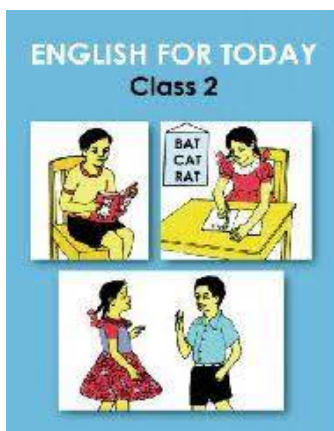


Bangladeshi EFL Teachers' Challenges in Dealing with *English for Today* in the Classroom

Md. Mahbubul Alam, M.A.

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Abstract

English teachers are struggling with multiple challenges in dealing with *English for Today* (EFT), the nationally prescribed English course book recommended for the learners of the secondary and the higher secondary levels in Bangladesh. Though the course book is written by a group of venerable scholars, the teacher confronts challenges coming from diverse angles. The *English for Today* textbook is designed in line with the key concepts of CLT, the representative of western pedagogy- rarely applicable to the eastern academia. Inductive presentation of grammar and other linguistic contents, suggesting too much classroom activities, not having direct relation with the national testing system etc. are responsible for creating a huge crack among teachers, textbook and learners. Besides, lack of properly trained and skilled teachers is a burning issue in English language pedagogy now. Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) was the learning method of most of the English teachers to whom the activities, instructions and teaching contents in the *EFT* are mostly alien, because GTM is no longer practiced now. Though in the *EFT* text there is renovation of replacing foreign cultural contents with that of local ones, even the teachers are not being able to cope up with it. As a result, the *EFT* is still alienated from both teachers and learners. The present study will critically point out why the course book *English for Today* is still an alien; sometimes object of fear, to both teachers and learners. It will also shed light on some recommendations to minimize the *EFT*'s gap with the teachers and learners.

Key words: *English for Today*, course book, challenge, teacher, learner, CLT etc.

1. Introduction

English is used as a foreign language in Bangladesh. The need for using English in different sectors is increasing day by day. The policy makers of national curriculum are trying to ensure innovation in English curriculum to keep pace with time. The *English for Today* text book is such an innovation which has been being changed, from its very inception, to ensure its updated versions regarding learning contents, instruction, presentation of contents etc. Even numerous planning and supervisions have been done to make better proximity between English Language Teaching and the socio-cultural realities.

But the ultimate result is not agreeable. Mondal (2012) opines that the study of English has a central place in educational institutions but the standard of English language is still awful (p. 12). Every year thousands of students are passing out from the intermediate (grade-12) level and sitting for the university entrance exam where they are showing deplorable performance in English. Likewise, each year thousands of students are passing out from universities with a poor skill in English, and, consequently, doing awful performance in the process of job recruitment and other sectors where competent communicative skill in English is required. To put it briefly, the rate of learners' skill in English has not reached yet up to the substantial level of expectation, though perseverance of the policy makers and experts has been relentless.

Now, the expected query is what is the reality behind this- the utter failure of ELT project in Bangladesh? There remain numerous factors. This paper will not talk about all the issues; it will deal with only the facts related to *English for Today* textbook which is alienated from both the EFL teacher and the learners.

2. *English for Today*: the Text book

English for Today (EFT) is the English course book for primary, secondary and higher secondary levels of education in Bangladesh. It is the compulsory textbook written by expert academicians and experienced ELT practitioners. There are two parts of English studies for each class: Paper-I, which includes *English for Today* and Paper- II includes grammar and composition writing where learners learn how to write personal letters, job applications, paragraphs and essays effectively. Before the introduction of the communicative textbook, i.e., *EFT*, there was text book for each class which consisted of prose and poetry. Learners read those literary contents, memorized, understood and reproduced in the examination papers. Thus, only reading and writing skills were tested.

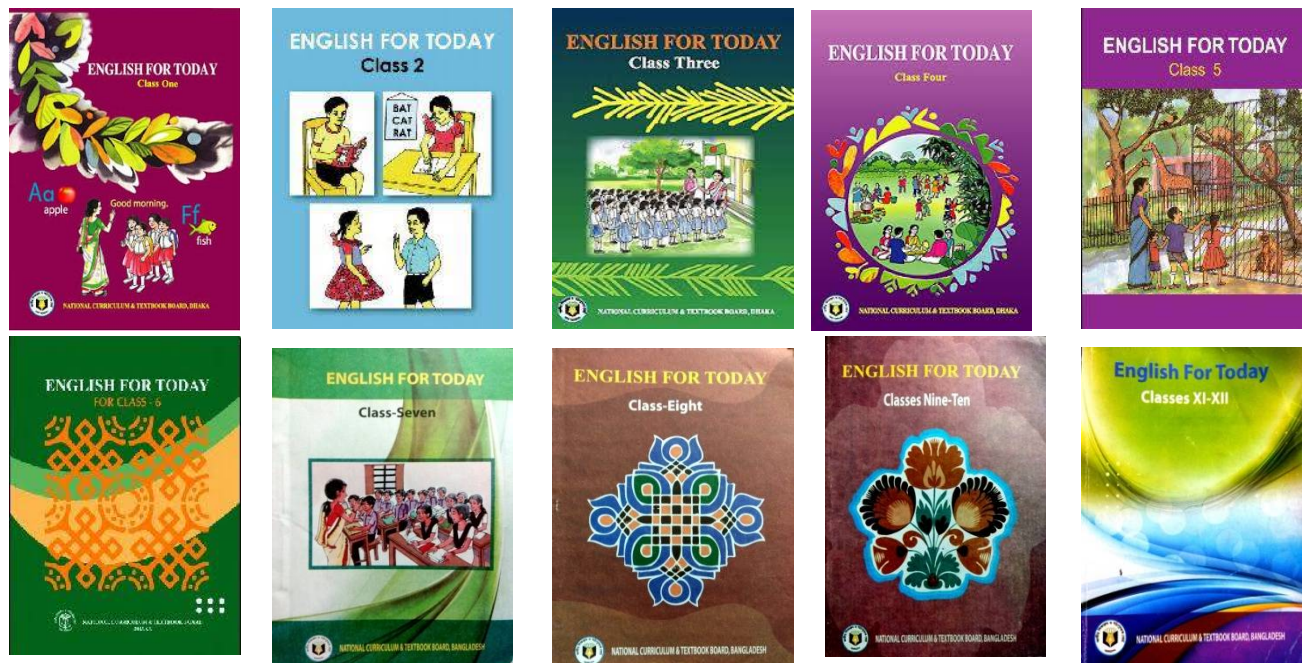


Figure: *English for Today* textbooks for different classes

English for Today is based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). So it promised to ensure learners' competence in all skills: speaking, reading, writing and listening. But as a content-carrier and representative of CLT, *English for Today* has drastically failed to guarantee learners achieving all the four skills. In contrast, *EFT* has offered much challenge to the English teacher to implement it in the classroom. Chowdhury (2012) remarks, "It is very often seen that though the course book contains communicative activities for interactional activities in the classroom, the classes are rather non-communicative or teacher centered where the traditional 'teacher initiation-learner response-teacher follow up' interaction patterns happen (p. 25)."

Thus finally, *English for Today* is alienated from both teachers and learners. This paper will critically shed light on these challenges that are faced by the teachers while dealing with this textbook in class room.

3. *English for Today* is CLT- Oriented

EFT is a representative of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. The textbook is written following the principles of this new approach (Khanum 2016; p. 31). The Chairman of National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) states in the *Preface* part of *EFT* that the textbook carries communicative purpose of language, and thus, it is prepared putting emphasis on the communicative approach. There is much doubt about the suitability of CLT in the context of Bangladesh, as well as the South Asian region. In most of the cases, may it be in teaching-learning method, teacher-learners relation, role of teacher/learners, syllabus design, choice of contents, instruction language etc. CLT has severely failed to satisfy teachers, learners and policy makers. The

book is divided into several units; each unit consists of a specific theme and some lessons. Each lesson starts with warm up activity and contains specific information, passages, group/pair works, project works, individual/group presentation, practice of vocabulary and grammar etc. Now we will see how the class teacher deals with these parts of the *EFT*.

- ***English for Today is Full of Classroom Activities***

As the text *EFT* is set according to the communicative approach, it naturally comprises various tasks and activities, like group/pair works, presentation etc, in each lesson. Communicative activities are there in every lesson of the course book (Chowdhury 2012; p. 25). Learners are expected to be engaged with these activities. They have to participate physically. It means that the tasks and activities here demand kinesthetic learners. This is a real challenge for the teacher. Our learners are more introvert than extrovert in accordance with the socio-cultural context. They feel shy to do something in front of others. Most of the time the EFL teacher has to fight with a learner to make them agree to perform something in front of his/her classmates and teachers. The teacher may try frequently to ensure her learners' willing and spontaneous performance; but it has limit since at a point she stops doing so and becomes de-motivated. Gradually, she loses interest in arranging learners' participation in tasks and activities.

So many tasks and activities make the classroom a playground, and we indisputably agree that a classroom is not a playing field. It turns the class into a park. Sometimes, it seems that a workshop is going on in the class. This is not the familiar pedagogical setting in our socio-cultural reality. It makes both the teacher and the learners turn back from the text *EFT*.

Finally, utilizing all these tasks and activities the EFL teacher requires a spacious classroom with suitable desks for the learners. Regrettably, almost all the desks are immovable and out of place for classroom activities. Thus, even if the teacher wishes to do something, she cannot do it for the inauspicious classroom setting.

- ***English for Today Holds Inductive Presentation of Grammar***

CLT believes in inductive learning of grammar. There will be no direct presentation of grammatical rules. Learners will read sentences and discover grammatical contents and rules. They will elicit grammar from the sentence/sentences. It looks incongruous in our context where learners are habituated with learning grammar through direct presentation of rules and then using that rules in sentences. It creates troubles for the teacher because she herself learnt grammar deductively. Also her learners are not ready for this type of unusual and comparatively intricate way of learning grammar. So what will the EFL teacher do in this circumstance? She will just keep away from this grammatical part of the text with disappointment.

- **English for Today Advocates Learner Centeredness**

Communicative Language Teaching is learner-centered where the teacher is just a facilitator. She manages the situation but is not the central figure. Learners are at the center of the learning process. But traditionally our classrooms are teacher-centered where the teacher transmits knowledge to her learners. She is thought to be depository of knowledge. Learners are accustomed to be dominated by the class teacher, inwardly they expect it. Classroom is not a place which is isolated from the society. It is the part of the mainstream society. The teacher here cannot remain just a ‘facilitator’, as prescribed in CLT. Rather, in the real classroom, she does not bother about her prescribed position and role. She does according to her wishes by keeping in mind her dominating role. Learner-centeredness is a myth, as Holliday (1997; p. 174) opines. He states, “I feel that the term ‘learner-centeredness’ is especially vague, and has been largely responsible for the failures in making the communicative approach work outside the BANA classroom (p. 175).”

In our context hierarchy in relation between teacher and learners is an important issue in the classroom, and it creates hindrance to CLT to be implemented through the textbook. According to Chowdhury and Le Ha (2008), it is hierarchy that “determines the nature of teacher-student interactions, which is facilitated by mutual respect (p. 308)”. Teachers also enjoy being the father figure even in the classroom. Our learners expect that the teacher will explain the lesson completely; they will just understand, note down and/or memorize it. There is huge learners’ dependence on the teacher. Mondal (2012) in a survey showed that majority of the respondents agreed that “teacher is to impart knowledge through activities such as explanation, writing, and example (p.18).”

In our socio-cultural reality knowledge is something the teacher gives and learners receive. Learners’ resistance, may it be silently or actively, occurs if this system is altered (Alam 2013; p. 13). Huda (2013) expresses the view that Bangladeshi learners’ cultural traits signify that “learners will learn better if they can learn under the control, guidance and directions of teachers (p. 70).”

The EFL teacher cannot cope up with the *EFT*, nor can she stand opposite to it; she falls into dilemma. A built-in controlling figure works inside her. She is not ready to offer learner autonomy as prescribed in the *EFT*. Consequently, there emerges a hostile relationship between the *EFT* and the EFL teacher. In this circumstance, where both teacher and learners hold within themselves teacher-dominated class, how learner-centered *EFT* textbook is handy to the teacher is a point of bargain.

4. English for Today has no Relation with National Testing System

Inconsistency between examination system and the teaching/learning methods prescribed for *EFT* takes both the teacher and the learners away from the text. Usually, our learners expect that what they learn in their textbook will appear, with modification though, at their examination. Students here learn English for good marks and university admission. Obtaining good marks in examination is their mission, and examination system is achievement oriented; it has no place for learners’ performance. Mondal (2012) states that learners in our country are learning English “not for knowledge but for employment (p. 25).

On the other hand, the *English for Today* textbook is performance- oriented. As the learners always keep in their mind obtaining good scores in examination, they feel reluctant to think about the textbook. In addition to this, they are de-motivated and think that it is useless to spend time with *EFT* as nothing can be reproduced in the examination. For last two years, some contents, a passage or poem, from the *EFT* have been used in the question papers. But this is insignificant to the learners because nothing from the exercise and activity part appears in the question paper. So, they believe that it is worthless to do according to the instruction in the *EFT* text. They tell the EFL classroom teacher, in a complaining tone, ‘it’s not worth reading’.

Therefore, the EFL teacher surrenders to the situation since she cannot change the belief structure of the learners who belong to a socio-cultural context larger than the classroom. If she attempts to change the learners’ belief system, she should first alter the scenario of the greater pedagogical policy making which is impossible for her.

5. *English for Today* Favors Monolingual Classroom

As a carrier of CLT *English for Today* demands that only English will be the language of classroom. That is implementing *EFT* requires monolingual classroom. Without considering accuracy, the monopoly of English is confirmed in *EFT*. But the reality is different. In our classroom there is the remarkable use of Bangla, the first language, which is discouraged to be used in the *EFT* class. Both the EFL teacher and learners use Bangla frequently in the class. The *EFT* suggests the use of English only, though some researchers present different views. Auerbach (1993) asserts that using the first language in the classroom “reduces affective barriers to English acquisition and allows for more rapid progress to or in ESL (p. 7).”

Keeping in mind the thing that English should be used as the only medium of instruction the EFL teacher struggles with the situation where there is uncontrolled use of mother tongue in learners’ side. Sometimes, the teacher herself has to use the L1 while dealing with a lesson containing Bangladeshi culture and contents, may it be any story or anything else, because in this case, the use of L1 helps the learners better understand of the lesson. Now, what will the EFL teacher do in this circumstance? Will she allow her learners, even herself, using the L1, or, struggle to ensure 100% use of English? She falls in a quandary and indecisiveness. This psychological state causes his avoiding various communicative activities given in the text and staying away from the *EFT* gradually.

6. Does Teachers’ Training Matter?

Arranging training for the EFL teachers is a necessary part of education policy. In Bangladesh the government is trying to do much for teachers’ training. Various teachers’ training institutions, both government and non-government, are active now in Bangladesh. But things are unchanged. Sometimes, it seems that teachers’ training does not matter, problem lies somewhere else. Language teachers are not scientists. They are not to invent classroom methodologies. Traditionally and culturally teachers maintain more affinity with the mainstream people. What they

learn in their student life, they will reproduce it in their class. Scope for incorporating new ideas and methodologies regarding language teaching is very limited.

Speaking frankly, most of our main-stream EFL teachers are not mentally ready to accept any change in teaching methodology which happens in their training. During training period the teacher may feel fascinated with new teaching strategies, as normal human nature, but, ultimately, nothing is consumed there. They cannot change their beliefs and attitude about language learning that have been built inside them from the very early age. Thus, what they see during training cannot be proved valuable to them. They think that training is waste of time as after returning from training they see the same textbook, same tasks and activities, same CLT dominated instructions not liked by them. So, we can be brave to proclaim that teachers' training does not matter when there is basic confrontation between the EFT and the EFL teacher.

7. The British Council's Disturbing Role

Whether we all agree or not the British Council has captured a significant place in ELT pedagogy and its market. The writer of this article is not going to tell much about neo-colonial mechanism of the British Council in the field of language pedagogy. The section will show only the disturbing effects this neo-colonial agent is producing through its unwanted interference in the field of EFL pedagogy in Bangladesh. Its role is 'disturbing' since it has been causing disturbance to our teachers' natural and normal teaching style.

Let us talk about two courses for teachers offered by the British Council: CiSELT and CLIL. CiSELT stands for "Certificate in Secondary English Language Teaching". It is a course for secondary school teachers of English. In this course the EFL teacher undergoes some classroom methodologies which are purely CLT-oriented. The organization has managed to offer the course to the English teachers of Bangladesh Cadet Colleges. The writer of this article himself experienced CiSELT training. He saw that the training was devoid of reality. Nothing has changed in the EFL class. CiSELT offered some related issues for the development of EFL teaching, and, of course, *English for Today* was closely related, but in vain. Now CiSELT has gone into oblivion. The only effect is that there was some disturbance imposed on the EFL teachers' natural and inborn style of language teaching in the classroom.

The other is CLIL which stands for "Content and Language Integrated Learning". It refers to teaching subjects such as science, history and geography to students through a foreign language. David Marsh in 1994 coined the term CLIL which refers to "situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language."(Retrieved from-<http://www.onestopenglish.com/clil/what-is-clil/>)The non-English teachers of Cadet Colleges have undergone this course thoroughly. But, speaking truly, it has become a fun to them. The idea of CLIL has become something ludicrous. Teachers are bored to deal with the underlying themes of this course.

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So the role of the British Council in the field of language pedagogy is dubious. It creates disintegration in our traditionally harmonious language classroom. It adds to the confusion of the EFL teacher when she attempts to come close to the *English for Today*.

8. The *EFT* is Alienated both from the Teacher and the Learners

The issues pointed out above have collectively caused a serious estrangement of the text *English for Today*. There prevails a massive crack in the relationship of the *EFT* with the EFL teacher and the learners. This crack is caused by CLT especially. Inconsistency between examination system and the teaching/learning methods is not less responsible for the fracture. Besides, the British Council is playing a vast role to turn the teachers' attention back from the *EFT*. As a result, *English for Today* is totally estranged from both the teacher and the learners.

9. What to Do?

Stern (1996) argues that in any educational system there is co-ordination of "personnel, students, parents, curriculum, learning materials, buildings, equipments, finance, and so on, directed to a common purpose (p. 430)." Unfortunately, there is lack of co-ordination in the EFL classroom with the text *English for Today* only because of CLT which is an imposition, not something of invitation.

The relation between the *English for Today* and the EFL teacher is a much talked about issue which has a root-spreading complexity; simply it is a problem in our language pedagogy, a problem which has deep root home and abroad. In this circumstance, what to do by the EFL teacher? She has nothing to do, strongly speaking. She has no voice for the change in curriculum design and language policy. She is there only to implement blindly the curriculum and policy. This is an irony that teachers have to fight with textbook in the class, they are the ones who go through real experiences during the class, but they have no place in curriculum design. It is one kind of whimsical imposition to them.

Saying directly, the alternative to the *EFT*, which will provide some communicative aims and be welcomed by both the EFL teacher and learners, should be searched. That ideal text will contain no excessive tasks and activities for the learners. More interesting topics, including literary pieces having easily accessible themes, can be included there. There must be, not 100% though, consistency between examination system and the teaching/learning methods/contents. In the examination, as it is achievement oriented till now, there will be a considerable number of question-contents, directly or indirectly taken from the textbook. It will encourage the learners, may it be to some extent by force, to come closer to the text. Thus, the EFL teacher too will feel interested to deal with the *EFT*.

This is the reality of our context that both teachers and learners expect that the classroom will partially or fully be dominated by the teacher. In the ideal textbook the role of the EFL teacher can be redefined. As learners expect too, her level of dominance can be increased to satisfy the both- teacher and learners. There should be space for teacher's talk as academician, not a manager of the class.

There should be roles that will demonstrate the teacher as deposit of knowledge, because in our socio-cultural reality she is a store house of knowledge who transfers knowledge to her learners who receive it like empty vessels. It will maintain the classroom equilibrium.

Our EFL classroom should be bilingual. In the textbook, the use of L1 should be permitted where it is needed. It will not hamper the process of L2 learning, nor in achieving communicative competence. Especially, during teacher's instruction and learner's sharing problems or feedbacks, Bangla can be used which will rather facilitate the L2 learning process.

British Council's mission of interfering in our language pedagogy should be handled carefully. They can be given space if their course materials and contents go with our basic socio-cultural norms and realities practiced in the EFL classroom. Otherwise, we do not need them only to make our EFL teacher confused regarding dealing with the *EFT*.

Above all, a drastic redefinition in ELT curriculum should be done. We will have to bring about innovation "from the viewpoint of the individuals who will be most affected by it: the teachers and learners (White 1993; p. 114)." Then, the *EFT* text book will naturally be changed in such way that it will be with the teacher's and the learners' own mind.

10. Conclusion

Modern epoch is dominated by globalization where no region can stay secluded from the influx of ideas of globalization. Modern technologies have made the exchange of communication and ideas easier. Hence, achieving communicative competence has become an indispensable part of the people. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is said to be the harbinger of achieving this competence. But it (CLT) should be readjusted and restructured so that we can receive it as our guest-method, not as guru and panacea for all pedagogical problems, in language pedagogy. Various innovations should be introduced so that the *English for Today* text book can turn into a practical and constructive coursebook for the EFL learners. Problem does not remain in the EFL teachers, rather inside the curriculum system. Changing this curriculum, according to requirement, is practical but changing the socio-economic-cultural context is absurd, impossible.

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Md. Mahbubul Alam, M.A.
Lecturer in English
Pabna Cadet College
Pabna, Bangladesh
Post code: 6600
palash759@yahoo.com.

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