

A Critical Study of Intensive Language Courses at the Private Universities in Bangladesh: Goals and Achievements

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Abstract: This study examines the goals and achievements of Intensive Language Courses (ILC) at Private Universities in Bangladesh. It focuses on how the students develop four linguistic skills—the art of critical reading, elegant writing, fluent speaking, and empathic listening; their performance in appearing for the examination and professionally dealing with the public audience. It also emphasizes how effectively the learners acquire communicative competence in English and the challenges they face in learning it. The researcher has followed the descriptive method for collecting qualitative and quantitative data. Besides, the researcher has employed questionnaires and interview methods to determine the objectives, findings, and limitations of ILC. The paper highlights the expert suggestions to learners and why they must follow the ILC to foster a strong local, regional and global network; develop professionalism in academic, corporate, and social life. Finally, based on the findings, the study intends to provide recommendations to ensure the effective implementation of ILC at Private Universities in Bangladesh.

Key Words: Communicative Competence, Goals and Achievements, Intensive Language Course, Linguistic Skills

I. INTRODUCTION

The foundation of the British Council in 1934—the world's largest English Language Teaching Organization—set the Intensive Language Course (ILC) journey globally. Its overseas network extends to 233 locations in over 100 countries, and there are 70 British Council Teaching Centers to conduct IELTS courses. To spread the English language and culture in Bangladesh, they established it in 1967, then East Pakistan. Since then, they have introduced ILC along with other linguistics courses. To develop communicative competence in English at the graduate level in Bangladesh, private universities also introduced ILC in 1992. This course aims to provide intensive language instruction to those students admitted to universities without acquiring basic language skills and help them perform better in their respective faculty programs. After completing the ILC in the first semester, students not only attain a high level of linguistic proficiency but also develop various study skills essential for active participation in academic tasks and tests at the university.

Different universities have named ILC differently: in North South University- Academic English I & II and Introduction to Composition; in East West University- Introduction to English and Writing Skill in English; in BRAC University- Basic English; in Independent University- Introduction to English;

Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing; in ULAB- Basic English Learning Skills and Fundamentals of English I and II; in United Independent University-Complied English Courses and Business English; in American International University of Bangladesh- English I and II, and Asian University of Bangladesh- Intensive Language Course. Although the course title varies from university to university, the purpose is to develop the communicative competence of the students studying English as a language.

Focusing on the four basic language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking, teachers follow Head Way, Oxford, and Cambridge Series to maintain a uniform global standard. Instructors encourage learners to practice and use the language in and outside the class to obtain accuracy, fluency, currency, and variety in these four areas. To use language appropriately in different circumstances, teachers inspire students to acquire the language rather than learn it, as the acquisition is longer lasting than learning. They prioritize that in achieving competency, learners must practice and experience the target language in the various situations where they communicate with others. Thus, teachers design this course outline separately for reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

To improve reading skills, students have to study selected pages or stories followed by questions- answer, fill in the blanks, and grammar-based exercises. Teachers, therefore, provide them with globally accepted and used reference books. These exercises help non-native learners develop their reading ability in the target language. Students can hone their reading ability and develop reading habits through reading exercises, tests, group work, and assignments. Gradually, novice learners get accustomed to basic reading skills and acquire competence and confidence.

Writing is a practice-based skill. It involves peer reading and continuous writing. As a good reader is a good writer, students with their reading ability become mature writers. This art requires a sound knowledge of grammar, syntax, sentence structure, and writing variety to help them write elegant English. Teachers train them by providing writing tools, traits, and techniques in the classroom. Additionally, they teach them how to write effective sentences, paragraphs, essays, and reports by assigning them to various writing exercises. These tasks guide them to produce readable English which is correct, concise, clear, concrete, current, and natural.

Listening, a form of communication, follows an active process. To improve listening skills, teachers organize various materials: CDs, tapes, films, and slides in the class. They utilize these resources to sharpen students' listening sense. Thorough practices help them develop listening sensibility. Sometimes, teachers allow learners to sit for the listening test in the classroom.

A good listener normally is a good speaker. It is the most common communicative skill. Teachers, therefore, encourage students to speak deliberately in and outside the classroom in English. They regularly organize speaking tests, competitions, and presentations to improve learners' speaking skills. Debate, public speaking, and sharing ideas also help them nurture this art.

Intensive Language Course at the Private Universities in Bangladesh: goals—include language proficiency and communicative skills that enable the students to acquire the requisite skills: reading meaningfully, writing elegantly, speaking fluently, and listening empathetically; achievements comprise the performance of the students in examinations and communicating with others proficiently. This study will examine some significant aspects of the objectives of introducing ILC at private universities in Bangladesh.

II. OBJECTIVE

Intensive Language Course aims at building concrete communicative competence among the learners. As it is known, these courses focus on fluency in speaking, elegance in writing, sensibility to sound (listening), and clarity in reading, the research will determine how effectively and efficiently ILC is implemented in Bangladesh. Further, it examines the present condition of ILC; tries to find the solution to existing problems and offers recommendations to instructors and learners to cooperate in obtaining the best outcome of the ILC. The main objectives of the study are to examine the effectiveness of ILC at private universities; observe the contribution of the course in developing the communicative competence of the students; diagnose the problems of ILC and find out the possible solutions and investigate the learners' difficulties in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The other objectives are to find out the limitations of each ILC, evaluate the performance of teachers and their teaching techniques, figure out the reasons for which students fail to acquire communicative competence even after completion of each course, enhance awareness among the teachers and the taught, and measure the students' level of learning. Finally the study analyzes the ILC classroom condition, examines the role of the authority, ensures the best use of ILC and measures the standard of the course.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A scientific process of teaching the English language—an Intensive Language Course—comprises four linguistic skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Speaking and writing are productive skills; on the other hand, reading and listening are receptive skills. 'Producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning, speaking which refers to the medium of the

message is a productive oral skill' (Nunan 2003, p48). Writing, a perpetual challenge, is a skill-based creative activity that expresses the maturity and personality of a writer. 'Writing is a way of coming to know as well as a way of communicating what is known' (C Martin & R Ohmann). Interpersonal communication through speech speaking is a spontaneous expression that enables a speaker to exchange their thoughts, views, feelings, emotions, and claims with others concisely and clearly (Shannon & W Weaver). English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners require 'motor-perceptive' skill, listening which helps them understand the correct sound what the speaker intends to speak (Bygate, 1987).

Of the objectives and methods English Language Teaching WM Reverses utters, ILC aims at developing international understanding, intellectual training, cultural enrichment, interpersonal communication, and a feeling for language (their own and those of others). To fulfill the basic needs, teachers follow ILC methods to train students through teaching sound (Phonetics & phonology), listening comprehension, speaking, reading, writing, and cultural understanding (Rivers: p1,32,112,135,158,189,213,240 & 261). His views and visions are clear in fulfilling the goals and assuring the achievements of ILC.

Teaching a foreign language creates awareness in students of certain linguistic features: the vocabulary of the foreign language, phonological and morphological features, and syntactic rules. Without adequate practice, learners could not express their messages clearly. On the importance of ILC, Imra, who teaches English through electronic means in Germany, states English is not just a language; it's a state of mind- the global mind, and ILC provides the devices, tools, techniques, and training which increase the level of accuracy, efficiency, elegance, and fluency in academic and professional career. She encourages learners to read more attentively, write more precisely, speak more concisely, and listen more carefully. This continuous practice will enable learners to speak fluently, write freely, read thoughtfully, and comprehend easily.

In his globally acclaimed article 'The Science of Learning and the Art of Teaching,' B. K. Skinner emphasizes that teaching and learning are inter-changeable activities between teacher and student. Here the language learners enhance their performance and achieve language learning goals—four inclusive skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening are usually assessed and focused areas.

Dr. Syed Naquib, Muslim, an author, and a modern linguist, claims: in ILC, four linguistic skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) are obtained through a grasp of grammar, a robust vocabulary, word choice, sensibility to sense, sound and style. He inspires learners to acquire and sharpen a relevant set of standard tools, techniques, and traits. Besides, Dr. Naquib focuses on the proper guidance of teachers of ILC and the thorough practice of the students in and outside the classroom. He clarifies that ILC is an organized course on a set of globally accepted standards and principles to meet teachers' and students' predetermined goals and needs.

An English language teacher and trainer, Carvallo, SJ, who focuses on reading, writing, speaking, and listening tasks in the class, believes that Intensive Language courses are skilled-based activities were reading—a serious art, writing—a productive process, speaking—a conversation-based act and listening—a concentration-based task developed through thorough practice that enables the non-native learners to acquire communicative competence in the target language.

The experts emphasize that the success of ILC depends on how effectively teachers guide the students and how sincerely students follow and practice the guidance of the teachers. It is expected that ILC learners will be able to forge a web-strong local, regional and global network; succeed in their academic and corporate careers. This evolves through commitment and continuous practice. Teachers, therefore, tell students to experience the language where they are actively involved in communicating with others. This study is a new venture to assess the implementation of ILC and its goals and achievements at private universities in Bangladesh.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This paper, 'A Study of Intensive Language Courses at the Private Universities in Bangladesh: Goals and Achievements,' is a question and interview-based descriptive paper. The researcher has followed a descriptive method of collecting data in qualitative and quantitative manners. Moreover, the researcher applied the questionnaire and interviewed to draw the respondents' views and perceptions on the topic. It is mainly a combination of primary and secondary research types that examines the goals and achievements of ILC. The reason for being descriptive is stated in the objective of this paper.

The study examines the overall findings, especially how effectively learners acquire communicative competence in English and the barriers they face. The paper explores whether the goals and achievements of ILC are fulfilled. In the literature review, the researcher paraphrased *Teaching Foreign Language Skills* by Wilge M. Rivers, *Professional and Academic Writing*, and *Writing Elegant English* by Syed Naquib Muslim, Ph.D. The researcher also studied the course contents of IELTS, TOFEL, and other English language courses and transversed the internet. In the paper, the researcher has followed the American spelling format.

The researcher has used primary and secondary sources to complete the research query. For the primary data, the researcher interviewed 440 students and 45 teachers from 28 private universities, 25 executives of the corporate office, and 15 trainers of the British Council, St. Johns, and Mentors as respondents. Books, journals, newspapers, and previous queries on English Language Teaching courses were secondary sources. *Teaching Foreign Language Skills*, *Basic Skills Tests and Academic Success of ESL College Students*, *Teaching English Abroad*, and *The System of Basic English* were inspirational sources of standard format, syllabus, and evaluation pattern of ILC. The researcher has prepared separate sample questionnaires for students, teachers, executives, and trainers. In the sample questionnaire, the researcher selected

200 questions to find out the outcome of ILC. The sample questionnaires were crosschecked and evaluated by the professors of ELT and Applied Linguistics from different universities. These four target groups closely examined the questions and answered them. The researcher uses electronic data and has followed the latest version of referencing the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Secondary Publishing* by the Modern Language Association.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher conducted the interview and used the questionnaire to find out the goals and achievements of ILC at private universities in Bangladesh. Teachers and students have closely studied the questions and answered them consciously. It is found that most of the students are not aware of acquiring communicative competence in English, and teachers have a passive attitude toward ILC's goals and achievements. Students are only aware of completing the course and obtaining a higher CGPA in the examination, whereas teachers emphasize completing the course on time. This is noticed that less importance is given to developing the student's reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Among the private universities, only 10 to 12 try to retain the global standards of ILC and offer expert trainers, modern facilities, and adequate study materials. They also set up Language Center to help develop the communicative competence of slow learners. In other places, it is also noted that students have limited opportunities to practice reading, writing, listening, and speaking separately during class hours.

At the end of the course, about 30% of students can acquire competency; another 35% obtain minimum proficiency, 20% remain below average, and the rest 15% fail to develop four linguistic skills. It is observed that students have grammatical inaccuracy, syntactic inaccuracy, stylistic flaws, faulty agreement, high-frequency errors, and less proficiency in English. And the course was not effective in improving their language skills up to a satisfactory level.

The researcher has identified students who aim to score passing marks, complete credit hours, secure good grades, and pass the time. Even teachers emphasize fulfilling authorities' demands and completing the syllabus on time. It is found that for those who have already acquired communicative competence, ILC helps them achieve higher proficiency, maturity, and elegance in English. And the communicative competence of the beginners remains unchanged; neither can they produce a readable sentence nor speak fluently in the target language.

Through the evaluation of the students, it is reviewed that many faculty members have the least proficiency in ILC. Many of them cannot guide the students according to the goals and objectives of the course. About 40% of teachers can conduct the ILC with competence; another 30% have minimum proficiency, 20% of teachers' performance remains below the standard, and the rest, 10%, fail to guide the students to develop four linguistic skills. The competency of students and teachers varies from university to university, and the ratio may differ, yet the overall findings and scenario stagnate everywhere.

VI. FINDINGS

At the end of ILC, the students' performance varies from university to university. The competency level is higher and standard in renowned universities than the others. In leading private universities, it is found that course contents, design, and duration have positively impacted learners. Especially, American International University, BRAC University, East West University, Independent University, North South University, Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, United Independent University, Central Women's University, Daffodil International University, and University of Asia Pacific, emphasize ILC and introduce a series of courses: introduction to composition, intermediate composition, advanced composition, academic English I & II, vocabulary building, speed reading to enhance the highest proficiency in English. Even they research the impact of ILC. In other universities: ASA University Bangladesh, Asian University of Bangladesh, Bangladesh University, Dhaka International University, Green University of Bangladesh, IBAIS University, Atish Dipankar University of Science & Technology, Northern University Bangladesh, Queens University, Royal University of Dhaka, Sonargaon University, Southeast University, State University of Bangladesh, Uttara University, Victoria University of Bangladesh, and World University of Bangladesh, the target result is far from satisfactory. The findings of this research are as follows:

- The institutions do not have specialized teachers for four linguistic skills;
- Learners have inadequate reading, writing, listening, and speaking practice;
- Progress in reading, writing, and listening is dissatisfactory;
- Students can manage to speak in English;
- Grammatical inaccuracies persist in writing and speaking;
- Institutions provide inadequate listening, reading, and writing materials;
- Teachers do not apply efficient writing guidance;
- Passive and unfriendly learning environment demotivates students;
- Students have no access to phonetics and drilling exercises;
- The disproportionate size of the classroom and time passing attitude of teachers deviate learning outcomes;
- The duration of the ILC varies, and its implementation is less focused;
- The limited number of classes and inexperienced teaching staff hamper the growth;
- Mismanagement and sub-standard evaluation system hinder the progress; and
- Monitoring of teachers' competence is less focused.

Besides, teachers avoid pragmatic course contents, use grammar-translation methods, and apply old-fashioned

teaching techniques, and universities follow teacher-centered classroom setups. It is noted that those who have acquired communicative competence in English either they obtain it in their respective schools or colleges. There are many universities where the result or outcome of ILC is dissatisfactory. Even many hire novice faculty to conduct this course on a low-paid basis. Examining data, interviews, and personal experiences of teachers and students, it is observed that after completing ILC, students fail to achieve high proficiency, maturity, and elegance in English.

VII. LIMITATIONS

Conducting this research on ILC is a challenging task. The sample size of the research area comprises hundred and three private universities in Bangladesh. The researcher, therefore, could not visit them all and conduct the study. As there is no other previous work on ILC, the researcher has to work hard to project the real scenario of this field. The passive attitude of the university authorities hampers the data collection process; the lack of cooperation from teachers and students of many universities blocks the accuracy of the research findings, and the shortage of resource materials hinders the completion of the work.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

To accomplish the objectives of ILC satisfactorily, the researcher suggests a proper implementation of the course is a must. Second, teachers must utilize modern tools, traits, and technologies for reading-writing-listening-speaking skills in the class. Third, they can teach four basic linguistic skills separately and strategically. Fourth, a conducive classroom is mandatory. Fifth, the teacher should involve students in various forms of reading-writing-listening-speaking activities and assess their progress practically. Sixth, they can motivate students to devote more time to four linguistic skills and facilitate the students with study materials. Universities must hire expert language teachers and stretch more attention to complete ILC successfully and establish Language Centers for intensive learning and training. Finally, the concerned authorities should review the intensive language course contents, examine the efficiency of the teachers, and reorganize ILC in the Bangladesh context.

IX. CONCLUSION

Intensive Language Course teaches productive skills—speaking and writing, receptive skills—reading and listening scientifically. These four skills foster acquiring communicative competence through critical or thoughtful reading, elegant writing, fluent speaking, and empathetic listening. To achieve interpersonal communicative proficiency, reading, writing, speaking, and listening exercises help learners exchange understandings, observations, messages, statements, expressions, ideas, and learnings concisely and clearly.

Every university has introduced this introductory course in the first trimester to provide intensive language instructions to students to acquire fundamental language skills; obtain linguistic proficiency; communicate with others proficiently,

and perform academic tasks and tests efficiently at the university. The course title varies from university to university but objectives, contents, and syllabus are common everywhere that aim at improving learners' communicative competence in English. A good listener is a good speaker, and naturally, a good reader is a good writer; teachers, therefore, involve students in multiple exercises and examinations—following globally acclaimed visual and manual study materials: Head Way, Oxford, Cambridge Series, CD, tapes, films, and slides.

The success of ILC largely depends on the pragmatic course contents; the proper guidance of teachers; the active participation of students; a thorough practice of the students in and outside the classroom, and the genuine interest of the institutions. A serious art—reading, a productive process—writing, a conversation-based act—speaking, and a concentration-based task—listening are skilled-based activities that require commitment and continuous practice to develop communicative competence in the target language. These interchangeable activities enhance students' performance and help them achieve language learning goals. Through experiencing a language where students are actively involved in communicating with others, they can achieve communicative competence and language proficiency in English. In the end, they can easily forge a strong local, regional and global network; succeed in the academic and corporate career.

As already mentioned, the goals of the Intensive Language Course are to achieve language proficiency and communicative competence in English; the achievements consist of the students' performance in appearing at examinations and communicating with others proficiently. The findings and recommendations of this study will help the concerned authorities craft new strategies to implement this course effectively and fulfill the objectives of an intensive language course at private universities in Bangladesh.

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