowels (/u: /, / ʌ/, / ɜ/, /ə/). They also observed that, Bengali speakers are unable to differentiate between the short and long vowels of English. For example, they pronounce feet /fi:t/, fool /fu:l/, half /ha:f/ (Houqe, 2010). In Bengali language there are 18 diphthongs but only 8 in English. The diphthongs of these two languages do not share any similarities (*ibid*). Hoque (2010) identifies a common mistake made by the Bengali speakers of English is that they say only the first part of the diphthong and ignore the second part. For example, they pronounce 'boat' / boʊt/ as /bʊt/ and 'here' /hiə/ as /hiɑr/ (*ibid*).

In term of consonant sounds there are 20 plosives in Bengali whereas in English there are only 6 plosives. Bengali plosives are categorized into 5 sub groups based on place of articulation where each group has aspirated and unaspirated sounds. The Bengali aspirated plosive ann English aspirated plosive become confusing for the Bengali speakers (Hoque 2010). In Bengali there is no fricative sounds therefore Bengali sounds /ph/, /bh/ and /n/ are considered similar to English /f/, /v/ and /n/. For example Bengali speakers pronounce 'full' /ful/ as /phul/ and 'vote' /vəut/ as /bhɔːt/. Hoque (2010) identifies that Bengali speakers often confuses with the English sounds /z/, /ʒ/ and /dʒ/. In Bengali there is only one sound /ja/ is similar to English /dʒ/. For example, 'zoo' /zu: / as / dʒu/ (*ibid*).

Interference of Dialects

The non-native English users in Bangladesh use various local dialects with different pronunciation and intonation which influence the use of English (Hoque 2010). Bengali speakers from different local backgrounds pronounce many words differently because of their local backgrounds (*ibid*).For example, the people of Barishal often tend to do pronunciation mistakes in words beginning with 'B' and 'V', both in English and Bengali (Hoque 2010). In Noakhali dialect, the bilabial plosive /p/ is not heard at all but replaced by a fricative sound similar to English /f/ (*ibid*). The unvoiced velar aspirated plosive /kh/ is pronounced as a fricative sound in Chittagong and Sylhet (*ibid*). Hoque (2010) also gave an example of a student from Comilla pronounced 'victory' /viktəri/ as /bikturi/ and another student from Natore pronounced as /bhikto:ri/.

The Study Method

This research is both qualitative and quantitative in nature as this study aim to provide a descriptive view of the challenges of teaching pronunciation at tertiary level in Bangladesh.

To collect and analyze the data for this study triangulation approach was used. According to Bryman (2010) triangulation refers to the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings.

The sample which was used to collect the data for the study was consisting of ten teachers and eighty five students of English department from two private universities of Dhaka. The data were collected through interviewing ten teachers (five teachers from each university) and by providing questionnaire to eighty five students (around forty students from each university). Further data were collected through class observation. The whole data collections were done through purposeful sampling. All the data required for this study were collected in both formal and informal setting.

Results and Discussion

Teacher's Response to the Interview

From the teachers' response it has been found that most of the teachers put lots of emphasis on teaching pronunciation. Teachers think the offered courses and provided materials are not sufficient to teach pronunciation. Most of the teachers prefer not to directly test their students' pronunciation though some teachers directly test students' pronunciation skill. Even though all the teachers agreed that training is inevitable to teach pronunciation but they also said they do not get any specific training to teach pronunciation.

Table-1

Teacher's Response to the Interview Question

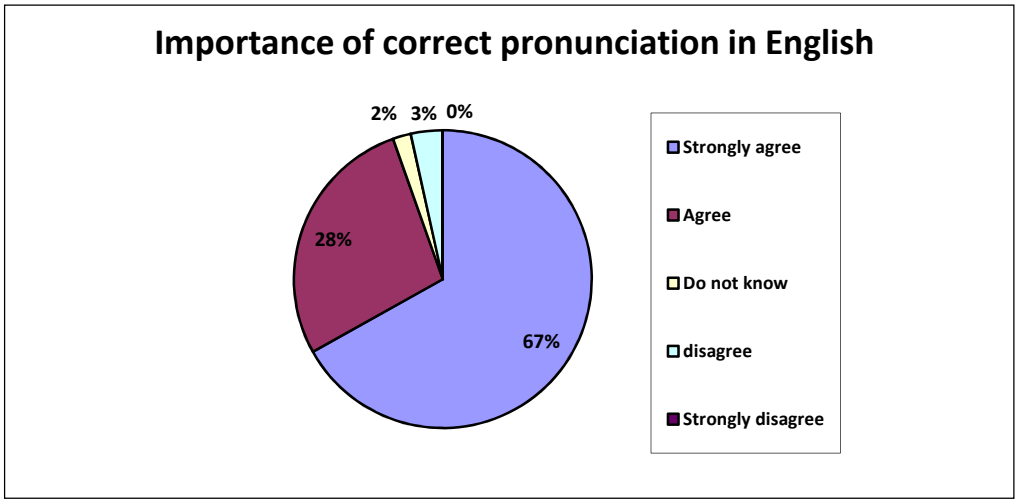
Q1.How much do you emphasize on English pronunciation on your teaching	70% teachers put lots of emphasis on pronunciation. .	30% teachers do not give any emphasis on pronunciation
Q2. What courses in English pronunciation does your department offer for your students?	50% teachers say that there is no specially designed course to teach pronunciation .	50% say that there is a core course specially designed to teach pronunciation to English department students
Q3. Do you have sufficient materials to teach English pronunciation to your students? What are the materials you use in the classroom?	40% teachers find- provided materials to teach pronunciation are sufficient	60% say that enough materials are not provided for teaching this skill.
Q4. What are the activities you use to teach English pronunciation?	70% teachers use Dictionary, phonetics transcription, tongue twister	30% teachers do not use any specific activities for teaching pronunciation.
Q5. Do you test your students' pronunciation skill? How do you test your student's pronunciation skills?	40% teachers test their student's pronunciation skill.	60% teachers do not test pronunciation skills directly.
Q6. What are the difficulties you face in teaching English pronunciation?	• Lack of listening input • Shyness of the students • Interruption of L1 • Students lack of motivation	
Q7. Do you get any training to teach pronunciation? Do you think training is important to teach English pronunciation?	All the teachers agree- • Training for teaching pronunciation is inevitable. • Combination of both theory and practical knowledge are important • They do not have any training	
Q8. What measures can be taken to improve English pronunciation of your students?	• To introduce the English sounds in early education. • There should be a specially designed course for pronunciation, • Lots of listening practice, • using dictionary • Not to compel learner's to get fascinated with native like variety.	

The Findings of the Questionnaire for the Students

The figure 1 is about to know the students' view about the importance of correct pronunciation in English. From the students' response it has been found majority of the students agree (28%) and strongly agree (67%) to the fact that good command on English pronunciation is important.

Figure-1

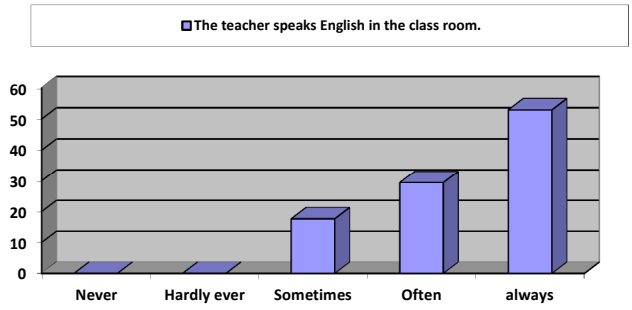
Good Command on English Pronunciation is Important



The participants were asked to inform about their teachers' English use in classroom. In this figure 2 students said that 52% students said that teachers 'Always' used English in the classroom. 30% students said that the teachers 'Often' used English in the classroom. 18% students said that 'Sometimes' their teachers used English in classes.

Figure-2

Teachers' Usage of English in the Classroom



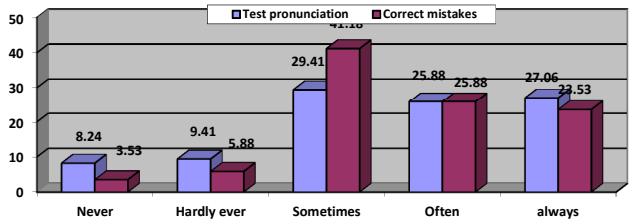
The next question tries to find how much the teachers emphasized on teaching English pronunciation.41 students (48%) 'Strongly agree' that the teachers put proper emphasis on teaching English pronunciation. Remaining 44 students (52%) agree with this opinion.

This research also try to investigate whether the teachers uses different activities or not. 38% students said that the teachers 'Always' used different activities to teach English pronunciation. 31% students said

their teachers 'Sometimes' used different activities to teach English pronunciation and remaining 31% students said that the teachers 'Often' used different activities to teach English pronunciation.

Figure-3

The Teacher Tests Students' English Pronunciation Skill and the Teacher Correct Students' Pronunciation Mistakes

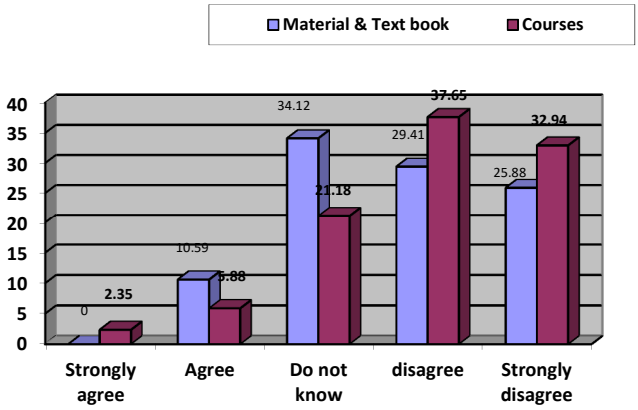


The figure 3 examine whether the teachers test students pronunciation skill or not and whether the teachers correct their pronunciation skill or not. 23 students (27.06%) stated that the teachers 'Always' tested their pronunciation. 22 students (25.88%) said that the teachers 'Often' tested their pronunciation.25 students (29.41%) said that their teachers 'Sometimes' tested their pronunciation skill. Only 8 students stated that the teachers 'Hardly ever' tested their pronunciation skill and remaining 7 students said their teachers 'Never' tested their pronunciation skill. About the teachers' correcting mistakes of their students, 23.53% said the teacher 'Always' correct their mistakes. 25.88% students said that the teachers 'Often' correct their pronunciation mistakes. Most of the students around 41.18% said their teachers 'Sometimes' correct their pronunciation.5.88% students said their teachers 'Hardly ever' correct their pronunciation and the remaining 3.53% students said their teachers never tested their pronunciation.

This research tries to find out whether the teachers teach the phonetic transcription of English words or not. Nearly half of the students (45%) stated their teachers 'Never' taught the phonetic transcriptions of English words. 29% students said that their teachers 'Hardly ever' taught the phonetic transcription of English words. 24% said that 'Sometimes' their teachers taught them the phonetic transcription of English words and only 2% said that their teachers 'often' taught them the phonetic transcription of English words.

Figure-4

The Materials and Textbooks Used by the Teachers' Pronunciation Mistakes



The materials and textbooks which are used by the teachers are sufficient for learning English pronunciation and the courses which are offered by English department are sufficient to teach English pronunciation.

In figure 4 two questions are accumulated. Question 10 investigates whether sufficient materials and textbooks are provided by the teachers to teach English pronunciation. 25.88% students 'Strongly disagree' to the fact that the provided materials and textbooks by the teachers are sufficient to teach English pronunciation. 29.41% students also 'Disagree' with this fact. 34.12% students stated that they 'do not know' whether the materials and text books are sufficient to teach English pronunciation. Remaining 10.59% students 'Agree' with the fact and they think the provided materials and text books by the teachers are sufficient to teach pronunciation. Question 11 tries to find out whether the courses offered by the English department are sufficient to teach English pronunciation or not. 32.94% students 'Strongly disagree' with this fact and they think the courses are not sufficient to teach English pronunciation. 37.65% students also shown the same view and 'Disagree' with this fact. 21.18% students said they 'Do not know' whether the provided courses are enough or not. Remaining 5.88% students' Agree' and 2.35% students 'Strongly agree' with this fact.

Findings from Class Observation

Two spoken classes were observed from two different universities for getting the real scenario of teaching pronunciation. Key findings of the class observations given below:

- Most of students are shy to speak in front of the class
- Most of the students English pronunciation is not up to the standard
- The interruption of L1 is the main reason behind for students' poor pronunciation
- Teachers are rarely correcting students pronunciation unless it effect intelligibility
- One teacher used tongue twister to teach pronunciation
- Very less emphasis is given on teaching pronunciation
- No particular material is used in both of the classes
- Both of the classes mainly seem teacher oriented
- Both of the teachers mainly use English as the mode of instruction but they switch to bangle when needed

Conclusion and Recommendation

From the above findings it can be said that teachers should give more importance to improve their students' pronunciation skill. Only by developing students' reading and writing skills teachers can not ensure a bright future of their students as oral skills are equally important. Therefore, students are needed to be aware and motivated to learn pronunciation for the job market and also for getting rid of the interruption of the regional articulation. On the basis of the analysis that the following recommendations can be made:

- If English sounds are introduced in early education, learners will get the knowledge of sounds and it will be easy for them to pronounce.
- A specially designed course for the pronunciation will also make the students able to have a good pronunciation skill in English.
- Lots of listening practice is needed, using dictionary in mobile phone. Confirming sounds before using can be practiced for teaching pronunciation.

- Teachers' training, laboratory facilities and logistic support are also suggested for teaching good command over pronunciation.
- Learners should be made aware that it is not the native like variety that they should follow; rather, they should follow the IPA (International Phonetics Alphabet).
- Students should be motivated enough to learn pronunciation, self teaching of reading IPA chart can help learners to have accurate pronunciation skill.
- Not only for the academic conversation, but also to do well in job market and to avoid being discriminated socially, students need to be aware of their pronunciation.

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