

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM AT HIGHER SECONDARY LEVEL

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Abstract: *It has long been debated that the English language programs (ELP) have not been able to achieve its objectives in Pakistani context. Students are still unable to learn and acquire English as a language. They memorize it as a subject. Researchers have blamed the policy, the practice, the curriculum and the overall implementation of the curriculum in this context. However, none have inquired about teachers' perceptions about the theory and practice of ELP at higher secondary school (HSSC) level in the context of Pakistan's public sector institutes which are affiliated with Board of Intermediate and secondary Education Lahore (BISEL). The aim of this research is to explore teachers' perception about: (i) the theory (National Curriculum for English Language, 2006) and practice (textbooks, instructional methodologies, criteria of assessment) of English language program at higher secondary level, (ii) the discrepancies between the two, and, (iii) the reasons and solutions of identified discrepancies. To fulfill the aim, 20 English language teachers, teaching at higher secondary level are interviewed, using a semi-structured interview protocol. The findings of the research explicate that: ELP at HSSC level, in the context of BISEL public sector institutes, has not been able to achieve its objectives and there are enormous discrepancies between the theory and practice. The main reasons identified by the teachers are: poor background knowledge of students regarding EL, assessment based teaching and learning practices and the content based assessment. According to the teachers, for acquisition of EL in real terms, the entire system needs major modifications, not only at HSSC level, but also at grass root level. They were of the view that students lack basic skills of EL, which ought to be acquired at primary and middle level. Higher secondary level is not to learn the basics of the language but to master the skills as a lifelong learning.*

Keywords: *Teachers' Perceptions, English Language Program, English Language Curriculum, Theory and Practice*

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Introduction

Teaching and learning English as a second language or as a foreign language is a world-wide phenomenon for over a century. It has been recognized in many countries around the world for international interactions and has gained the status of lingua franca (Crystal, 1997). English language education and policy has a long history in the subcontinent since the colonial times. Moreover, from post-colonial era to postmodern times, no other language has been able to surpass the importance of English, especially in underdeveloped and developing countries, including Pakistan. Particularly in Pakistani context, English language learning has been an inevitable part of everyone's life who aims for higher education, or a better job opportunity. Consequently, there has always been a hype regarding English Language programs, English language curriculum and English language policies. The major, paradigmatic shift in the history of English language curriculum in Pakistan can be traced back in 2006. The Ministry of Education (MoE), on the basis of needs analysis of the students and of the communities around the world, established the criteria for English Language program (ELP) in the document of National Curriculum for English Language grades I-XII (NCELD). The document asserts the objectives of ELP, in accordance with the international standards of Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Saba, et al., 2018). Moreover, it also states the guidelines for the implementation of these

objectives in terms of textbook development, classroom instructions and assessment. Nonetheless, the quality of English language programs, English language curriculum, its implementation and students' performance, all are still questionable (Karim, 2020; Saba, et al., 2018; Siddique, 2013). The effects of pragmatic shift from content/ knowledge based curriculum to skills/ competency based curriculum cannot be witnessed yet, even though it has been fourteen years since the implementation of NCELD, 2006. Moreover, there are very few studies related to English language curriculum, its evaluation, implementation and alignment (Karim, 2020; Saba, et al., 2018; Siddique, 2013; Asghar 2014; Aftab, 2012). Therefore, the reasons behind the inefficiencies of English language programs are still unidentified or the existing literature does not provide a holistic approach towards the evaluation of English language program in theory and practice. Therefore, the researchers conducted a mixed methods, holistic evaluation of English language program in theory and practice, using Stufflebeam's (1971) Context, Input, Process, and Product Evaluation Model (Stufflebeam, 2003; Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007), as part of the doctoral degree. This article is the qualitative part of the researcher's doctoral research. In the quantitative part, the researcher has evaluated the textbooks, instructional methodologies, criteria of assessment and the outcomes of ELP (in terms of students' performance) through quantitative checklist, based on the objectives/ students' learning outcomes of

ELP at HSSC level. The findings of the quantitative part, articulated that ELP has not been able to achieve its objective in Pakistani context, and there are enormous discrepancies between prescribed and practiced. The qualitative part is to add validity and comprehensiveness to the findings and research design of the study. This qualitative part explores teachers' perceptions about the ELP program; in terms of theory (National Curriculum for English Language, 2006) and practice (textbooks, instructional methodologies, criteria of assessment), and the gap between the two. Moreover, this part of the research aims at finding the reasons between the identified discrepancies and the solutions to bridge the gap between the prescribed and practiced. Moreover, according to Nunan's (1992) recommendation, curriculum developers must consider and duly respond to the opinions of learners, teachers and evaluation experts. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, students' and teachers are not invited to give inputs on policies, curriculum and its implementation. Consequently, there is very little or no participation of all stakeholders. This study is significant in this context too. It will put forward teachers' perception about the theory and practice of ELP, the reasons behind the inefficiencies of ELP and the solutions to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Research Questions

This study explores the perceptions of teachers about the theory and practice of English language program at higher secondary level in the context of BISEL

public sector institutes. In this study, the theory refers to the document of National Curriculum for English Language Grades I-XII (Ministry of Education, 2006) whereas the practice includes other three domain of curriculum: content/textbooks, teaching and learning practices, and, assessment criteria. The guiding questions for this study include:

1. How far do the prescribed objectives of English Language Program (ELP) have been achieved practically (in terms of language acquisition)?
2. What are the discrepancies between prescribed and practiced curriculum of ELP?
3. What are the reasons and solutions of identified discrepancies?

Review of Literature

Pakistan is a multilingual society (Mansoor, 2005), where English is taught as a compulsory subject till tertiary level. Yet, English language acquisition has always been problematic and challenging for most of the learners (Ahmad & Arif, 2020). According to Coleman (2010), the substantial aim of ELP in Pakistan is to accomplish a higher degree and secure better career opportunities rather than learning/ acquiring the language skills. Bhatti et al. (2016) claim that the reason behind the aggrieved scenario of English language learning is that students' lack of motivation, language anxiety, and the fear of are wrong. Gopang et al. (2017) also attributes this lack of proficiency in English language to communication apprehension. However, Imran et al.

(2016) asserts that poor background knowledge of students and incorrect use of formal and lexical aspects of language is the reason behind the poor acquisition of language skills. Awan et al. (2010) blames the teacher centered classrooms. They are of the view that students are not able to practice the language skills in the classrooms and they are not given a chance to actively involved in the process of learning. Haider (2012) attribute this lack of proficiency in English to inadequate pedagogical approach. Moreover, Panhwar et al. (2017) claims that traditional methods of language teaching and the lack of professional training is the cause. Siddique (2002) also blames the use of traditional methods of teaching language skills and the lack of formal training. Furthermore, Rasheed (2017) concludes that multilingualism, students' weak linguistic background, lack of exposure to English, students' anxiety of English and lack of teachers' training are the main causes behind the poor acquisition of English language skills. Apart from these studies. There are several other studies which have focused on the poor acquisition of language skills and have explored the reasons in different perspectives at different levels. Yet, none have focused on the teachers' perception on all the claimed reasons of inefficacies related to ELP at higher secondary level, and none have analyzed these reasons within the framework of theory/ NCELD. However, Saba et al. (2018) has evaluated: the document of NCEL with reference to CEFR and, the textbooks in contrast with NCEL. Moreover Aftab's (2012)

multidimensional study explores the English language textbook situation inPakistan. Her research was carried out in five stages. Two preliminary stages include a survey ofthe English language requirements and interviews of the officials involved in sanctioning and publishingtextbooks. The main stages were the critical examination of the *English curricula and syllabi*, the survey of theviews of the textbook users, and the detailed course book evaluation. But the researcher disagrees with the use of term *Englishcurricula and syllabi* in 'critical examination of the *Englishcurricula and syllabi*', as the study only focuses on curriculum content and concludes that the textbook policies are inadequate as the course books overwhelmingly rely on controlled and artificial activities to teach English. Furthermore, Asghar (2014) reviewed the objectives of reading skills with reference to NCEL. The study explores the learning outcomes of reading and thinking skills as prescribed in the curriculum document. These goals are contrasted with another, independent study, which evaluates one of the textbooks, being implemented to achieve the reading goals, in the BISEL colleges. The study concludes that the goals are appropriately set for HSSC level but the inadequate guidance regarding teaching and learning and poor implementation results in failure to achieve the intended goals. The report also proposes critical pedagogy as a potential approach to be used to fill the gap between the learning goals in the curriculum and the teaching as well as learning straggles. Lastly,

Siddique's (2013) study evaluates the assessment criteria of summative assessment as practiced by BISE Lahore, at HSSC level. The study identifies the weaknesses of the summative assessment with reference to the students' performance in board exams. But it does not evaluate the samples from students' papers. It takes into consideration the general perception about the poor performance of students in board exams and the general figures about board results. The main focus of the research is to analyze the theory and practice of summative assessment. The study concludes that the quality of assessment needs to be improved to achieve the intended outcomes. Apart from these studies which have focused on different aspects of NCELD in theory and practice, there are a very few studies which are related to teachers' perceptions about English language program or English language curriculum. Ahmad and Arif (2020) explored teachers' perceptions about pedagogical practices of English language programs at tertiary level. Khan and Khan (2020) talked about teachers' and students' perceptions about the proficiency of students' in English language at higher secondary level in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Akhter and Malik (2019) talk about the perceptions of teachers in terms of methods of assessment in English language teaching and its effects on students' achievement at secondary level. Kausar and Akhtar (2012) takes into account, the perceptions of the teachers about the effects of English language curriculum and

the system of examination, on students' performance. Saeed, Iqbal & Azam's (2012) research ascertains the perceptions of teachers and students about English as medium of instruction at secondary school level. Channa (2012) explored the perceptions of science teachers about English language as medium of instruction at university level. Hence, the existing literature lacks studies related to teachers' perception about the theory and practice of English language program in term of its inefficacies at higher secondary level. Therefore, in this study the researcher aims to explore the perceptions of the teachers regarding the theory and practice of ELP. Focusing on all the foundations of a curriculum i.e. policy (NCELD), content (textbooks), teaching practices, assessment practices and the overall usefulness (product) of ELP at higher secondary. Moreover, the researcher has taken into account teachers' perception about the claimed inefficacies of ELP and the reasons and solutions of the claimed deficiencies.

Research Design

The study is purely a qualitative exploration of teachers' perception regarding the theory and practice of ELP. For the collection of the data a semi structured interview protocol was designed by the researcher. The interview protocol was based on (i) the objectives of NCELD, (ii) the findings of the quantitative phase of researcher's doctoral research, and, (iii) existing literature. In accordance with the theoretical approach of the quantitative study, the questions of this qualitative

study has also been categorized under the four categories of Stufflebeam's (1971) Context, Input, Process, and Product Evaluation Model. These categories explore teachers' perceptions about the content/textbooks, instructional methodologies, criteria of assessment and students performance, respectively.

For the study, the target population includes, English language teachers: teaching at public sector institutes, affiliated with BISEL and the sample size consisted of 20 English language teachers who had at least five years' experience of teaching English at higher secondary level. The sample was selected through convenience sampling techniques from two public sector, women universities of Lahore. The convenience sampling technique was used because the interviews required the thorough study of NCELD which is comprised of 177 pages. Before the interviews, the researcher provided the document of NCELD (MoE, 2006) and the interview protocol to the potential participants and requested them to read both thoroughly. The researcher also gave a brief introduction and background of the study to collect relevant and comprehensive data regarding the study. The interviews were conducted with those who read the document of NCELD thoroughly and agreed to give the interview. A few questions from the interview protocol are as follows:

1. What is your opinion regarding the Objectives/ SLO's of English Language Program (ELP) as prescribed in NCELD?
2. What do you think are the

discrepancies between theory and practice of ELP in terms of its Objectives, as prescribed in NCELD?

Context

3. What is your perception about the content of textbooks?
4. Is it in accordance with the SLO's of NCELD?

Input

5. What is your perception regarding Instructional Methodologies used for language instruction?
6. Are the instructional methodologies in accordance with the SLO's of NCELD?

Process

7. What is your perception about the criteria of assessment?
8. Is it able to assess the extent to which the SLO's of ELP has been achieved?

Product

9. What is your perception about the achieved SLO's of ELP? Have students' been able to achieve the SLO's of ELP?
10. Are you satisfied with the performance of the students? Have they been able to acquire the language competencies as aimed in NCELD?

The interviews were recorded and afterwards transcribed. After the transcription of text data, the data was coded and analyzed to generate themes and to construct a narrative as suggested by Creswell (2007). For thematic analysis, a six phase thematic framework was used. It includes familiarization with the text data, generation of codes through segmentation and labelling of the text data, using codes to form themes, revising themes, labeling

themes, and constructing the report (Braun &Clarke 2006). Moreover, to ensure the anonymity, the direct quotations have been assigned codes as T1, T2, T3.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This part of the research ascertains the findings of the qualitative data. The aim of the research was to explore teachers' perception about ELP in theory and practice. In other words, the research highlights the perceptions of teachers about all the domains of curriculum in theory and practice i.e. NCELD, textbooks, teaching methodologies/ classroom instruction, and assessment process.

In response to research question 1: 'How far do the prescribed objectives of English Language Program (ELP) have been achieved practically (in terms of language acquisition)?' The findings of the interview data reveal that all the teachers were of the view that ELP has not been able to achieve its objectives. According to T5, 'the curriculum of ELP is not in accordance with the objectives mentioned in NCELD. 'The textbooks, the classroom instruction and the assessment process do not exhibit even half of what is aimed in NCELD' (T5). T15 claims that the aim of ELP as prescribed in NCELD, is to equip the learners with language competencies, but, in reality the students are not skilled with any of the competency. All the teachers were of the view that only writing skills are being taught to some extent. According to Alam and Uddin (2013), assessment driven language teaching and learning has resulted in the development of writing skills only.

T16 was of the view that among all the five competencies mentioned in NCELD, students are able to equip themselves only with writing skills and that too 'to some extent'.

All the teachers agreed that students are not able to write on their own. They can only memorize and reproduce. According to T12 the writing skills can better be called reproducing skills. 'There is no concept of creative writing. The students simply memorize and reproduce' (T1). Ahmad and Arif (2020) claims that majority of the students rely absolutely on rote learning and memorization of the content of the textbooks, hence, they do not equip themselves with language skills even at higher education level.

Furthermore, according to the teachers, reading and thinking skills are not given any attention while designing the content of the textbooks. The teachers were of that the content of the textbooks is very simple. It does not require higher order thinking skills. And added to that, the paper pattern and modes of assessment do not compel the students to practice these skills. According to teachers, there is not any question in the examination papers which requires reading and thinking skills. All the questions are based on literal level. Students simply memorize the answers from the guidebooks and reproduce in exams.

Moreover, talking about oral communication skills, all the teachers were of the view that oral communication skills are the most neglected part. According to T16, T2, T9, T10 there is not any margin for the development of oral

communication skills in terms of practiced curriculum. The content, the classroom instruction, the modes of assessment; nothing conforms to the SLO's of this competency. However, the research questions the role of teachers in developing listening and speaking skills. NCELD, clearly mentions the objectives/ SLO's which aimed to be achieved through classroom discourse: during teaching and learning, and formative assessment. MoE asserts that 'listening and speaking skills are to be developed in the classroom context' (MoE, 2006, p.2). However, these SLO's are overlooked explicitly. Hodson (2006) also concludes that speaking and listening skills has been neglected completely. Moreover, Alam (2013) asserts that language is learned for the sake of passing exams, not for developing skills such as listening and speaking.

However, in response to competency 4: Formal and Lexical Aspect of Language, the teachers were of the view that some of the SLO's of this competency are being fulfilled through the 'objective type' and 'section II' of the examination paper. The most of the part of objective type and the entire 'Section II of BISEL examination is based on grammar and composition. But the teachers were of the view that objective type section is a guess work. In real terms, students' do not understand grammatical structures, they are not able to write accurately and proficiently. Whatever they write in section II is based on memorization. Hence, according to them ELP has not been able to implement and achieve its objectives in real settings.

However, the researcher questions the execution of the SLO's of this competency during the process of teaching and learning. According to the findings of researcher's doctoral research, this competency is not focused much in classroom instruction. All the instructional methodologies revolves around the content of the textbooks, and that too on literal level, for the preparation of objective type questions only.

In response to research question 2: 'What are the discrepancies between prescribed and practiced curriculum of ELP?' The teachers opined that the prescribed curriculum and its SLO's are based on competencies. Whereas in practice; the ELP is content based. According to T5, 'the textbooks and modes of assessment do not incorporate skills'. According to T9, 'the ELP in practice don not conform to the competencies mentioned in NCELD'. 'The textbooks, the classroom instruction and the assessment process do not exhibit even the half of what is aimed in NCELD' (T12). 'The curriculum has nothing to do with skills/ competencies' (T2) it is based on rote learning. Moreover, talking about the textbooks, they were of the view that the content of the textbooks does not address the SLO's of NCELD properly. The content is simple and does not offer much to stimulate higher order skills. Moreover, the exercises at the end of each text are also based on literal level. The sample exercises do not require any of the mentioned skills apart from reading and writing (T20). And students do not even practice these two. They prefer to rote learn from guide books. Moreover, taking

about classroom instruction, the teachers agreed that classroom instructions are also not in accordance with the guidelines of the NCELD. But they blamed the criteria of assessment for this discrepancy. They were of the view that the entire system of teaching and learning is based on assessment. And assessment is based on the content of the textbooks. Therefore, the entire focus of teaching and learning is based on the content of the textbooks. Furthermore, teachers' perceptions about assessment was that: 'the modes of assessment do not incorporate the SLO's of NCELD' (T9, T10, T6, T78, T15). According to them the modes of assessment do not measure all the competencies. And this is one of the main reasons of the gap between theory and practice. Siddique (2013) also claims that the questions, asked in the paper are merely content based and can be reproduced easily by students. Shah and Saleem (2010), also assert that the education system of Pakistan is based on textbooks and rote learning. Furthermore, Khan (1995) asserts that the questions related to textbooks are based on literal level. Such questions can only measure low order language skills. Siddique (2013) finds out that 65% questions of exam papers are based on memorization of textbook content. Only 10% are based on understanding level (Siddique, 2013, p.52). Furthermore, talking about research question 3: 'What are the reasons and solutions of identified discrepancies?' The teachers claimed 'the criteria of assessment' as one of the main reasons. The other reasons include: content based

assessment, assessment based teaching and learning, students background knowledge, students involvement, teachers competence, teachers training, medium of instruction, large size classrooms, constraint of time and lack of resources. According to teachers' perception, the main reason for the existing discrepancies between prescribed and practice is 'content based assessment'. The question papers of board exams are based on the content of textbooks only. Siddique (2013) also claims that the methods of academic assessment; practiced in Pakistan are not appropriate to evaluate real competence. According to the teachers, the section II of the paper provides some margin to use language skills like writing skills, formal and ethical aspect of language. However, the tradition of repetitiveness and the availability of guidebooks, fail this effort of the curriculum too. 'Students prefer to rote learn' (T5) rather than create. According to the teachers, the section I of the exam paper asks the questions which are based purely on literal level. And the section II, allows 50% choice to students. And they go to opt the easiest thing. For example, there is choice between letter writing and application writing. The letter writing is a bit tricky than application writing, so students usually do not prepare letter writing for exams. According to them, the only question which requires real competence is translation passage. It asks to translate the Urdu passage into English. And this passage is usually unseen. Students need to put extra effort to prepare for this question but this too is of 15 Marks

only. And students need only 33 marks to clear the exam.

Moreover, teachers claimed that students are not eager to learn anything which is not the part of the final assessment. And final assessment is based on the content of textbooks only, therefore the entire process of teaching and learning is based on the textbooks. Furthermore, along with students' incorporative behavior and lack of interest in learning, the teachers complained about the poor background knowledge of the students too. They were of the view that students' background knowledge of English language is so weak that they are unable to understand even the textbooks, properly. They blamed the inefficiencies of public schools and claimed that the students need to acquire the basic language skills at primary and elementary level. Secondary and higher secondary levels are not to acquire the basic skills of English language but to master the skills for higher and/or professional education/career.

Linked with inefficiencies of public schools, seven teachers talked about the incompetency of teachers and lack of teachers' training too. They were of the view that even at higher secondary level, the incompetence of teachers can be witnessed. Most of the teachers use Urdu as medium of instruction in classrooms, not only at middle and secondary level but also at higher secondary level (T15). Alam (2013) also asserts that 'language teachers themselves are not able to communicate in proper English' (p.18). Moreover, four teachers questioned lack of teachers training and complained that teachers are

not trained according to the objectives of the curriculum at any level. And general in-service teachers' trainings do nothing good in terms of the objectives of the language curriculum. However, some teachers also pointed out that large sized classrooms, shortage of time and unavailability of resources also contribute to the gap between theory and practice.

Nonetheless, talking about the solutions to remediate the gap between theory and practice, the teachers recommended major reforms in the assessment criteria. They suggested including all the SLO's of ELP in board exams. Moreover, they proposed to rejuvenate school education system and emphasized to improve the quality of education from the first day of school. However, they also endorsed the importance of teachers' training programs based on the objectives of language curriculum. They also suggested the modifications in teachers' selection criteria to be able to induct more competent teachers on the basis of language skills not on the basis of grades and degrees. Lastly, they also urged for the availability of resources, essential for the acquisition of language skills such as audio video aids. And they requested to recruit skilled teacher on a larger scale to cope up with the issues such as time constraints and overly large classrooms.

Limitations

Keeping in view detailed description of NECLD, and due to extensive readings and interview protocol random sampling methods were not adopted in this study and purposive sampling was taken, which may

be avoided in future studies to broaden the scope of research. Moreover, the target population included all those institutions, which are affiliated with the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Lahore (BISEL). This criteria limits the study within the context of Lahore region only and excludes all the institutions which are following any other board. Resultantly, the results of the research can be further elaborated with extensive sampling to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Apart from sample size, the current study was limited to higher secondary level, and English language curriculum only. In future the design of the study can be adopted to explore teachers' perceptions about the theory and practice of other subjects too. However, in spite of these limitations, the study explicates teachers' perceptions about the theory and practice of English language programs at higher secondary level in the context of BISEL.

Future Research direction

The study explored teachers' perceptions about the theory and practice of ELP at higher secondary level in BISEL context. The findings of the research explicate the discrepancies between the theory and practice of ELP; whereas, theory refers to the aims/ objectives of ELP at higher secondary level, prescribed in the document of National Curriculum for English Language (NCELD) (MoE, 2006) and practice refers to all those means (textbooks, instructional methods and methods of assessment) which are adopted to achieve the prescribed objects. However, the study exhibits the

perceptions of the teachers only. To make it more comprehensive and to present a holistic picture of the issue, including the perceptions of students, curricularists and examiners will be fruitful. Apart from approaching all the stakeholders, the ELP can be evaluated using international standards/ frameworks related to curriculum evaluation, program evaluation, and language curriculum evaluation.

Practical Implication

The findings of the research reveal that there is a wide gap between the theory and practice of ELP. It asserts the reasons of the inefficacies of ELP being implemented at BISEL institutes and recommends the solutions to bridge the gap between theory and practice of ELP. The inferences which the researchers have derived through teachers' perceptions are that the competence of language teachers is the key to language acquisition. The need of the hour is to train the teachers first. The modifications in the content and methods of assessment can do no good without timely rejuvenation of instructional methods. Apart from teachers training and improving teacher' competence in terms of language competencies, the teachers have recommended to change the assessment driven learning practices. However, the researchers recommend to change the criteria of assessment and to introduce competencies based assessment methods rather than traditional content based methods, as the traditional content based examinations are the root cause of all the discrepancies found between the objectives of the ELP and its practical

implementation. Therefore, it is suggested to revisit the criteria of assessment and to include all language competencies (as mentioned in NCELD) in the process of assessment for the acquisition of English as a second language.

Conclusion

The aim of the research is to explore teachers' perception about the theory and practice of ELP. The data of the research answers the questions: (i) how far do the prescribed objectives of English Language Program (ELP) have been achieved practically (in terms of language acquisition)? (ii) What are the discrepancies between prescribed and practiced curriculum of ELP. (iii) What are the reasons and solutions of identified discrepancies?

The findings of the research assert that: ELP has not been able to achieve its objectives. The NCELD aimed at the acquisition of all language skills and terms them as competencies, which refers to knowledge and skills. But in practice, the textbooks, the classroom instruction and the assessment process do not exhibit even half of what is aimed in NCELD. Students are not able to communicate properly in English language. They cannot express their thoughts/ ideas in English, neither orally nor in writing. The major discrepancy between the theory and practice is that the same. The theory (NCELD) revolves around language competencies. NCELD advocates knowledge with skills whereas in real life setting, the ELP is based purely on the rote learning of information, content and

knowledge. The reason behind is content based assessment. Precisely, the ELP in practice, revolves around assessment. The assessment is based on the content of the textbooks so the teaching and learning practices in the classroom are also based on the content of the textbooks. Alam & Uddin (2013), has also blamed assessment driven teaching and learning practices for the poor acquisition of language competencies. Teachers have also claimed 'the criteria of assessment' as one of the main reasons behind the discrepancies between theory and practice, which leads to the futile ELP. The other reasons include: content based assessment, assessment based teaching and learning, students background knowledge, students involvement, teachers competence, teachers training, medium of instruction, large size classrooms, constraint of time, and lack of resources. Moreover, according to teachers, for the acquisition of EL in real terms, the entire system needs major modifications, not only at higher secondary level, but also at grass root level. They opined that students lack basic skills of EL, which ought to be acquired at primary and middle level. Higher secondary level is not to learn the basics of the language but to master the skills for the professional world. Therefore, it is recommended to revisit and invigorate the school education system first. Without that the objectives of ELP cannot be met.

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