

## Scenario of EFL Research at the Tertiary Level in Bangladesh: Causes and Impacts

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### *Abstract*

English is taught as a foreign language at every level of education in Bangladesh. The present paper aimed at examining the present scenario of the practice of EFL research at the tertiary level in Bangladesh and to find out the causes and impacts of it on the total educational system as well as the learners' future development. The study was conducted using Mixed Method Approach including teachers' interview, students' questionnaire and curriculum analysis. It was found that a large number of students from the department of English graduated without conducting any research work and a number of the students who conducted the research work were not properly guided to undertake the research journey as per the expected level. Findings also showed that no student had publication and a number of teachers were also found having very poor interest in publication. It was suggested that emphasize should be given on implementing mandatory research methodology and practice courses, allocating teachers with research experience and motivating teachers and students in research work with funding as well.

**Keywords:** Research, EFL, Tertiary Level

### **1. Introduction**

Almost all the universities in Bangladesh have the department of English. Its core aim is to make the students skilled in English language, but in many cases the students cannot cope with the goal for many reasons and the lack of research activities is one of them. Tertiary education is indeed a biggest arena to be emphasized from the perspective of research and innovation. Through research, students develop critical thinking ability, discovers, elucidates and

evaluates new knowledge and ideas. When our next generation of practitioners and leaders (students) engage in research, with its deliberate process and requirements for critical thinking skills, they become better students and are best prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

According to Boyer Commission (1998), “The ecology of a university depends on a deep and abiding understanding that inquiry, investigation and discovery are at the heart of the enterprise, whether in funded research projects or in undergraduate classrooms or graduate apprenticeships. Everyone at a university should be a discoverer, a learner.” Healey and Jenkins (2009) argue: “All undergraduate students in all higher education institutions should experience learning through, and about, research and inquiry.” For this to be possible it can only occur if the experiences are integrated into the curriculum. Walington (2008) mentions that the student experience of research at undergraduate level is significantly different to that of an academic. Once student research (e.g. a dissertation or final project) is submitted, it may be read only by a marker and supervisor and the summative feedback may be of limited value for the student about to graduate. The findings are often forgotten and rarely developed further. This is the ‘gap’ in the research cycle. In contrast, academics share their research results through publication and a process of peer review provides feedback to the researcher who is able to make modifications to the work before it is disseminated. The findings themselves may spark further research questions.

According to (Hackling & Fairbrother, 1996), Autonomy in the research context ranges from student engagement with closed inquiries directed towards a pre-determined outcome, involving a high level of structure and guidance and using prescribed methods and processes, through to open inquiries involving high levels of autonomy and self-determination in terms of what is investigated and how the investigation is done. Inquiries can be classified as ‘closed’ (lecturer-specified) or ‘open’ (student-specified) in relation to: the question, hypothesis or aim of the task; the procedure followed or equipment used; and the answer, resolution or need for further inquiry which is arrived at.

## 2. Literature Review

The current study aimed at exploring the present scenario of EFL research activities at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. So, this portion of the study is intended to make a bridge with the

other studies in this arena. However, there has been little research into the respective field. A few studies have focused on students' experiences and perceptions of academic research at the university level. According to (Zamorski 2002; Lindsay, Breen & Jenkins 2002; Robertson & Blackler 2006), Students were found to have mixed reactions to academic research because research made their lecturers less available to them; however, many valued academic research and wanted it to be more visible to them. (Lindsay, Breen & Jenkins 2002) mentioned that students' perceptions of the relevance of research to their learning were also influenced by disciplinary perspectives. Research was less valued by those with practical and applied orientations to careers and knowledge; in particular, postgraduate students tended less often to perceive research as salient to their own goals and motivations.

Healey, Flint and Harrington (2014) framed the variety of roles which students take under the broad term 'students as partners'. They proposed four overlapping areas where partnership may occur, including: 'learning teaching and assessment'; 'pedagogic advice and consultancy'; the 'scholarship of teaching and learning' (where students engage in pedagogic research) and 'subject based research and inquiry'. It is students' role in subject- based inquiry which forms the focus of the publication. The extent to which student research within and sometimes between /across disciplines forms part of a 'students as partners' relationship, is therefore highly dependent upon the context in which it takes place.

Beckham and Hensel (2009) refused to define undergraduate research because of the wide variety of interpretations, not only in disciplinary terms, but related to the differences between the contexts in which research takes place. Anderson and Priest (2014) argued that undergraduate research may include ways of promoting research-teaching linkages by developing students' appreciation of research in the discipline. It can also involve using teaching and learning approaches which simulate research processes and using assignments which involve research or elements of the research process; giving students first-hand experience of research based consultancy e.g. through live projects; bringing research data into the curriculum for students to manipulate. In 2008, the Boyer Commission called for American research universities to engage undergraduate students in the research process. The process was viewed as the entire research cycle, with dissemination being an integral part of student activity. Bauer and Bennett (2003) revealed increased satisfaction ratings amongst students who incorporated an

undergraduate research element to their university experience and students reported increased intellectual curiosity and enhancement of research and communication skills.

Crowe and Brakke (2008) summarized the findings from 13 whole institution/program level evaluations of undergraduate research plus ten focused on student experience studies to call for a more systematic approach to demonstrating the impacts of undergraduate research, particularly in relation to program level intended learning outcomes and longer term benefits such as career choices, and changes in cognitive development and attitudes.

### **3. Objective of the Study**

Generally, the study aimed at examining the scenario of EFL research at the tertiary level in Bangladesh and its impacts. Specific objectives includes:

- i. To explore the present scenario of EFL research at the tertiary level in Bangladesh
- ii. To identify the causes behind poor EFL research activities at the tertiary level
- iii. To recommend research based solutions to overcome the challenges

### **4. Methodology**

Mixed Method Approach was used to conduct the present study. Study took place in department of English of five tertiary level institutions in Bangladesh. Total 10 EFL teachers were interviewed and 30 students were given a questionnaire for collecting data. Curriculum analyses was done by the researchers as well. Recommendations have been made connecting teachers' opinion, classroom observation and the researchers' teaching experience.

### **5. Findings and Discussion**

This is the core section of the study concerned with the findings and discussion based on teachers' interview, students' questionnaire and curriculum analyses.

#### **5.1 Findings from Teachers' Interview**

While conducting teachers' interview, all the teachers mentioned that they had the course/courses on research at the undergrad and postgrad levels but in some cases students could choose other course instead of research as well. All the teachers opined that they did not have funding opportunity for students regarding research and publication activities, even a number of teachers said that they did not get any fund for themselves. And that's why they were

demotivated for research activities like joining conference, doing publication in paid journal and for research project covering students.

Half of the teachers mentioned that their university did not have specialized research center and 4 of the teachers said that their department did not publish any journal even. In response to another question, almost all the teachers disclosed that a number of teachers teaching research courses did not have much experience in the field even and that's why students were not properly guided in the arena as well. Two of the teachers frankly said that they did not have enough skill in the respective field and they did not have any publication yet.

All the teachers thought that motivation and support from the authority, adequate funding, and training for the teachers were essential for the improvement in the arena of research. They also emphasized the need of some collaboration with the research based universities of the foreign countries.

## 5.2 Findings from Students' Questionnaire

This part deals with the response of the students regarding their opinion and practice of conducting research activities by themselves.

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
We have a course on research in our curriculum	17 (56.67%)	13 (43.33%)	0 (0%)
I am interested in conducting research	16 (53.33%)	06 (20%)	08 (26.67%)
Teachers motivate us for research activity	13 (43.33%)	7 (23.33%)	10 (33.33%)
I have a publication	0 (0%)	10 (33.33%)	20 (66.67%)
Our department publishes a research journal	14 (46.67%)	08(26.67%)	08 (26.67%)
We get funding for research	0 (0%)	09 (30%)	21 (70%)

Table: Student Questionnaire

In response to the first question, 56.67% (frequency-17) students agreed that they had a course on research in their curriculum. Another 43.33% (frequency-13) students were neutral regarding the same statement. In answering to the same question, no one disagreed. Such a great amount of students being neutral indicated that they did not have sufficient knowledge about their curriculum.

In case of the second question 53.33 % ( frequency-16) students opined that they were interested in conducted research. 20% (frequency-06) students were neutral to the same statement. In answering to the same question 26.67 (frequency-08) students disagreed and it showed that a great number of EFL students were not interested in doing research.

Regarding the question number three, 43.33% (frequency-13) students agreed that teachers motivated them for research activity. 23.33% (frequency-07) students were neutral regarding the same statement. In answering to the same question, 33.33 % ( frequency-10) students disagreed.

Answering the question number four, none of the students said that he/she had a publication. 33.33% (frequency-10) students were neutral regarding the same statement. It suggested that one third of the students most probably did not have the idea of publication. In answering to the same question, 66.67 % ( frequency-20) students disagreed.

In response to the question number five, 46.67% (frequency-14) students agreed that their department published a research journal. 26.67. % (frequency-08) students were neutral regarding the same statement. In answering to the same question, 26.67 % ( frequency-08) students disagreed.

Regarding the question number six, no student said that he/she got funding for research from university. 30% (frequency-09) students were neutral regarding the same statement. In answering to the same question, 70 % ( frequency-21) students disagreed.

### 5.3 Findings from Curriculum Analyses

The researchers also analyzed the curriculum and syllabus of the department of English of the five tertiary institutions selected for the study. Through the analysis of the curriculum and syllabuses, the researchers observed that all the five university had courses on research but there

were variations. Only two of the universities had mandatory research methodology course with dissertation. Two of the universities had course on research with the option of taking other course instead of research. And one university had only research methodology course without any dissertation.

Another important issue was observed by the researchers that topics covered in the course, time duration and resources were not sufficient for conducting the research methodology course with practice (dissertation).

#### **5.4 Summary of the Findings**

Based on the findings of the study, it has been explored that a great number of students being graduated from the department of English without undertaking any EFL research for reasons like: research not being mandatory, lack of proper motivation, and lack of resource persons. Who are doing research are not doing it properly even. All these issues have great impact on the future of the learners. Not being skilled in research, learners can hardly produce new knowledge and they are not motivated for higher studies like M.Phil., PhD etc.

#### **6. Recommendations and Conclusion**

Based on the teachers' interview, students' questionnaire, curriculum analysis and the researchers' experience, some recommendations are:

- i. University Grant Commission and the authority of each university should make EFL research mandatory for the students of the department of English.
- ii. Authority should allocate a handsome fund for the research activities both of the teachers and students
- iii. Experienced teachers with research degree and publication should be nominated for teaching research courses
- iv. Universities should create department-wise research center
- v. More resources should be provided to the research students

To conclude, it can be said that to create and generate true knowledge in any field of higher study, research is must though our present scenario is not satisfactory. So, it is time to take proper initiatives from authorities of every university to ensure research engagement at the tertiary level, especially in the department of English.

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