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English language teaching practices at the tertiary level of Bangladesh: A public university alumni's feedback

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at exploring the problems and challenges faced by the students in the long English language teaching practices of the Department of English, Islamic University, Bangladesh, and the achievable modifications recommended by its alumni to ensure pragmatic English language teaching at the universities of Bangladesh. Both qualitative and quantitative or mixed-method approach was applied and a total of 21 alumni of various academic years from 2010 to 2012 (12 Years) of the Department of English at Islamic University, Bangladesh participated in the study. The findings of the study revealed that majority of the participants, after completing the graduation and post-graduation in English, failed to develop their English language skills at the advanced level due to the lack of some crucial issues, like particular course and test on specific skills (Speaking, listening reading and writing), effective course design and teaching approach, learner-expected professional dedication of the English language teachers, practice and feedback session, and the use of technological devices in the language classroom and language lab in the English language teaching practices. The study suggests that at least one particular course and test for each English language skills and more practice-oriented ELT courses should be added to the syllabus, and the language teachers should be more serious concerning course design, class activities, effective testing, feedback, use of technology-based classroom, blended learning approach, group discussion and implementation of specific as well as experience-based teaching approach to English language teaching.

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1. Introduction

The English language teaching practice at universities of Bangladesh is, in fact, closely connected with the colonial history as British colonial rulers instituted English language teaching only for serving their own purposes. But by coincidence, Bangladeshi people are benefitted by English teaching and learning the in many ways. Obaidul (2010) mentioned that, “the spread of English, the phenomenon of globalization and their reciprocity have brought immense opportunities as well as challenges for developing nations”. Tsang (1999) also stated that English language skills are pivotal in response to globalization. This is because, Amin (2019) ensured that all the English departments of

- (ii) Understanding the overall problems and challenges faced by students of English language learning at the university.
- (iii) Recommending achievable considerations from the alumni's points of view to ensure pragmatic English language teaching at the universities of Bangladesh.

2. Literature Review

The literature on the problems and the challenges in the long-run English language teaching practices faced by the students of the department of English of the public universities of Bangladesh is scarce though some studies highlight some problems and obstacles as a whole.

Chawdhury (2001) revealed that the students found themselves in a new approach when they faced communicative language teaching at the university as they were not exposed to any specific language skills course in the pre-university years. He also remarked that the first year students felt heavy difficulty in expressing themselves in English though they have a good knowledge concerning sentence structures and grammatical rules and considered overall cultural orientation to the academic atmosphere to be more problematic than the language competence of the students. Likewise, the study of Farooqui (2007) mentioned that the students who admitted themselves into different universities of Bangladesh were somewhat good in writing and reading but verily poor in speaking. Because the English books they had read in the secondary and higher secondary level focused on four skills but only reading and writing skills were assessed in the final examinations. And the most of the teachers blamed the educational system for the students' lack of courage to speak in front of others in class and outside of the class because they had no so many chances to interact with their classmates and even the family members.

Again, there were some reasons for low speaking skills of the students at private universities of Bangladesh mentioned by the participants comprised "complex nature of speaking, inappropriate application of instructional methods, teachers' low proficiency in spoken English and controlling behavior, students' psychological factors, sociocultural factors, students' inadequate linguistic resources, L1 interference, and large class size. Remedies suggested by the participant's entail integrating Task-Based Learning (TBL) and Cooperative Learning (CL), making students aware of noticing, learning speaking through listening, teaching collocations, promoting self-regulated learning, and strengthening teacher education" (Islam and Stapa, 2021). Shumin (2002) recommended the teacher to examine some factors 'affecting adult learners' oral communication, components underlying speaking proficiency, and specific skills or strategies used in communication.' The factors Shumin mentioned were age or maturational constraints, aural medium, sociocultural factors, affective factors, components underlying speaking effectiveness, grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence and interactive activities. He suggested that the students of the university should develop interactional exchange among themselves through small talk in target language as it engages them in conversation of target language. According to Hinkel (2006), the use of specific grammar structures in exact context and vocabulary are supportive for the learners to engage themselves in subject-matter and target language learning activities. Again problem-solving and debate in target language prepare learners for actual life communication in an EFL setting. But the

As presented in Figure 3, more than 50% of the alumni divulged that they had language exposures that helped them to a great extent to develop their language skills. Some of the participants mentioned that they talk in English with their friends outside of the classroom. Likewise, they did group study and gave speech in English in different occasions. On the other hand, 48% of them stated that they had no language exposure outside of their classroom.

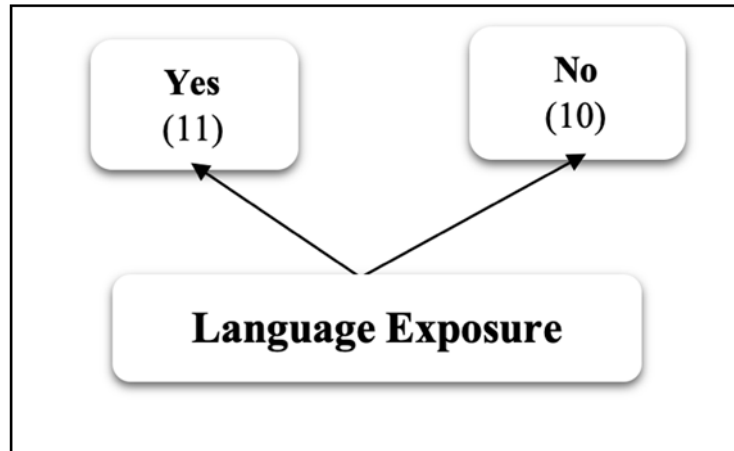


Figure 3. If the students had any language exposure

About 80% of the Alumni as shown in the flow chart acknowledged that the courses they studied at university were insufficient because there was no particular course for specific language skill. Some of the participants added that task based ELT courses, advanced writing and business communication courses and practice oriented courses should be included into the syllabus to develop the language proficiency. But 04 of the 21 participants ensured that that the courses they studied at university were sufficient.

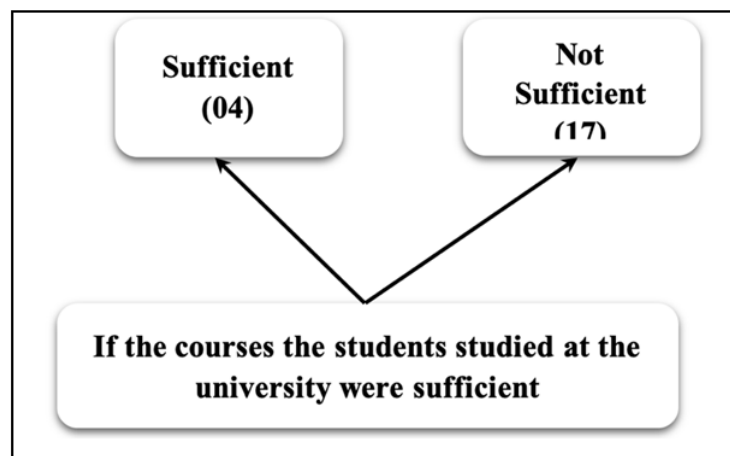


Figure 4: If the courses the students studied at university were sufficient

As shown in Figure 5, nearly 80% of the participants mentioned that there was no specific course to develop speaking skills in syllabus while 04 of them admitted that there was a specific course on speaking skills in syllabus. And 01 of the participants added that his language teacher created atmosphere of speaking in classroom and outside of the classroom. But most of the alumni added that the course design was unclear. Though some classes were conducted on pronunciation, they were not, in fact, effective because of having no practice session.

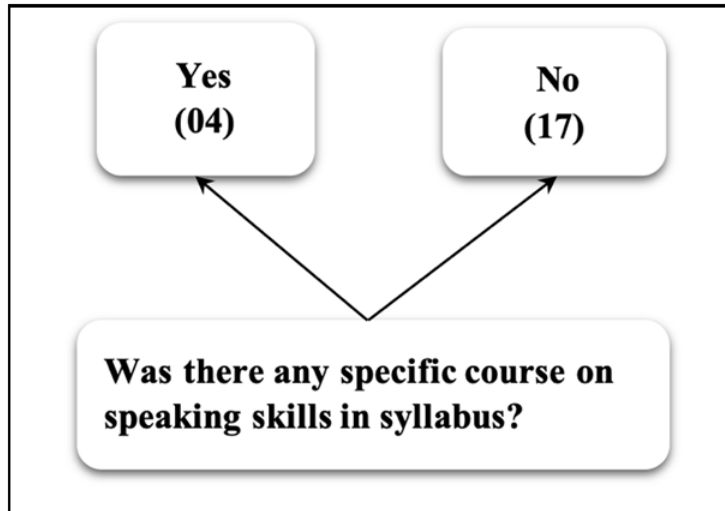


Figure 5. Specific course on speaking skill in syllabus

The alumni (80%) participated in the open ended survey stated that there was no specific course to develop listening skills in syllabus (Figure 6). And 4 of the 21 participants mentioned that there was a specific course on listening skills in syllabus. 01 of them added that it was not clear how the course teacher designed his course.

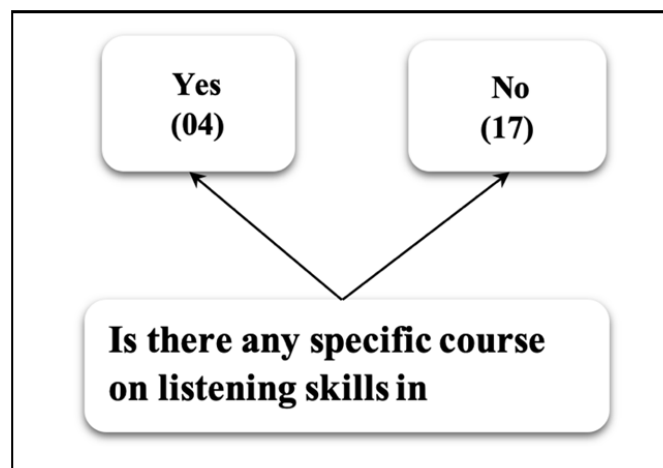


Figure 6. Specific course on listening skill in syllabus and course design

As shown in Figure 7, more than 70% of the participants acknowledged that there was no particular course on reading skills in syllabus while 30% of the alumni admitted that they got specific course on reading skills in their graduation and post-graduation level. They added that the English language teachers designed the course of reading skills by setting some questions on passages, word meanings and open-ended questions, giving lecture and homework. 01 of them said that the way the teacher designed the course was unclear.

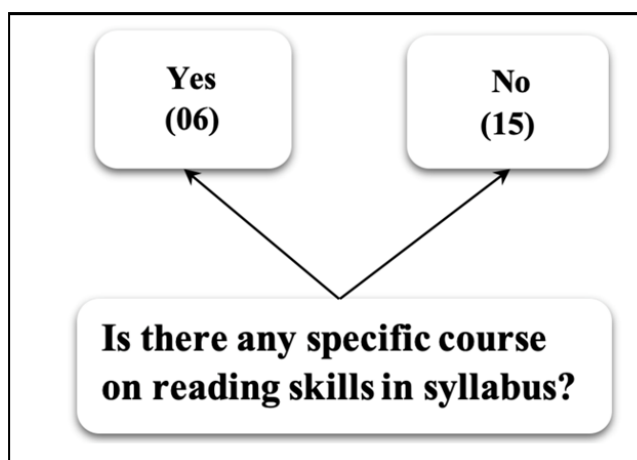


Figure 7. Specific course on reading skills in syllabus and course design

Likewise, about 80% alumni who answered to the questionnaire ensured that there was a particular course on writing skills in their syllabus whereas 04 of the 21 participants said that they studied no specific course on writing skills in their Honors and Master's syllabus (Figure 8). They also mentioned that the teacher designed the writing course by conducting classes on how to write paragraph and composition, answer writing pattern, sentence structures and analysis, different types of professional letters. On the other hand, 01 of the participants complained that no practice session had been arranged to correct grammatically errors sentences written by the students.

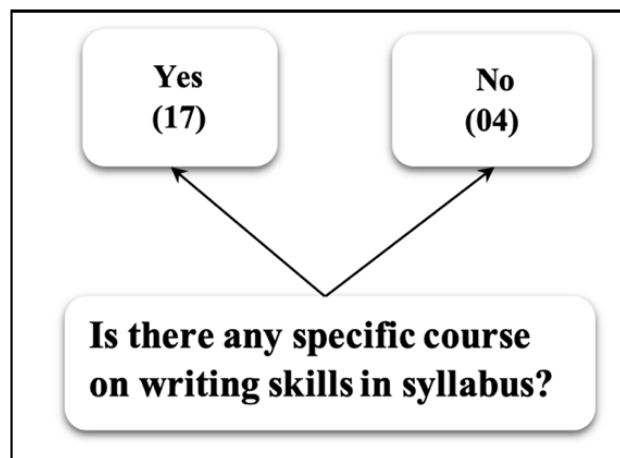


Figure 8. Specific course on writing skills in syllabus and course design

About 90% of the alumni in the question of if English language teachers used technological devices to develop English language skills clearly stated that no language teacher used technological devices in language class though it was very essential to use technological devices to develop English language skills particularly speaking and listening skills. They also revealed that they used their mobiles and internet to practise English outside of the classroom. Only 10% of them mentioned that the teacher used laptop and multimedia projector in language classroom. (see Figure 9)

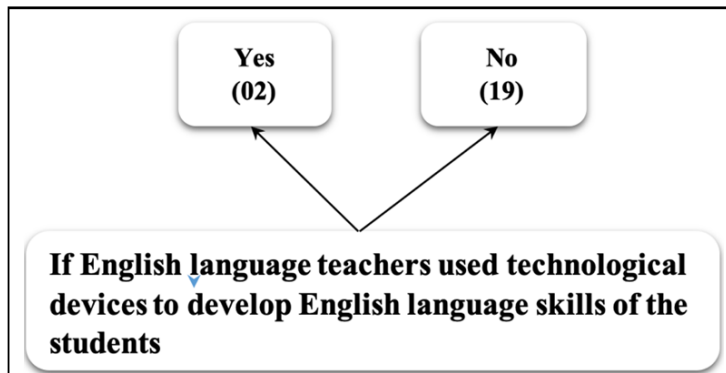


Figure 9. If English language teachers used technological devices to develop English language skills of the students

Again, 90% of the alumni admitted that they were, after completing Honors and masters in English, dissatisfied with the course design and teaching approach for developing speaking and listening skills (Figure 10). They also mentioned the reasons why they were dissatisfied. They stated that no steps had been taken to develop speaking and listening skills and teaching approaches are not effective. Similarly, the teacher didn't make plan to execute any particular method for speaking and listening skills. Having no particular courses and assessment for speaking and listening skills, no usage of language lab and less scope for practice English in the classroom were, in fact, important causes for their dissatisfaction. 10% of them were satisfied with the course design and teaching approach for developing speaking and listening skills.

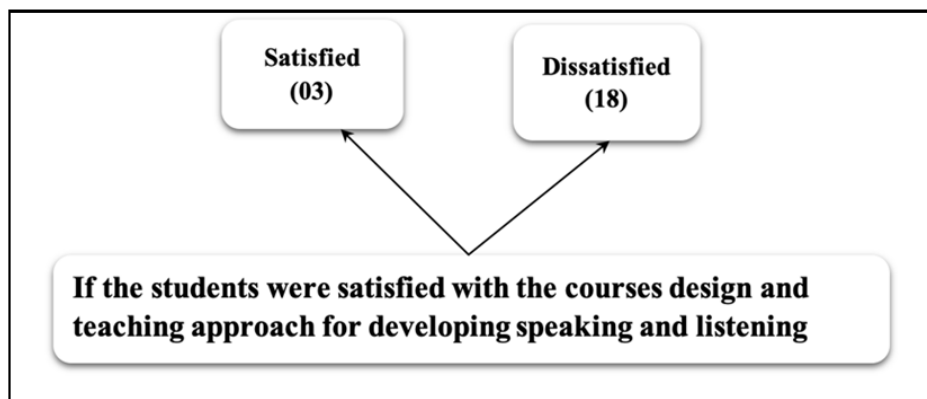


Figure 10. If the students were, after completing Honors and masters in English , satisfied with the course design and teaching approach for developing speaking and listening skills

The alumni's responses regarding if they were, after completing Honors and Masters in English, satisfied with the courses design and teaching approach for developing reading and writing skills revealed clear distinction, for 90% of them disclosed that they were dissatisfied with the course design and teaching approach for developing reading and writing skills because of having no strategies, practice work, instructions and particular course on reading skills. On the other hand, 10% of the participants were satisfied with the course design and teaching approach for developing reading and writing skills. (see Figure 11)

Figure 11. If the students were, after completing Honors and masters in English , satisfied with the courses design and teaching approach for developing reading and writing skills

As presented in Figure 12, about 95% of the participants as shown in the pie chart were dissatisfied with the testing system they were exposed to for developing four language skills. They mentioned the reasons why they were dissatisfied with the testing system are having no separate test for particular language skills and only memorization based testing. In contrast, 05% of the alumni were satisfied with testing system they were exposed to.

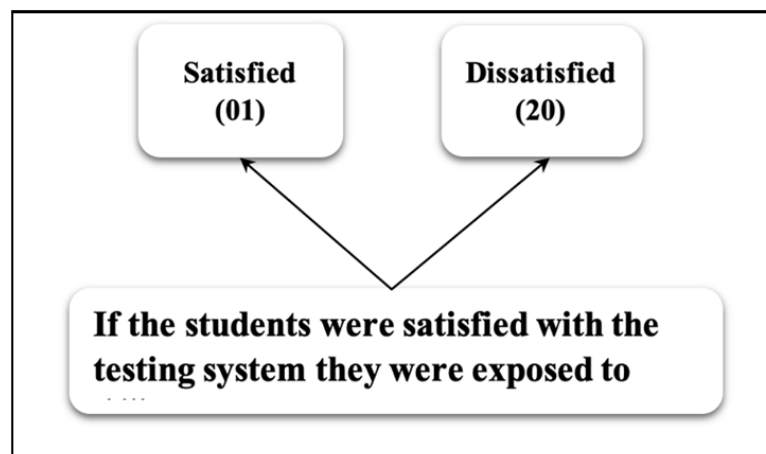


Figure 12. If the students were satisfied with the testing system they were exposed to for developing four language skills

Almost all the alumni (90%) participated in the open ended survey admitted the fact that most of the language teachers were competent but not serious in regard to conducting classes or designing the courses (Figure 13). One of the participants mentioned that most of the teachers were busy with administrative and political issues. The rest of the participant (10%) considered their teachers to be unskilled.

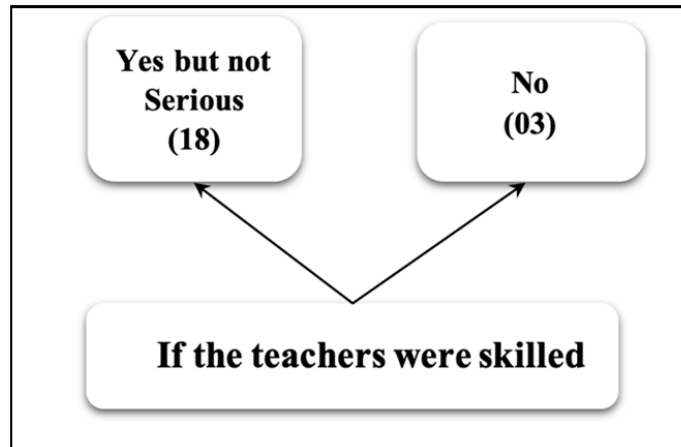


Figure 13. If the teachers were skilled

After completing graduation and post-graduation from the university, the alumni admitted their English language proficiency level, for 60% of them were, in speaking, at intermediate level while about 35% were at advanced level and only 05% of them were beginners. Again, 55% of the participants were, in listening, at intermediate level whereas 40% of them were at advanced level and 01 of the 21 participants were beginner. Likewise, 55% of the participants were, in reading, at intermediate level. In contrast, 45% of them were at advanced level. Similarly, in writing 60% of the participants were at advanced level and 40% of the alumni were at intermediate level. (see Figure 14)

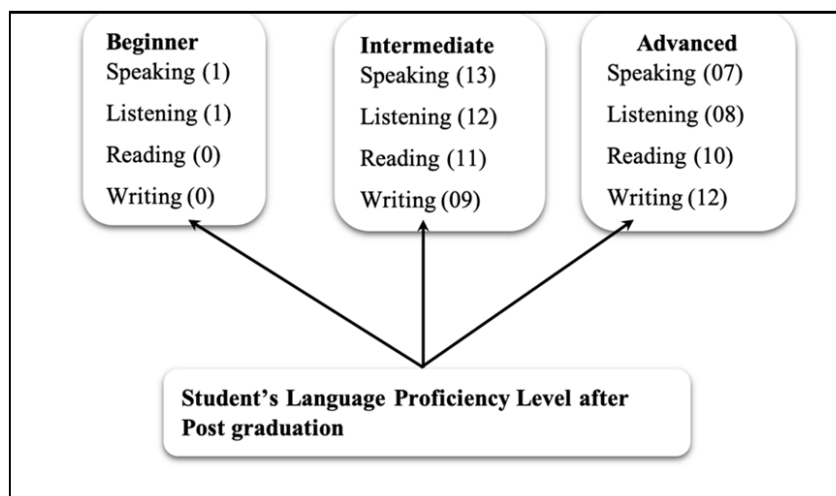


Figure 14. Student's language proficiency level after post-graduation

The modifications suggested by the participants as shown in the pie chart are, in truth, important for the English language teaching practices at the concerned university and the other public and private universities of Bangladesh. As shown in Figure 15, 35% of the alumni recommended that at least one specific course for each language skills should be included into the syllabus while 30% of them suggested that teachers should be cordial, serious, punctual, accountable, out from politics, skilled and well –trained. Likewise, 25% of the participants proposed that practice oriented courses, Blended learning, group discussion, specific test on each language skill should be taken into account whereas 20% of them advised that technology based classroom, more ELT based courses, seminar, and student's seriousness were substantial. Again, 04 of the 21 participants in the open ended survey advocated that teacher should make language teaching enjoyable by showing movies and songs and encourage students to practice English in their daily life rather to memorize. And 03 of them suggested that learner's and experienced based teaching approach with examples of real-life situation should be introduced.

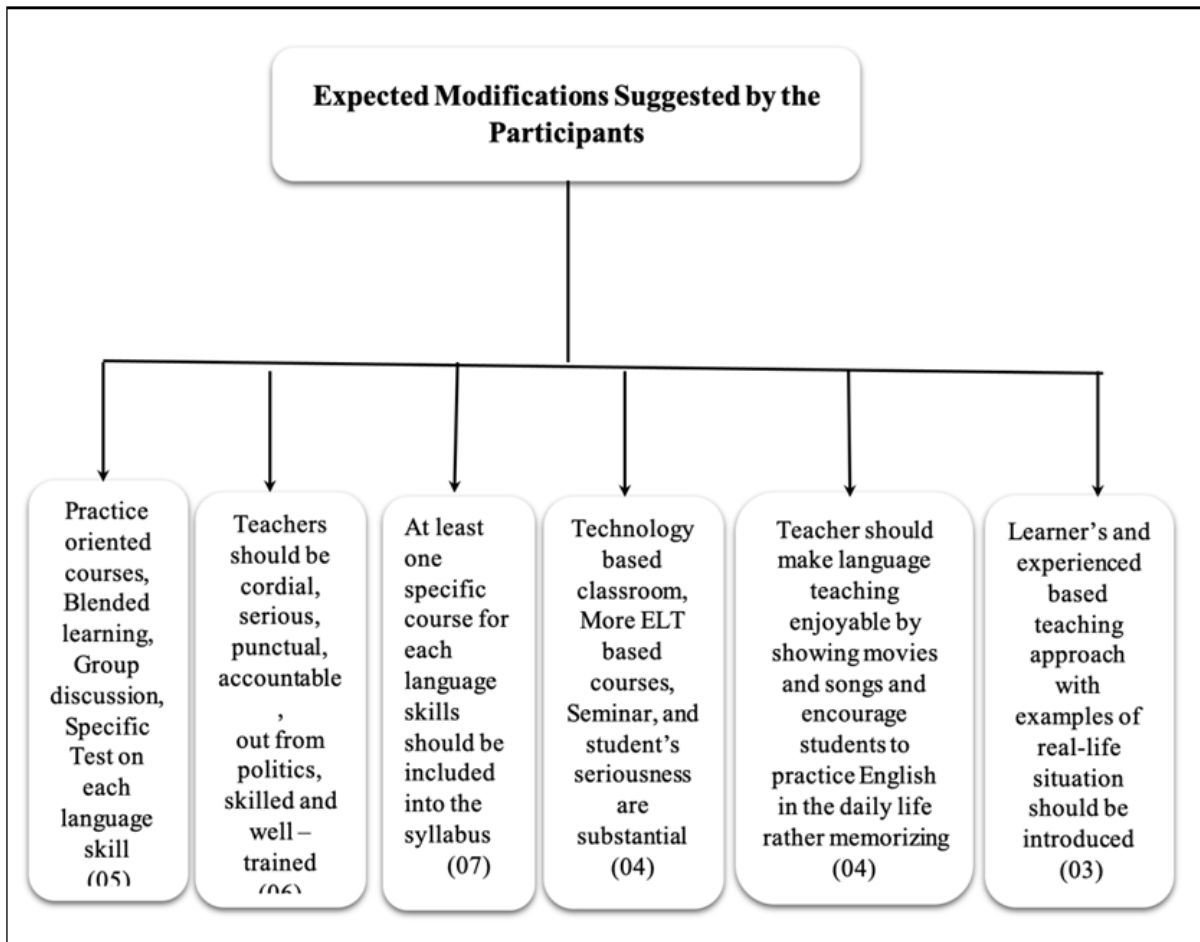


Figure 15. Expected Modifications Suggested by the Alumni

4.2. Discussion

Twelve years of the study concerning the English language teaching practices in the department of English at Islamic university, Bangladesh demonstrated that majority of the students, after completing the graduation and post-graduation in English, failed to develop their speaking, listening, reading skills at advanced level though most of them were, at the time of entrance into the university, at intermediate level and some were as beginner in all these skills while more than half of the participants successfully improve their writing skills at advanced level. This is, in truth, in contrast to their expectations. The findings also revealed that the greater number of alumni's English language proficiency achievement was the result of their personal effort rather institutional effort as they did not get much support from the program offering entity. Again, the English language courses the participants studied at university were not sufficient because there was no particular course for each language skill (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing) and the language course design was not clear and not designed properly though some lecture based classes were conducted and some tasks were given to the students to develop their skills but all the effort exerted a very little fruitful effect on English language skills because of having no practice and feedback session. Almost all of the alumni clearly stated that language teacher normally did not use technological devices in language class though it was very indispensable to use technological devices to develop English language skills particularly speaking and listening skills. In a similar manner, the alumni were dissatisfied with the course design and teaching approach because no specific strategies and effective teaching approaches were applied to develop four English language skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing). Besides, the teacher did not make any plan to execute any particular method. Having no practice session and feedback, no use of language lab and less scope for practice English in the classroom were, in fact, important causes for their dissatisfaction. The participants also mentioned the reasons why they were dissatisfied with the testing system were having no separate test for particular language skills and only memorization based testing. Lastly, the alumni admitted the fact that most of the language teachers were competent but not serious in regard to conducting classes or designing the courses. The findings meet all of the objective of the research as they explicate the nature of the English language teaching practice at a public university for more than a decade, explore the overall problems and challenges faced by students of English language learning at the university and recommend achievable considerations from the alumni's points of view to ensure pragmatic English language teaching at the universities of Bangladesh.

4.3. Recommendations

After a thorough analysis of its findings, the study offers some recommendations which might be applicable and achievable both in public university and private universities of Bangladesh and in many other countries of the world in terms of population, language teaching practices, resource capacity and academic arrangement. However, the study recommends that at least one particular course for each English language skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing) should be added to the syllabus and the language teachers should be very cordial, punctual, well-trained, accountable, aloof from the political activities and serious concerning the class activities, course design and imple-

mentation of specific teaching method of second language teaching. The study also proposes that more practice oriented ELT courses, technology based classroom, seminar, Blended learning, group discussion, practice session, specific test on each language skill should be taken into account. Students must be serious in regard to the tasks given by the language teacher and practices English in the real life situation. The language teachers should make language teaching enjoyable by showing movies and songs and encourage students to practise English in their daily life rather to memorize and experienced based teaching approach with examples of real-life situation should be introduced to the students. Again, the language teachers should use technological devices to develop English language skills particularly speaking and listening skills.

4.4. Limitations

The study experienced a number of obstacles, and, it has some limitations too for sure. As the alumni lived in different places for the job purpose after the completion of their post-graduation, they for the answer of the questionnaire could not be approached in person, which resulted in the need for arduous over-phone, on-social media or on-internet communications to request and remind the responders. Besides, majority of the participants were reluctant to answer all of the research question due to, may be, their job and family related engagements, scarcity of spare time and investing time in typing. Many of them seemed hesitant to say something problematic concerning the English language practices of the department where they studied. Again, they were doubtful regarding the data collection and research work as a whole. The study also could not reach a greater number of populations for getting more representational findings.

5. Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the problems and obstacles in the English language teaching practices faced by the students for a long time (2010 to 2022) and modifications recommended by them of the department of English at a public university of Bangladesh. Based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the English language teaching practices in the department of English at Islamic University, Bangladesh, it can be concluded that the students are facing many problems and difficulties in English language teaching approaches. Because of these problems and obstacles the students are failing to learn English language properly. The results indicate that that majority of the students, after completing the graduation and post-graduation in English, failed to develop their speaking, listening, reading at advanced level. The findings also revealed that the greater number of alumni's English language proficiency achievement was the result of their personal effort rather institutional effort as they did not get much support from the program offering entity. Again, the English language courses the participants studied at university were not sufficient because there was no particular course for each language skill (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing) and the language course design was not clear and not designed properly and all the effort exerted a very little effect on English language skills because of having no practice and feedback session, usage of technological devices in language class, separate test for particular language skills. The study suggests some recommendations which might be applicable and achievable for English department of both public and

private universities of Bangladesh and in many other countries of the world in terms of population, language teaching practices, resource capacity and academic arrangement. However, the study also recommends that at least one particular course for each English language skills should be added to the syllabus and the language teachers should be very cordial, punctual, well-trained, accountable, aloof from the political activities and serious concerning the class activities, course design and implementation of specific teaching method of second language teaching. The study also proposes that more practice oriented ELT courses, technology based classroom, seminar, Blended learning, group discussion, practice session and specific test on each language skill should be taken into account.

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