

English as Second Language Evaluation Methods in Bengali Medium Schools

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Abstract: *The present study looks into the ground realities of these innovative evaluation models to know why, despite their promised child-centricities and improvements, vernacular medium school students are unable to read & write Basic English. Qualitative content analysis of interview data from 25 Govt. aided Bengali Medium English language teachers was done by means of First and Second Cycle Coding process. The study observes that English language evaluation in Bengali Medium schools lack formative evaluation; their evaluation process, hence, has no constructive learning outcomes. The process is too summative & content-oriented, barely causing any language skill development among students.*

Keywords: *Evaluation models, Bengali Medium, English as Second Language, Qualitative Content Analysis*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Learning is incomplete without evaluation (Chavan, 2007). Success of ESL (English as Second Language) pedagogy thus greatly depends on its evaluation strategy adopted by the respective language teacher in order to locate Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" in learners. If learner's initial language level is located at i stage, the language input that would help him/her reach the zone of proximal development, should be at $i+1$ stage. (Krashen, 1985). Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) method is currently being encouraged mostly to determine the learners' stage of linguistic development. However, it needs mention that how a learner is being evaluated will decide whether the learner at all wants to be evaluated. Often most child-centric evaluation procedures are anxiety provoking. It is thus a question of both "how and how much". It has been often observed that "learners participate in evaluation with more comfort when the experience is not always a failure.....Unfortunately for most children the immediate role played by current evaluation methods within the learning process is not clear." (NCERT, 2006). As per NCF 2005, evaluation in English should, thus, not be tied to the achievement but to proficiency in terms of skill development. With this in view, NCERT 2017 came up with the concepts of "Assessment for learning" which adopts multiple pedagogical processes to create conducive learning environment, "Assessment of learning" where learners' learning levels i.e., what the learner at a particular class or stage know and can do is assessed, and "Assessment as learning" which is a kind of self-assessment where scaffolding and involving students in developing rubrics, portfolio and anecdotes play very important roles. Teacher facilitates learning through *assessment for*, *assessment of* and *assessment as* learning. Such comprehensive and continuous assessments are feasible only when teaching, learning and evaluation are considered as one. As a result, learning outcomes, as per the latest methods of evaluation, have been well integrated into "curricular expectations", "pedagogical processes" and "learning outcomes". (NCERT, 2017). The exclusive emphasis being made on learning outcomes brought into picture a new evaluation model – the PEACOCK Model – which is an advanced version of CCE Model. It evaluates students beyond their textual knowledge. In the context of evaluation of ESL learning, it made language learning meaningful because it is now connected with the immediate environment of the learner. Evaluation is no longer limited to the far end of the teaching learning process but is now continuous and comprehensive, and well-integrated with the learning outcomes. The integration also solves the evaluation problem, raised by NCERT (NCERT, 2006) and as mentioned above about learners being unclear about the role played by evaluation procedures within the learning process. The 5 indicators of the PEACOCK Model give a very concrete picture to evaluate students all round development. Educational training on this new evaluation strategy was conducted by NCERT in 2017 from July 24th – 27th at Regional Institute for Education (RIE) in Bhubaneswar. It later reached the grassroots levels through the SCERTs and DIETs of respective States.

The present study looks into the ground realities of these innovative evaluation models to know why, despite their promised child-centricities and improvements, these models Bengali medium students are poor in reading & writing English.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK :

As per the above narrative, two evaluation models, popularised by NCERT for school level English as Second language teaching – the CCE and the PEACOCK models – have, hence, been elaborated under the conceptual framework of the study:

Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation Model (CCE)

The CCE model includes both formative and summative evaluation approaches. NPE, 1986 had emphasized CCE to enhance quality education at school level. It aims at all round development of the learner through - Continuity in evaluation and assessment of broad-based learning. “From the academic year 2013, the WBBSE has introduced revised Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) system for the students of Class I to Class VIII. In CCE two types of assessments have been referred to - Formative and Summative. The periodicity of both types of assessment are thrice (i.e., 1st, 2nd & 3rd Formative & Summative Evaluations) in an academic year.” (Basu & Debnath, 2016).

CCE aims at all round development of the learner through - Continuity in evaluation and assessment of broad-based learning. Continuous refers to “regular assessments, frequency of unit testing, analysis of learning gaps, applying corrective measures, retesting and giving feedback to teachers and students for their self-evaluation, etc. Comprehensive on the other hand attempts to cover both the scholastic/curricular and the co-scholastic/co-curricular aspects of a student’s growth and development — with both these aspects of the evaluation process being assessed through Formative and Summative Assessments” (Basu & Debnath, 2016). While *Formative Evaluation* are conducted during the course or program to measure students’ learning and to decide if remedial teachings are needed, *Summative Evaluations* are made at the end of the course/program to rank or grade the students’ learning achievements. In English language, however, comprehensive evaluation also refers to assessment of the four English language skill development. NPE, 1986 had emphasized CCE to enhance quality education at school level. WBBSE has introduced CCE from the academic session 2007-2008, the Board has however expanded and changed the format of CCE in 2016.

The PEACOCK Model

The model is the advanced version of CCE Model. It evaluates students beyond their textual knowledge and are known for its 5 *indicators*, needed for comprehensive evaluation. Under each of these *indicators*, there are a set of 4 *Rubrics* (scoring guides) arranged in the descending order, using which the teacher will score and analyse students’ performance.

The 5 indicators and their respective rubrics are

Participation:

1. Actively participates and has leadership qualities.
2. Actively participates and exchange views.
3. Participates but has no interest in exchanging views
4. Reluctant to participate

Questioning and Experimentation:

1. Can ask learning related questions and interested in experimentation.
2. Can ask learning related questions but not interested in experimenting.
3. Asks few learning-related questions and interested in experimentation.
4. Asks very few learning-related questions and least interested in experimentation.

Application and Interpretation

1. Able to interpret, give examples and apply.
2. Able to interpret, give examples but unable to apply.
3. Able to interpret partially, but unable to apply.
4. Only memorizes

Co-operation and Empathy:

1. Actively empathetic to both known and unknown persons.
2. Actively empathetic to known but sympathetic to unknown persons.

3. Sympathetic towards known person
4. Expressions of empathy is less

Creative Expression of Knowledge:

1. Creative inside and outside the class
2. Creative only inside the class
3. Eager for creative activities
4. Less eager for creative activities

3. LITERATURE REVIEW :

Despite such innovations in the evaluation strategies through the CCE and the PEACOCK Models, researchers are unanimous in observing the evaluation of ESL learning to be ineffective. Grover describes it as “unrealistic evaluation system” (Grover, 2014) and Haribhau as “Defective Examination System” (Haribhau, 2016). Rani finds evaluation strategies to be more about “certain stock inquiries. He need not read even the prescribed text-books. The consequence is that though a student succeeds in the examination, yet he has no practical command of the language. He can neither speak correct English nor write.” (Rani, 2019). Tests, in the name of evaluation, are more a memory tests of and do not evaluate skill-development (Jabbar, 2019).

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY :

The above discourse begs the question as to why ESL teachers demonstrate a poor proficiency in ESL teaching as so unanimously manifested by authors above. Indian educationists, over the years, have tried to come up with innovative and student-centric approaches, methods and techniques to teaching English; we have formulated education policies and have been planned and infiltrated them into the Indian masses through teacher training courses. It is through the in-service teacher training courses that ESL teachers have been informed about new teaching methodology, viz. the ICON Method, or about the child-centric evaluation strategies, viz. the CCE Model or the PEACOCK Model. It will hence be now significant to look into the ground realities of these evaluation models to know why, despite their promised child-centricities and improvements, vernacular medium school students are unable to read & write Basic English.

5. RESEARCH QUESTION :

How are Upper Primary State-aided English teachers evaluating students' English language learning?

6. METHODOLOGY:

In view of the research question, 25 Govt. aided Bengali Medium English language teachers were sampled by means of *incidental sampling process* and interviewed over phone for Primary data. 5 English Medium school teachers were approached as reference group for knowledge addition through comparative analysis. Over-phone interviews that lasted for almost 30 – 40 minutes was done through a semi-structured open-ended interview schedule. The schedule was developed around the research component – *students' evaluation of English as second language*:

1. How do you evaluate students' English grammar knowledge and textual learning?
2. How do you evaluate students' English language skill development?
3. Do you assign individual or group tasks for class evaluation?
4. Do these assignments include alternated evaluation methods like PPT presentation, impromptu or language games? Or, are they mostly about filling out worksheets or/and oral answers?
5. Do these assignments evaluate students' capacity for language skills or their content knowledge?
6. Do you have class written tests? Are they scored and made a part of Internal marking scheme?
7. Do the quarterly unitary exams evaluate English language skills or mostly content knowledge for better scoring?
8. What predicaments do you face during evaluation process? What changes would you recommend?

Qualitative content analysis of the interview data was done by means of First and Second Cycle Coding process. The primary codes, extracted from the data in the First Cycle Coding by means of *in vivo, process & descriptive codes*, were assembled into categories and sub-categories by means of *pattern codes* for theme formation. The theme has been elaborated below as the key assertions of the present study. The theme, being a one-line response to the research question and formulated on the basis of the above coding process, is as follows:

Research Question: *How are Upper Primary State-aided English teachers evaluating students' English language learning?*

Theme: *Upper Primary State-aided schools' English language evaluation, being too summative & content-oriented, has no constructive learning outcomes*

The thematic response to the research question has been elaborated and authenticated, using secondary data and participant-teachers' quotes from the primary data in the study's key assertions.

7. OBSERVATIONS :

[Participant-teachers' own words, as appropriated from the primary interview data, have been italicized. Participants' Bengali responses have been transcribed & translated, simultaneously, in required places. Non-italicized quotes are borrowings from referred researchers and educationists.]

Like previous studies (Grover 2014; Haribhau 2016; Rani 2019; Jabbar, 2019) present study also finds classroom Evaluation of ESL teachers to be 'defective' and 'unrealistic'. But unlike previous studies, the present study makes a closer observation as to why and how the evaluation methods are defective. It is defective because, like the teaching trend, the evaluation strategies also show a conspicuous deviation from the science of CCE (Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation) Model introduced by WBBSE (West Bengali Board of Secondary Education) since 2013." (Basu & Debnath, 2016), as follows.

Assessment is more content-oriented than skill-oriented

Assessment is more content-oriented than skill-oriented. For language subjects, CCE Model emphasizes on students' all round linguistic skill development through *Formative Evaluations*. Although Likert score shows 70.8% of participants favouring Formative Evaluation, Class Observation shows ESL teachers' evaluation strategies have no constructive Learning Outcomes in terms of language skill development because the strategies are too *Summative & content-oriented*. Class Observation shows ESL teachers' evaluation strategies have no constructive Learning Outcomes in terms of language skill development. Class evaluation generally begins with the question, "*Galpota bujhecho?*" (*Have you understood the story?*), and occasional "*one word answer questions*". These questions are orally asked and responded in Bengali. Students are seen either to read answers from the text or repeat answers which they have memorized from Guide books or learnt from their tuition teachers. Students who are mostly the first benchers respond to this leading question in Bengali, the rest of the class was quiet. This is how their internal evaluation after lesson delivery takes place. The questions set for Unit Tests are mostly to assess students' content-comprehension and aim to to prepare them for the Board exams. Interviewed participants unanimously shared that Unit Test question patterns imitate Board exam patterns where, "*MCQ, True False, Short answer type, Very Short Answer type, Long Question – are generally given.*" – The pattern does not evaluate any of the four language skills adequately.

Evaluation focuses only on reading & writing

Evaluation focuses only on reading & writing. Although the CCE Model equally emphasizes on all the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing, ESL evaluation focuses only on reading & writing. Class Observation showed all that the students did in English was textual reading and writing. Interview data showed how teachers equate the concept of evaluation only with writing, if something has not been written down and subjected to corrections it is not an evaluation as manifested in one of the participants' words – "*Personally speaking, if you do not write something down – that is not an evaluation for me...if you ask questions and they will be giving you one sentence or two sentence – that will not be an evaluation, I will be proud of. – When they write – everything gets checked, the grammar is checked and everything.*" The sad part of it is, as observed during Class Observation, English reading is only for pronunciation and not comprehension and writing is either to copy from the text or from memory.

Evaluation is more about memory testing

Students are capable only to write memorized sentences because, first, 12 participants opined that Board exam question patterns hinder English writing skill development, the questions are mostly memory-testing and MCQs. The MCQ and True& False questions require less writing and can be easily mass cheated. Creative writing sections are compulsory but too minimum to threaten students' chances for passing the exam – "*Question pattern guloi to valo na – MCQ answer kore 30 – 40% peye jache...ora writing part ta chere diche – MCQ korei to pass hoe jache...*" [The very question patterns in Class IX- X are flawed. 30-40% of the question is MCQ...student hardly attempt the writing part – attempting the MCQs are enough to qualify for them...].

No Class Tests

There are no Class Tests. Given the no pass-fail criterion for grade promotion in State Board Curriculum from Classes 1-8, class tests could have been an effective means to track the learning progress and locate the learning gaps. But the significance of class tests has been completely ignored. 12 interviewed participants agreed that in Govt. schools,

except for the stipulated Unit tests, no class test takes place due to workload - *“in class of 70-80 to complete the syllabus, to maintain discipline and other duties assigned to us which are actually to be done by the non-teaching staffs but are done by the teachers like distribution of midday meals, cycles are too much – we have no time for class tests.”*. 6 participants shared Class tests takes place only occasionally and mostly before the Unit Tests or the Board Exams. One participant expressed her declining motivation towards class tests for having to face poor learning environment and non-responsive and poor-quality students over the years: *“In the beginning I was very enthusiastic about teaching and used to frequently take class test. To motivate them I even used to offer cadburies to them. But now, given the kind of learning environment, rate of absent and drop out students and students’ non-participation in class, I have lost all drive for class tests.”*. Another participant blamed the huge class population: *“Earlier when there were fewer students, it was possible to take Class Tests. But now a days, there are so many students that I give them questions only during their unitary exams...”*

Classwork is more for Class Management

Classwork is more for Class Management. Class observation shows that classwork in the name of class evaluation is more for class management, for Interview data unanimously shows how students, being First Generation learners, are either anxious or disinterest towards English, as one of the participants shares, *“We, here, deal with village boys and girls who are not at all careerists – according to them, there is no need for education – hence earlier they used to be scolded and warned if they refused to study – but today we no longer can scold or even think of beating... It’s just two/three in class eager enough to work with”*. Class gets chaotic with such a large population of disinterested students. Questions, being asked or assigned in such a class, are sometimes more a means to control students for class management than for evaluation

Homework is rarely given and never checked

Homework is rarely given and never checked. Class Observation reveals that homework assignments in ESL classes are a mere formality because they are rarely checked. Since the ESL teacher is not serious about homework completion, the students too do not treat it seriously, they rarely revise the rules at home. In contrast, homework completion is of paramount importance in English medium school because, as during interview an English medium teacher rightly pointed out, *“They (students) will be interested if the students are aware that the teacher is giving home works and checking at the same time.”*, and shares an experience that *“Some of the students are very tricky, they remain absent for some time and think I have forgotten the homework.”*

In English Medium, on the other hand, have both formative and summative evaluations. Homework is regularly assigned and evaluated. They have regular Class Tests and during Term Exams, students face separate question papers for English literature that evaluate critical writing and English language that evaluate creative writing. They also have reading tests and impromptu speeches for reading and speaking skill development. Often students are made to have group presentations where the class is divided in groups and each has to present on the topic though Power Points for participative learning.

8. CONCLUSION :

The study, thus, concludes that English as second language evaluation in these Bengali Medium schools, unlike English medium schools, are too summative & content-oriented, and, hence, has no constructive learning outcomes. A few, causes, as the study asserts are that the process is too content-oriented and barely causes language skill development among students. Evaluation is all about writing in exams or answering questions in class. Evaluation techniques for language skill development, viz. group/individual oral presentations, impromptu, language games are not employed due rush to complete syllabus, poor human and material resources, low motivation among both teachers and students towards English language. Evaluation focuses only on reading & writing, it is more about memory testing than about students’ language skill achievements, there are no regular class tests, Class assignments are more about class management, homework is rarely given and never checked, Board exams are all about scoring, students score high and yet are incapable of reading and writing Basic English.

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