

Effects of Bangla Literature Courses on Students of English Department in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The article presents the effects of Bangla literature courses on students of the English language department in Bangladesh, and it investigates the impact of Bangla literature courses on students' understanding of literary ideas and their importance in the syllabus of the English department in Bangladesh. Bangla literature courses have been introduced in the syllabus of every English language department in Bangladesh. However, it cannot be effective in students' understanding of literature and languages without proper teaching practice. The teaching target focuses on teaching Bangla literature separately as a non-departmental course but does not show the purpose for students of the English language department. This paper discusses the position of Bangla literature courses in the teaching-learning setting of English departments. It identifies the implications of Bangla literature courses on students' overall understanding of literary ideas. Moreover, it examines the significance of Bangla literature courses in the syllabus of the English department. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are followed for conducting this research. This research represents data collected from three public and three private universities in Bangladesh. This study reveals that the students of the English language department can increase their understanding by experiencing progressive attitudes toward learning Bangla literature. Furthermore, it evaluates some difficulties faced by teachers and students in the context of Bangladeshi classrooms. Based on findings from collected data, the research offers some practical and pedagogical recommendations and some proposals at the end.

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Introduction

Bangla literature is one of the most prevailing non-departmental courses of the English departments in Bangladesh, so there is a marginalized approach given to the teaching and learning of Bangla literature in most teaching and learning contexts of the English department. To learn stylistics, most universities can use optional Bangla course that should be designed to give an intensive understanding of literary culture. Moreover, learning Bangla literature courses promotes students' analytical ability regarding literary devices. By considering this impact, English departments try to accommodate Bangla poetry, novels, drama, and short stories of prominent Bangla literature writers of all periods. However, this article reveals that learning outcomes of Bangla literature courses are not always correctly achieved in different teaching-learning contexts in Bangladesh. In most contexts, learners are unaware of the learning objectives of their Bangla literature learning process to study English literature and language. As a result, the Bangla literature course remains an irrelevant non-departmental component for many students. Moreover, in many Bangla literature classrooms teaching methods and techniques do not offer sufficient motivation and interest to generate students' active involvement in the learning process. Therefore, to make Bangla literature effective, teachers and learners should understand the learning goals of this course.

Problem Statement

Learning literature is one of the significant parts of the English department syllabus in Bangladesh. However, as English is a foreign language in Bangladesh, students find English literature difficult at the tertiary level. One of the main reasons for not having adequate knowledge of literary ideas is the way we approach communicative language teaching at school and college levels because, to ensure communication, we have almost eliminated literature from the pre-tertiary level syllabus. Moreover, there are minimum literary contents in the curriculum of mainstream educational institutions, but they are not taught with proper importance because literary items are not important for board examinations. As a result, literature remains unexplored for many learners at schools and college levels, so they need additional assistance when they enter tertiary-level English majors. However, students who are getting admission from English medium backgrounds have knowledge of academic literary components because they get chances to learn English literature at the pre-tertiary level. In fact, syllabus patterns of English departments of Bangladeshi universities do not reflect the connection with school and college levels English syllabuses of mainstream educational institutions. So, learners with Bangla medium backgrounds face difficulties with understanding literary ideas. Bangla literature is taught in almost every English department that can help learners to gain literary ideas, but the set of courses should be designed based on the needs and aptitude level of the learners.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is formulated by combining concepts of decolonial approach and intercultural competence. Svensson (2015), in his research, theorizes the intercultural competence of Byrnes that explains understanding regarding the culture of one's own and the target language and it helps students to understand different cultures. Moreover, it describes the efficiency of analyzing text by making relevance with one culture. In addition, this approach is relevant to the EFL context, where exposure to their own literature can assist learners in feeling engaged and joyful with literature learning. This study is also indebted to decolonial literary ideas that can complement the intercultural competence concept for this research as Espinosa (2021) explains the decolonial ideas for education curriculum and according to him, the decolonial approach can be a vital endeavor in education as education is an area of ideological imitation that can transmit conventionally obstinate paradigms and apply innovative paradigms of consciousness and compassion. It argues that we can apply foreign language either as the stick of coloniality or the supporter of revolution and alteration, so the decolonial approach changes the way learners see their own language and foreign language in traditional EFL contexts and curriculum changes by incorporating the decolonial option allows to avoid the conventional ideological burden and paves the way for paradigm changes. Similarly, decolonization assists innovative intercultural competence and exchange of cultural universality, and this approach combines techniques and mechanics of customary observation on own language and foreign language for exploring new pedagogical approaches that make a balance for foreign language learners.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To determine the position of Bangla literature courses in the teaching-learning setting of English departments.
2. To identify the implications of Bangla literature courses on students' overall understanding of literary ideas.
3. Examine the significance of Bangla literature courses in the syllabus of the English department.

Research Questions

Based on the requirements of the study, the research questions are:

1. To what extent is Bangla literature taught at the English department in Bangladesh?
2. How much does the course promote the literary understanding of students?
3. Does the syllabus offer appropriate learning outcomes for Bangla literature?

Literature Review

This section includes previous literature related to the research questions of this study.

Decolonial Approach

Akter&Siddiqua (2016) used mixed methods for finding the attitudes of both teachers and learners regarding the factor of decolonization of English study by incorporating Bangla literature, and their findings reflect that it is possible to accommodate native language literature in English departments of Bangladesh and the participants of this study responded that Bangla literature course is beneficial for learners and researchers recommend the application of proper teaching methodology at university level education. This study called the inclusion of a Bangla literature course in the English department a “crying need” because it claims that learners will not confine themselves to limited exposure to literary understanding if they learn native language literature along with English. Similarly, it can enhance the socio-cultural awareness of Bangladeshi students, as in this study, participants supported the integration of native literature courses in the English department. Casallas (2021), in his research at a Colombian University, reflects on English language teaching pedagogy where it is evident that in Colombian English language teaching, there are still influences of colonial ideas that prevent them from practicing innovative teaching concepts. This study claims that English language teaching should incorporate institutional discourse rather than depending on traditional approaches to teaching. According to this study, pedagogy is not fixed, so by considering ontological and epistemic challenges, teachers can use a decolonial approach to liberate teaching practices, so the teaching system can incorporate self-criticism where they can reflect inequality in educational settings. Similarly, this study suggests exploring Bangla literature based on our social and educational contexts where learners need a decolonial approach to learning literature by incorporating the experience of their own language that helps to become better learners.

Cultural Factors

Cruz (2010) describes that literature and culture confer perspectives to learners that help them to decode new literature and culture that do not share similarities with their personal contexts, and both literature and culture assist learners to make connections with the language they want to acquire. In short, this study suggests that the inclusion of literature and culture should follow pedagogic models so that students can develop a critical understanding of literary and cultural components. Billows (as cited in Maley 2001) explains that teaching literature within a cultural model enables students to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space and to come to perceive traditions of thought, feeling, and artistic

features within the heritage the literature endows. Dodou (2021) focuses on the Swedish curriculum and its involvement with English literature. In Sweden, literary works in English are parts of the education system from primary to higher education, so this study tries to justify how English literature in non-native settings can be safeguarded, supportive and encouraging. This study explains English literature and intercultural learning to evaluate values and respect for self and cultural diversity that link to language learning. This study investigates curricula of different levels and shows the approach; for example, it explains cultural and contextual engagement with literature. It suggests the interdependence of different approaches at different levels of the curriculum. Moreover, Breen (2001) discusses a culture-based syllabus, which aims at the development of students' knowledge and content focuses on the systematic study of the people who use the language in terms of their society, history, and values, and communicative activities syllabus where the main goal is proficiency and contents promote the use of language in its socio-cultural context, both inside and outside the classroom.

English Literature in EFL Context

Divsar&Tahriri (2009) discuss that literature is obscure for learners who do not have proper knowledge of the English language, and for this reason, teaching literature for EFL learners is very challenging. Similarly, teaching literature for non-native learners is intricate for some reasons: for example, the rhetorical language of literature is different from conventional usage of language, and the difference between the meaning of literary texts and the social contexts of EFL students. This study mentions three stages of teaching literature: the linguistics phase, the content-culture phase, and the synthesis phase. Besides, this study suggests that the application of proper methods for teaching literature can help learners to get the target language properly and develop socio-cultural skills for literary analysis. Moreover, it also suggests that proper attention to the way of instruction for literature lessons creates innovative strategies for pedagogical outcomes-based teaching.

Bangladeshi Context

In addition, Karim & Zaman (2006) explain the reasons for the lack of literary ideas of the majority of students at the tertiary level and claim that by keeping in mind the demands of the present communicative language teaching method, the SSC and HSC English curriculum has been redesigned, and the teaching method has been changed. Moreover, in this updated curriculum and teaching method, literature receives no place, and functional English is the main learning goal for all teachers and learners at SSC and HSC levels. They also add that literature has been significantly eliminated because it is considered a 'luxury' for students of developing countries like Bangladesh. After that, they analyze that it is unfortunate that the communicative method, which has little or no literature component, does not help our students to acquire proper linguistic or

literary knowledge. For this reason, the majority of English department students come to the university level with no or minimum level of understanding of literary components. Besides, Chowdhury & Kabir (2014) mention the reference to the 1972 Constitution, which gave Bengali the status of the only national language and refer that the language of education in Bangladesh should be our native language Bangla. In higher education, we face a dilemma between Bangla and English language and our students remain weak in both languages. In their study, they also claim that in Bangladesh, we have 'persistent nationalistic favoritism towards Bengali' and assert that for higher education, we have an absence of a national language policy.

Bangla literature has similarities with English literature as Yasmin (2014) describes that English literature influences contents of Bangla literature and satire and social comedy genre development in Bangla are indebted to Western influences. This research shows the influences of English on Bangla literature from several points of view, and according to this researcher, the impact of English literature on Bangla literature can be one of the major far-reaching and insightful impacts yet put forth by one language literature over another kind of literature. So, learning Bangla literature assists learners in dealing with literary techniques and mechanics of foreign literature. Moreover, literature is complex in the EFL context because to understand contents, learners need historical, political, and social knowledge, and not knowing the target language culture creates problems for foreign language learners (Okebe & Yashim, 2017). For example, we also follow a new criticism approach in literature teaching, and our learners are also challenged because of their cultural, historical, and social unfamiliarity. So, knowledge of Bangla literature can help learners to understand how to interpret foreign literature from different contexts as literary knowledge of native language can be easily and successfully transferred to foreign language and literature settings.

However, it seems unconventional, as in Bangladesh. We have a traditional approach towards language learning; if we consider our learners' lack of motivation and enjoyment in literature classes, we should not ignore incorporating need-based approaches that can assist our learners as Widdowson (as cited in Noaman, 2013) explains that language teachers have the accountability to arbitrate adjustments in academic practice so that they can enhance the efficiency of language teaching (p.125). So we should not ignore incorporating our approach instead of copying from native literature learning context as we have English as a foreign language. Literary contents usually give ideas about experience, thoughts, outlook, and feeling that may possibly be conventional to an existent or creative component of the reader's understanding, and this creates it, to a great extent, easier for readers to communicate the understanding of experience with the familiarity of their surroundings that assist the education procedure. (Maley as cited in Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014). So having knowledge of Bangla literature provides background knowledge of how to approach EFL context literature.

Non-Bangladesh Context

Kumar (2020) explains that literature written in regional Indian languages faces challenges in teaching and learning because of English literature and mentions it as a predicament for learning. However, this research shows that learners bring literary competence from Hindi literature that helps them to analyze English literature better, but the presence of regional literature both in its original form and the translated version is facing colonial overshadow. Even though provincial languages are capable of performing dominant existence, the co-existence faces remoteness and inconsistency with each other. He mentions how reference materials from Indian languages and English language literature succeed in a fresh spirit that reveals the positive attitude of the students, but many teachers do not consider regional language presence appropriate to the educational contexts.

Teaching Techniques

Widdowson (as cited in Maley 2001) describes those techniques such as opinion, information gap, problem-solving, and role-play/simulation are effective techniques to enhance students' creative writing. When students come to literature classrooms, they are expected to know how to tackle literary analysis, but it is the reality that in many literature learning contexts, students have inadequate knowledge regarding how to grasp literary texts. For this reason, we find our literature learners are demotivated, and they acquire a kind of pseudo-literary competence. Similarly, for learning literary analysis, they memorized ideas like parrots, and these ideas are not their own because they collect ideas from received opinions. However, teachers can make students familiar with literature progressively and can sensitize them to the literary ideas that endow literature with special features, and it will provide students with the necessary literary skills which are needed for particular literary works.

Vuckovic (2015) explains that understanding terms related to literature plays an essential part in interpreting texts because understanding terms provides reading skills for literature and creates comprehension of the poetic function of any language. This study reviews the ideas that for taking the experience of literature, there is no getting away from literary terms because literary works function within the structure of literary terms and ideas. Understanding literary terms are necessary for a classroom environment where learners can relate experience and understanding, and thus it can be enjoyable for learners. Teaching literature should not forget the aesthetic distance and implied reader; otherwise, readers will not be able to interact with the text, which requires literary-theoretical acquisition. If learners do not acquire literary features, they will be unable to acquire adequate knowledge about literature.

Method

This research is mixed methods in nature because it requires the integration of both qualitative and quantitative research procedures to deliver accuracy of data production and analysis. The target group was undergraduate English department students from three public and three private universities; both public and private universities were included to get holistic ideas from both streams. Purposive random sampling was used, and both rural and urban areas were covered to produce data crosschecking from both sources.

This study considers the extent to which Bangla literature is taught, and the data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussion, and syllabus analysis. The questionnaire was mock-tested by teachers and students, and a total of fifty students participated in the questionnaire. The interview was face-to-face, and a total of ten teachers participated in the interview. Focus group discussion was used to get high face validity, and a total of twelve students (each six) participated in two focus group discussions. A total of seven syllabuses were analyzed to get reliable comparisons from both public and private universities. Six questions were used in the questionnaire, and the Likert scale was used to design and analyze the questionnaire. A total of five questions were asked for teachers' interviews, and both structured and unstructured processes were incorporated.

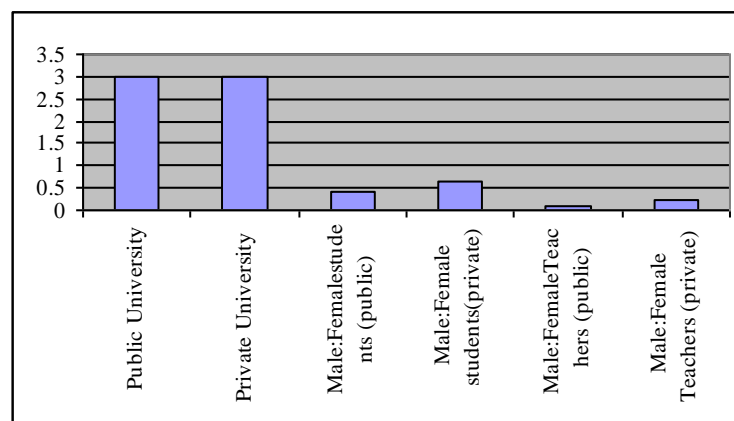


Chart 1. Sample of the Study

Results

Charts 2, 3 & 4 show the results of the students' questionnaire, and it represents the percentages and means for respondents' responses according to the Likert scale.

ITEM 01 Importance of Bangla literature courses

ITEM 02 Literary analytical ability

ITEM 03 Organization in the syllabus

ITEM 04 Attitude toward learning

ITEM 05 Awareness of the learning outcomes

ITEM 06 Enjoyment in the classroom

Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1)

Results of Students' Questionnaire

Firstly, in item 01, the importance of Bangla literature courses in the English department is represented, and the analysis shows that the majority (54% strongly agreed and 22% agreed) of respondents acknowledged that Bangla literature course is essential for the English department students and this item has mean score 4.24 which is highest among other items. However, item 2 shows contradictory results where the majority (44%) were neutral with the statement that the Bangla literature course is improving students' literary analytical ability, which shows that learners are not aware of the learning impact of this course. After that, in item 03, the majority (18%) strongly disagreed, and 26% disagreed) responded that the Bangla literature course is not properly organized in the syllabus of the English department. Similarly, in item 5, the majority (38%) disagreed, (and 20%) strongly disagreed that learners are aware of the learning outcomes of Bangla literature courses.

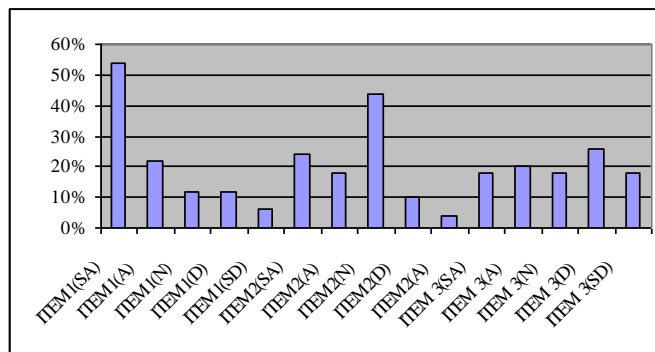


Chart 2. Questionnaire (I)

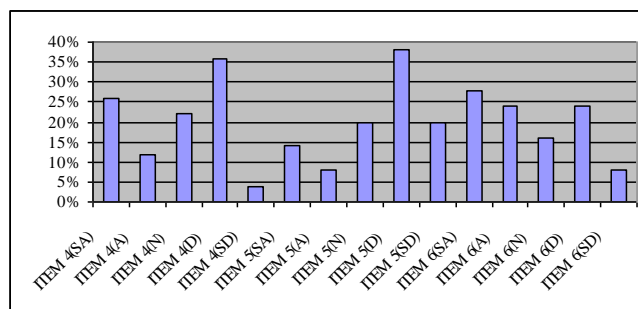


Chart 3. Questionnaire (II)

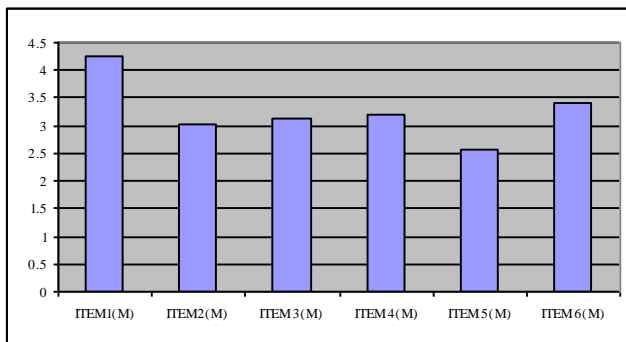


Chart 4. Questionnaire (III)

After that, in the results of item 4, the majority (36%) believed that they do not show a caring attitude towards learning Bangla literature courses, but it is noticeable that (26%) strongly agreed with the same statement. Finally, in item 6, the majority (28%) responded that they are enjoying Bangla literature courses in the classroom, and (24%) disagreed with the same statement.

Results of the Teachers’ Interview

The first question for teachers was on the objectives of Bangla literature courses for English department students, and in answer, 6 (60%) said that learning goals are properly achieved because learners acquire literary interpretation, while 1 (10%) teacher emphasized the inclusion of more literature courses. After that, teachers were interviewed on a question regarding the level of literary analytical skill at the entry level of students of the English department, and in response, 1(10%) said that since students do not get a chance to study English literature at schools and college level, they struggle with literary analysis.

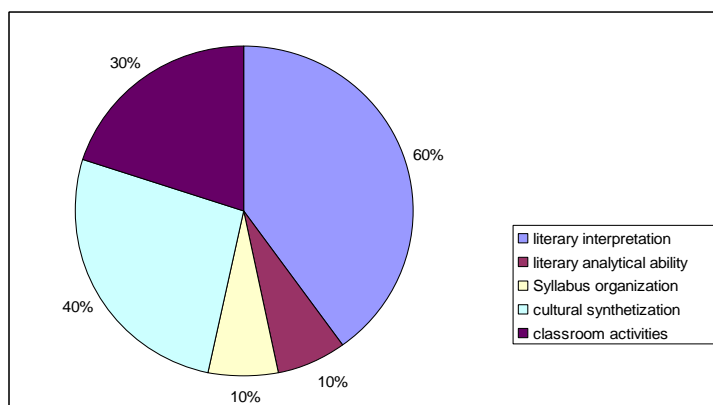


Chart 5. Teachers’ Interview

In response to the third question, 1 (10%) teacher responded that the Bangla literature course can incorporate more texts in the syllabus. In addition, 4(40%) teachers responded that Bangla literature courses have an impact on the cultural synthezation of the English department students. Finally, 4(40%) teachers replied that Bangla literature courses have value in the learning process of students, and 3(30%) added that interesting classroom activities could be incorporated to make students engaged in the learning process.

Results of the Focus Group Discussion

For focus group discussion total of twelve students were selected, and they completed Bangla literature courses in previous semesters. At first, participants were introduced to the topic, and it took thirty-five minutes for discussion and opinions.

Outcomes and Relevance

Firstly, the question was asked regarding learning outcomes and the relevance of Bangla literature courses in their syllabus; seven students responded that they sometimes found Bangla courses very irrelevant to their syllabus. Two of them agreed that Bangla poetry, novels, and plays gradually made them interested in studying literature.

Benefits

When they were asked questions regarding the advantages of having Bangla literature courses in their syllabus then, two of them added that they benefitted from Bangla literature courses because it helped them to analyze literary ideas. Moreover, four of them said that they understood character analysis from Bangla literature courses, and later they applied it to English literature courses. Besides, one of them responded that it helps her to understand the symbolism. In addition, two students were from mainstream English medium backgrounds, and they responded that Bangla literature is enriched with alluring details that are not far from English literature, and they both have similarities, and they pointed out that the only difference is the language they are expressed in. They also added that acquiring knowledge of Bangla literature draws various impacts on students, and the significant impacts are they learn the basic of Bangla literature, and they can find the similarities between Bangla and English literature. They also said that learning is never a loss, and thus, gaining knowledge of Bangla literature while studying English at the tertiary level is a great motive to know the language better. Moreover, students mentioned that they could compare two literary traditions easily after completion of this course.

Challenges

They were asked to mention some problems that they faced in Bangla literature courses. Three of them explained that for a student who does not have enough knowledge of Bangla literature from an early stage, it is quite complex for them to grasp ideas, and one of the students was from a North American school background. He said sometimes he faces problems regarding writing Bangla because of a lack of practice.

Results of the Syllabus Analysis

This part explains the findings from the analysis of different syllabuses.

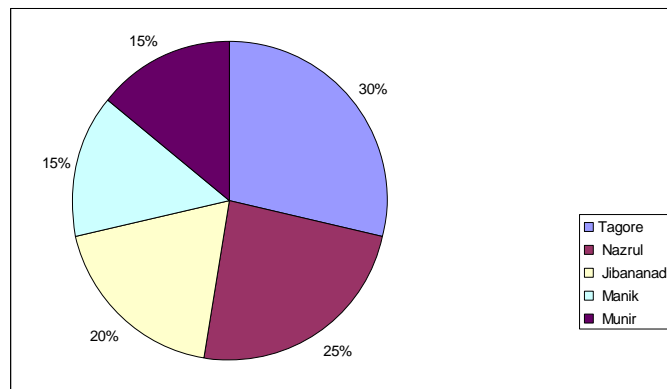


Chart 6.Syllabus Analysis

Contents

Firstly, Bangla literature syllabuses in the English department of different universities share similarities and differences. In fact, the similarities are they mainly focus on Rabindranath Tagore (30%), Kazi Nazrul Islam (25%), Jibananda Das (20%), Manik Bandopadhyay(15%), Munir Chowdhury(15%) of the entire contents of the syllabus. Syllabuses of these universities also cover Akteruzzaman Elias, Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, and other writers.

Pattern

It is noticeable that different universities offer this course in different semesters, and this course is offered as an optional course in public universities. Moreover, in the syllabus of the University of Dhaka, there were two Bangla literature courses, and the time duration was two years, but in the existing syllabus, there is one literature course for six months. Furthermore, both Jahangirnagar and DhakaUniversity offer this course in

the first semester, and this study reveals that the course objectives can be properly achieved if this course is taught at the beginning of the semester process because students need exposure to literary devices and analysis process in the native language.

Objectives and Outcomes

In the syllabus of Jahangirnagar University, course objectives are mentioned for students' understanding of the course, and it states that this course samples the rich tradition of Bangla literature. Besides, it includes both the formal study of literary devices and the critical reading of selected poems, plays, novels, and short stories. The objective is to underscore the uniqueness and immense varieties of Bangla literature as well as to explore if and how Bangla literature has been influenced by Western and English literature and philosophy. They also offer literary devices in Bangla which promote students' understanding of complex literary components at the early stage of their university level. In contrast, many syllabuses of private universities offer this course at an advanced level of the semester, and they do not provide clarity of learning outcomes for students' understanding of the relevance between Bangla literature and English literature.

Discussion

This section describes the findings and analysis of this study.

Position of Bangla Literature

From the above study, it is evident that the purpose and learning objectives of learning literature in the English department are not clear among students, so this indicates that learning outcomes and objectives should be properly disseminated among students at the beginning of the semester. Moreover, private universities can update their Bangla literature syllabus to make it more effective, as it can help students to enrich their literary criticism and develop literary sensitivity.

Literary Understanding

Bangladeshi students are challenged by the cultural remoteness of the text, so studying Bangla literature courses can enhance literary and cultural orientation towards studying literature. Similarly, the Bangla literature course inspires students to understand the literary qualities of the Bangla language; for this reason, more courses can be incorporated into the syllabus of the English department, and more literary criticism books can be added for further reading. In addition, different classroom activities can be incorporated to

promote students' engagement and interest, and a Bangla literature course can be offered at the beginning of the semester to offer students parallel notions of English and Bangla literary ideas.

Syllabus and Learning Outcomes

From the analysis of different syllabuses in terms of their clarity of stated learning outcomes, the inclusion of literary devices, literary texts, and position in the syllabus, it is noticeable that private universities can improve their syllabus organization by following methods and techniques used by public universities. However, it is found that students coming from diverse backgrounds in English departments have different levels of needs for literary studies, so courses can be designed and offered based on the needs of the learners. For example, Bangla literature courses can be offered as optional non-credit courses so that teachers can advise learners to take Bangla literature courses based on their needs assessment.

Cultural Factors

Findings from the students' questionnaire reveal that students enjoy Bangla literature course as it connects their personal cultural experiences, and teachers also consider that Bangla literature courses have an impact on the cultural correlation of the English department students.

Decolonial Approach

This study shows that there are positive prospects for a decolonial approach in English as a foreign language setting because both teachers and students acknowledge the successful existence of local language and culture in the English department that enhances the literary and intercultural competence in the literature learning process. Moreover, FGD shows that learners do not show a conventional attitude toward their literary study as they consider that the inclusion of Bangla literature has a better impact on the learning experience as learners feel the connection between Bangla and English literary traditions.

Conclusion

Students of English at the tertiary level of education are required to take a course on Bangla literature. While at first glance it may seem counterintuitive, the requirement is very much a deliberate effort to guide the students through a steep learning curve associated with studying literature by exposing them to the key literary elements. Therefore, it is obvious that a course on Bangla literature is the essential first step for

students of the English department at the tertiary level of education so that they get a grasp of these key elements of literature through their native languages.

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