Volume 21 Issue 11
Originally issued as G4



Global Journal of human-social science: G
Linguistics & Education
Volume 21 Issue 4 Version 1.0 Year 2021
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Exploring the Difficulties Encountered by the Non-English Department Students in Learning the English Language: A Study on the Tertiary Level of Education in Bangladesh

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Keywords: *non-english department, quantitative, tertiary level, Bangladesh.*

GJHSS-G Classification: *FOR Code: 130309*



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Exploring the Difficulties Encountered by the Non-English Department Students in Learning the English Language: A Study on the Tertiary Level of Education in Bangladesh

Md. Musrifur Jelane

Abstract- Most of the non-English departments at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh conduct the English language course for the development of English language skills of the non-English department students. However, the non-English department students at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh face many troubles in learning the English language efficiently. The purpose of this study was to explore the difficulties encountered by the non-English department students at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh in learning the English language. This study followed a quantitative research approach. Data collected from 100 non-English department students both from public and private universities of Bangladesh through survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings of this study disclosed that the non-English department students face the most difficulty in productive skills (speaking and writing). Moreover, duration of the class and semester, syllabus design, needs analysis, classroom techniques, and methods are the significant factors that affect the English language learning of the non-English department students. Based on the findings, this study also made some recommendations to overcome the difficulties encountered by the non-English department students at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh in learning the English language.

Keywords: non-english department, quantitative, tertiary level, Bangladesh.

I. Introduction

Because of the fast-growing impact of globalization, people are becoming more receptive to use English language to communicate with one another. English has now become the language of global business, innovation, and technology (Alghail & Mahfoodh, 2016). To create skilled and potential candidates in this competitive world, most of the non-English departments at the tertiary level of education feel the urgency to make their students proficient in the English language (Gestanti, 2017). Besides, to gain access to the vast international literature of science, business and, technology, the non-English department students are very eager to learn the English language efficiently. Therefore, the importance of learning English skillfully for the non-English department students at the tertiary level of education is increasing day by day.

To comprehend the necessity of English language in international arena, the non-English departments at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh are more receptive to the English language. Most of the non-English departments at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh follow the English for Specific Purpose (ESP) (Afrin, 2016). Under this ESP program, the non-English departments incorporate the specific English language skills that are essential and relevant to the particular non English department while designing the syllabus and course contents for the English language course. Therefore, the primary target to conduct the English language course for the non-English department students at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh is to make them skillful in using the English language.

Although the non-English departments at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh regards English as one of the important courses, it is surprising to notice that students of non-English departments face many difficulties in learning English effectively and successfully. In most cases, the non-English department students cannot communicate properly in English with others. They do not feel the confidence to use English in their real-life context. Besides, incapability to produce error-free and structured writing in English also reflect lack of writing skill of the non-English department students. Moreover, their receptive and productive skills in English do not develop such a standard as expected at the end of the course (Ali, 2020). Therefore, it is now indispensable to research to find out the factors that create the difficulties in English language learning of the non-English department students.

The general objective of this study is to explore the difficulties encountered by the non-English department students in learning the English language at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh. Based on the general objective, this research work has been designed to conduct on the following specific objectives:

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a) To examine the existing situation of the English language courses of the non-English department students at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh.
b) To identify the factors that are associated with the problems in English language learning of the non-English department students at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh.

II. Literature Review

Ali (2020), Rahmah (2019) and, Prastiyowati (2016) identified the problems associated with the English listening skills of the English department students. However, Rahmah (2019) tried to find out the difficulties in listening comprehension of TOEFL test specifically. Besides, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) investigated the listening comprehension difficulties of English language learners. On the other hand, Gestanti (2017) tried to explore the listening strategies used by the non-English department students to overcome the difficulties they faced in listening. Moreover, this paper sheds some light on the effectiveness of these strategies to minimize the difficulties in the listening of the non-English department students.

Ibnian (2019) and Nakhalah (2016) investigated the problems associated with the English speaking skills of English language students. These studies revealed that students' lack of confidence, fear of mistakes, anxiety and, shyness are the important factors associated with the speaking problems of the students. On the other hand, Rahmaniah & Asbah (2018) and Sudjasmara (2013) tried to identify the speaking difficulties encountered by the non-English department students. These studies highlighted both the internal and external factors that influence non-English department students' speaking skills.

Satriani (2018) and Kasim & Raisha (2017) explored the problems associated with the English reading skills of the English department students. These studies explained the linguistics and non-linguistic difficulties, which were very prominent in speaking skills among the English department students. Besides, Alghail and Mahfoodh (2016) identified the problems in the academic reading of the international graduate. On the other hand, Pudyastuti (2019) tried to identify the English reading complexities of the non-English department students. This study revealed that non-English department students encountered difficulties in reading due to a lack of proper reading strategies and stock vocabulary.

Alghammas (2020) and Pratiwi (2016) identified the problems associated with the English writing skills of the English department students. Pratiwi (2016) found that linguistics and cognitive difficulties are important regarding students writing skills, while Pratiwi (2016) identified semantic and syntactic difficulties are paramount in regarding students writing skills. On the other hand, Widyan & Darwish (2019), Afrin (2016), and Lathif (2017) explored the writing difficulties encountered by the non-English department students. Widyan & Darwish (2019) identified internal factors like linguistics, syntactic and morphological competence, while Afrin (2016) and Lathif (2017) highlighted the external factors like motivation, practice, and cultural aspects are important in students' development of writing skills.

Studies above, it is clear that there is an avalanche of literature available related to difficulties associated with the English language learning of the students. However, the literature on the English language learning difficulties encountered by the non-English department students at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh is quite inadequate. Therefore, there remains a research gap in this field. The purpose of this study is to fulfill the gap with a critical approach.

III. Methodology

a) *Research Design*

This research followed a quantitative approach. The quantitative research approach chose due to the effectiveness in evaluating the subject matter more accurately. The primary sources of data used to carry out this research. Data collected through a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The response of a respondent has been cross-checked with other respondents to ensure the validity of the information.

b) *Population and Sampling*

The target population of the study was the students who belonged to different departments (except the Department of English) at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh. This study followed the Stratified Random sampling method. Therefore, the students at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh divided into subgroups or strata based on their departments like Sociology, Political Science, History and Archeology, Physics, Chemistry, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Computer Science Engineering, etc. Samples then selected randomly from each subgroup or stratum.

c) *Data Collection and Analysis*

Data collected from 100 students of different departments, both from public and private universities in Bangladesh, through questionnaires. A five-point Likert scale used to measure the responses. Additionally, semi-structured interviews conducted with 30 students of different departments. Data were analyzed by using IBM SPSS Statistics. The statistical measurements used were Mean and Standard Deviation to analyze and interpret the collected data. By using a five-point Likert scale, items were scored as Always= 5, "Often= 4, "Sometimes= 3, Rarely=2, Never=1; Very Difficult=5

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Difficult=4, Moderately Difficult=3, Slightly Difficult=2Not Difficult=1 and Strongly Agree=4, Undecided=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Agree=5, Disagree=1.

IV. Results and Discussions

Table 1: Skills that are practiced most during school and college levels of education

Skills	Number		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
Listening	100	0	3.25	0.91
Speaking	100	0	2.82	0.92
Reading	100	0	4.28	0.93
Writing	100	0	4.51	0.95

The results in Table-1 show that among the four language skills, writing skill has the highest mean (4.51) while speaking skill has the lowest mean (2.82). The results indicate that students practiced the writing skill most where they practiced the speaking skill least during their school and college levels of education.

Table 2: Students' frequency of facing difficulty in each of the four language skills

Skills	Number		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
Listening	100	0	3.97	0.97
Speaking	100	0	4.40	0.91
Reading	100	0	3.19	0.94
Writing	100	0	4.09	0.93

The results in Table-2 show that among the four language skills, speaking skill has the highest mean (4.40) while reading skill has the lowest mean (3.19). The results reveal that students face the most difficulty in speaking where they face least difficulty in reading.

Table 3: The duration of the English language course (i.e. 4/6 months) is fair enough.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	11	11	11	11
Disagree	33	33	60.0	44
Strongly Disagree	56	56	56	100
Total	100	100	100	

The results in Table-3 show most of the students were disagreed that the duration of the English language course is fair enough for the non-English department students.

Table 4: The syllabus & course contents of the current English language course need to update

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	76	76	76	76
Disagree	20	20	20	96
Strongly Disagree	4	4	4	100
Total	100	100	100	

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The results in Table-4 show most of the students (76%) were agreed, and it indicates that the present English language syllabus of the non-English department students needs to update.

Table 5: Students' frequency of facing problems with regard to English Listening skills

Sub skills	Number		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
Listening and comprehending the class lectures	100	0	3.52	0.89
Listening and comprehending the materials presented in the class	100	0	3.60	0.91
Listening and understanding main idea of a topic	100	0	3.87	0.98
Listening and understanding specific information in a topic	100	0	3.19	0.91
Listening and comprehending speaker's attitude and purpose	100	0	4.14	0.95
Listening and understanding Radio program/TV program/Seminar/Conference/Workshop	100	0	3.65	0.96

The results in Table-5 show that among the problems regarding listening skills, 'Listening and comprehending speaker's attitude and purpose' has the highest mean (4.14) while 'Listening and understanding specific information in a topic' has the lowest mean (3.39). The results reveal that students face the most difficulty in listening and comprehending the speaker's attitude and purpose, where they face the least problem in listening and understanding specific information in a topic.

Table 6: Students' frequency of facing problems with regard to English Speaking skills

Sub skills	Number		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
Participating in class discussions	100	0	3.92	0.94
Asking questions to the instructor	100	0	4.10	0.91
Organizing and presenting oral reports	100	0	3.10	0.95
Pronouncing words clearly	100	0	3.80	0.92
Talking in English with the instructor outside of the class	100	0	3.63	0.90
Talking in English with classmates outside class	100	0	4.56	0.91

The results in Table-6 show that among the problems regarding speaking skills, 'Talking in English with classmates outside class' has the highest mean (4.56) while 'Organizing and presenting oral reports' has the lowest mean (3.10). The results reveal that students face the most difficulty in talking in English with classmates outside the class where they face the least problem in organizing and presenting oral reports.

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Table 7: Students' frequency of facing problems with regard to English reading skills

Sub skills	Number		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
Understanding the main idea of a context	100	0	3.76	0.95
Comprehending the purpose and attitude of the writer	100	0	3.70	0.91
Transforming information to graphs/charts/pictures/ maps/tables/diagram	100	0	3.83	0.89
Summarizing a text	100	0	3.35	0.90
Predicting a text	100	0	4.24	0.95
Skimming & Scanning a text	100	0	3.90	0.97
Ability to read quickly	100	0	3.74	0.93

The results in Table-7 show that among the problems regarding reading skills, 'Predicting a text' has the highest mean (4.24) while 'Summarizing a text' has the lowest mean (3.35). The results reveal that students face the most difficulty in talking in predicting a text where they face the least problem in summarizing a text.

Table 8: Students' frequency of facing problems with regard to English writing skills

Sub skills	Number		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
Spelling correctly	100	0	4.12	0.91
Using appropriate word order	100	0	3.70	0.89
Using proper punctuation	100	0	3.13	0.93
Using correct vocabulary and grammar	100	0	4.44	0.97
Writing thesis statement, topic sentence, supporting details	100	0	4.21	0.95
Developing ideas and Joining sentences	100	0	3.51	0.91
Using cohesion and coherence	100	0	3.55	0.88
Writing at an efficient rate	100	0	4.60	0.95

The results in Table-8 show that among the problems regarding writing skills, 'Writing at an efficient rate' has the highest mean (4.60) while 'Using proper punctuation' has the lowest mean (3.13). The results reveal that students face the most difficulty in writing at an efficient rate where they face the least problem in using proper punctuation.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Although most of the non-English departments, both in public and private universities in Bangladesh, conduct the English language course to improve the English language skills of the students, the usefulness of these English courses hinders due to several factors. This study tries to find out these factors which create obstacle in learning the English language skills properly of the non-English department students. Moreover, the results and recommendations of this study will assist the teachers to guide the students in a proper engaging way as well as the syllabus design and assessment committees will be benefited to form an effective and practical syllabus for the students of non-English departments by evaluating this paper. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been made:

Firstly, the students of the non-English departments face the most difficulty in productive skills (Speaking and Writing) compared to receptive skills (Listening and Reading). Due to lack of practice and opportunity, non-English department students feel less enthusiasm to develop their productive skills. Therefore, it is much needed to create more opportunities inside and outside the classroom to develop productive skills along with the receptive skills of the non-English department students.

Secondly, most of the English language courses offered to the non-English department students are for the only a semester (which is 4 to 6 months). This

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duration of time is quite inadequate for the proper English language learning of the non-English department students. Moreover, the class duration of the English language courses offered to the non-English departments is insufficient enough. Therefore, the number of semesters and duration of the class time need to extend for the non-English department students.

Thirdly, the present English language syllabus of the non-English department students is not good enough to provide the English language skills that the non-English department students need much. Most of the English language syllabuses of the non-English department students are based on only grammatical competence. The communicative aspect of language can hardly find in the English language syllabuses of the Non-English department students. Therefore, both the notional and functional aspects of the syllabus need to incorporate in designing the English language syllabuses for the non-English departments.

Fourthly, students' active involvement is important for the English language learning process. However, teachers play an active role while students remain passive learners in most of the English language classes for the non-English department students. Therefore, it is essential to create a learner-centered classroom instead of a teacher-centered classroom to foster the learning process of the non-English department students.

Finally, students of different departments have different English language needs. For example, the English language needs of the students of BBA departments are not the same as the English language needs of the students of engineering departments. Therefore, needs analysis should carry out before, in the middle, and after the language course to find out the appropriate English language needs of the particular department students. Moreover, this will also fulfill the gaps in English language learning of the non-English department students.

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Appendix

Students' Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

Greetings!

I am conducting a research work on "Exploring the Difficulties Encountered by the Non-English Department Students in Learning the English Language: A Study on the Tertiary Level of Education in Bangladesh." This questionnaire is part of this research work to collect data from the students. It might take approximately 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes only.
Thank you for your assistance.

Demographic Details:

Name:

Age:

Gender: Male/Female

Department:

University:

Specific Questions:

1. To what extent the following skills of English you practiced in your school and college levels of education? (Put a tick mark)

Skills	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Listening					
Speaking					
Reading					
Writing					

2. How difficulties do you face in each of the following language skills? (Put a tick mark)

Language skill	Very Difficult	Difficult	Moderately Difficult	Slightly Difficult	Not Difficult
Listening					
Speaking					
Reading					
Writing					

3. The duration of the current English language course (i.e. 4/6 months) is fair enough. (Put a tick mark)

Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Undecided	
Disagree	
Strongly Disagree	

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4. The syllabus & course contents of the current English language course need to update. (Put a tick mark)

Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Undecided	
Disagree	
Strongly Disagree	

5. How often do you face difficulties in the following sub skills of the Listening skill? (Put a tick mark)

Sub-skills					
Listening	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Listening and comprehending the class lectures					
Listening and comprehending the materials presented in the class					
Listening and understanding main idea of a topic					
Listening and understanding specific information in a topic					
Listening and comprehending speaker's attitude and purpose					
Listening and understanding Radio program/ TVprogram/Seminar/Conference/Workshop					

6. How often do you face difficulties in the following sub skills of the Speaking skill? (Put a tick mark)

Sub-skills					
Speaking	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Participating in class discussions					
Asking questions to the instructor					
Organizing and presenting oral reports					
Pronouncing words clearly					
Talking to the instructor outside of the class					
Talking with classmates outside class					

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7. How often do you face difficulties in the following sub skills of the Reading skill? (Put a tick mark)

Sub-skills					
Reading	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Understanding the main idea of a context					
Comprehending the purpose and attitude of the writer					
Paraphrasing information					
Transforming information to graphs/charts/ pictures/maps/tables/diagram					
Summarizing a text					
Predicting a text					
Skimming & Scanning a text					
Ability to read quickly					

8. How often do you face difficulties in the following sub skills of the Writing skill? (Put a tick mark)

Sub-skills					
Writing	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Spelling correctly					
Using appropriate word order					
Using proper punctuation					
Using correct vocabulary and grammar					
Writing thesis statement, topic sentence, supporting details					
Developing ideas and Joining sentences					
Using cohesion and coherence					
Writing at an efficient rate					

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