

Expectation of Tertiary Students of Bangladesh from ELT Classrooms

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Abstract

Expectation influences motivation and performance in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Students' expectation also plays a significant role in curriculum development. This paper focuses on the expectations of the students in an English language classroom and how they want to be taught. From a study on 45 students of Stamford University Bangladesh, the researcher tried to find students' expectations about content, factors behind the expectations and effects of expectations in a language classroom using semi-structured interviews. It was found that students have expectations regarding their course content, teaching-learning style and education management. Several factors such as professional need, education background, social beliefs, personal goals and personality of the students worked behind their expectations and their expectations played a significant role in their classroom behavior and performance.

Keywords: Expectations, ELT, EFL, Learner-centered

Introduction

English is taught almost all over the world either as the first, second or foreign language. It is a medium of international correspondence and, therefore, is considered important everywhere. This importance has further increased because of economic globalization and spread of multinational companies (Nunan, 2001). English plays significant roles in four broad areas in developmental contexts - increasing employability, facilitating international mobility, giving more development opportunities and acting as imperial language in odd contexts (Coleman, 2011). English is now taught not only to children and young learners but also to adult learners. Many adult learners are now learning English as migrants to find out

suitable employment. Everyone is concerned about the importance of English and therefore they have certain expectations from any English language course. Curriculum designers and material developers design different textbooks and supplementary books for teaching English in various language classes. The teachers follow the books, make their own lesson plans and teach English. They try to consider the needs of the students and design the objectives, chapters and lessons according to the needs and levels of the students. Sometimes, the objectives and goals of the English language course may not be fulfilled and the students may not be motivated well and do not enjoy the English language classes. Thus, they may fail to perform according to their expectations. This results into frustration both on the part of teachers and students. One of the major

reasons for this drop in motivation is lack of proper attention to the expectations of the students from the course and the way they want to be taught. Considering their expectations can help teachers set the objectives and goals of the course more realistically. This can make both the students and teachers successful and save them from their frustration.

Background of the study

In Bangladesh, English is taught as a foreign language from the very beginning of the school. English is a compulsory subject for the students in the national curriculum. Students study English for 12 years before entering their undergraduate studies. Even after that, they are often found making frequent mistakes in grammar, reading, writing and speaking. The percentage is alarming and the teachers teaching at the undergraduate level show their concern for it. Ahmed (2012), Mumin and Haque (2006) have talked about the poor writing and grammar skills of Bangladeshi tertiary students. Bhattacharjee (2008), in her research, has focused on the reasons of poor speaking skills of Bangladeshi students. Alam and Sinha (2009) have acknowledged in their research that Bangladeshi undergraduate students have poor listening skills and suggested ways of developing their listening skills further. Though many researchers have conducted studies on the poor performance of Bangladeshi students and on the probable strategies for improving their performance in ELT classrooms, no research has been conducted on what the tertiary students expect from their language classes. Their perceptions, needs and expectations from their own perspectives have not been considered for research. Now-a-days the ELT practitioners talk about learner centered classrooms and use teaching methodologies and tasks suitable for such classrooms. Therefore, I considered studying the tertiary

level students' expectations and preference for teaching methodologies and techniques. Their opinions give an insight into their wants and needs from English language classrooms.

Relationship between students' expectation and language learning

Very few studies have been carried out on the nature and effects of expectations of the students from a language course. According to Bordia, Wales, Pittam and Gallois, (2006) ELT practitioners have agreed that most of the students have prior expectations about course content and teaching methodology and their expectations play a significant role in learning and student motivation. Their expectation is a kind of affective factor in second language acquisition and is directly linked to motivation and language learning performance. They have developed a model of student expectations using expectation disconfirmation paradigm. This paradigm is broadly used in consumer psychology. Researchers have shown that when the expectations are fulfilled, these influence satisfaction with the product or service. When the product or service gives expected result, they get confirmation and the consumers become satisfied. But when disconfirmation happens, it may lead to positive or negative results. When the performance is better than expected level, it is called positive disconfirmation and leads to enhanced satisfaction. But when the disconfirmation is negative, it leads to utter disappointment. Therefore, disconfirmation of expectations affects student motivation, performance, behavior in class and the general language learning experience as students rely mostly on teachers and institutions for the acquisition of knowledge.

Similarly, Bennett (2003) has expressed the opinion that expectations are powerful force and play a significant role in the classroom.

They can serve as a medium for success or failure. She suggested four steps to drive expectations as positive force in the classroom- identify, verbalize, adapt, exceed. The first step is to identify the expectations and then verbalize the expectations of both the teachers and students. If the teacher can identify the expectations of the students from the language course, he will be able to set the course objectives and goals in a way that can satisfy the students. Similarly, if the students come to know about the expectations of the teacher, about the course and about their own performance, they will try to achieve that level. After knowing students' expectations, the teacher can adapt his/ her own expectations. If the expectations of the students are low, the teacher can motivate them to raise the level and set up high expectations. Whatever the students or their parents expect from the language class should take place in the classroom. The last step is to exceed. After identifying, verbalizing and adapting the expectations of both the teachers and students, they can exceed to achieve that level from the language course.

I considered Bandura's self-efficacy theory (as cited in Ketsman, 2012) for this research. Self-efficacy is one's belief in his/ her ability to achieve a goal or an outcome. According to self-efficacy theory, a person's belief system influences how he behaves, how much effort he invests, how much persistently and successfully he completes a task in a learning process. A student's self-efficacy directs his motivation and expectation in a language course. A student will put only that much effort in his learning process that he believes he is capable of doing. He will persistently try to achieve his expected level, not more. Therefore, a teacher needs to know what his students want from the language course. Knowing students' expectation will help teacher

create the kind of learning environment in the classroom which will allow his students achieve the expected level. If the teacher thinks that the expectations of the students are very low, he can motivate the students to raise the level and create a fear-free learning environment in the classroom where students will not have any fear for being ridiculed or criticized in the classroom.

Relationship between students' expectation and curriculum development

Curriculum means the overall experience that a student or person gets through various activities of class, workshop, playground, library, laboratory and through teacher-student interaction. Curriculum is a complete plan for any educational or training course or program. Curriculum comprises of the contents, objectives of a course or a sequence of courses, a set of performance objectives and even co-curricular activities. To develop or change curriculum, curriculum developers need to consider several factors - individual talents and basic needs of the students, social aspects, cultural factors, intellectual, moral ideals of a society. If the curriculum developers listen to the voices and expectations of students from a specific course and their learning experience and preference, it will help understand their nature, learning process, interests, attitudes and readiness for achieving the goals of that specific course. Considering their expectations in curriculum development creates a positive learning environment by engaging students in the process. According to a study conducted by Carini, Kuh, and Klein (2006), student engagement is 'linked positively to desirable learning outcomes such as critical thinking and grades' (p. 23). Students also need to understand the process and structure in order to be successful learners. If they feel connected to the curriculum or course objectives, they avoid

disruptive practice and cannot be their own barriers to learning (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Through a study, Thompson (2009) has found that if a teacher considers students' perspectives and views, the students emotionally value that teacher. The teacher can then drive the students to achieve the goals and objectives of the course more successfully. Therefore, considering students' opinions and expectations can bring a positive result in the whole process of curriculum development.

Research questions

The researcher tried to explore the following research questions through this study.

- i. Do the students have prior expectations about English language courses? What is the nature of their expectations?
- ii. What are the factors that drive these expectations?
- iii. What is the effect of their expectations on their classroom and examination performance?

Research methodology

This study is qualitative research based on the data elicited from interviews with 40 students of the Department of English of Stamford University Bangladesh. For collecting data, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews were designed in a way that focused on the nature, factors and consequences of expectations. Interviews included some open-ended questions. Students were asked the questions; they answered in return and added additional comments. The interviewer recorded their answers, comments and opinions and converted their opinions into percentage. The researcher clarified it to the students that these questions were asked for research and students could give their true

responses as they would not be held responsible for any answer. The interviewees were quite comfortable with the interviewer as both had a good rapport. Semi-structured interviews were conducted taking into consideration that they could elicit responses and opinions of the participants in an extensive way as both the interviewer and the interviewees could discuss the questions and answers. Semi-structured interviews also created a non-threatening environment in which students felt quite comfortable to answer the questions. After collecting data, all the responses of the students were considered and analyzed. The responses and comments of the students were thematically analyzed. The responses were calculated and expressed through percentage.

All the participants in this research were students who were studying English Literature and Language in the Department of English, Stamford University Bangladesh. They all were Bangladeshi nationals and native speakers of Bangla. Their age varied from 18 to 23 years. Among them 30 were male and 15 were female. Their age, gender and first language were not considered as variables in the study. The sample was suitable for the study as they were studying English at undergraduate level. They already completed several trimesters in the university and were mature enough to understand language skills, teaching methodologies and course contents. They completed 12 years of compulsory English classes in their school and college. At this age they had some expectations from their English courses and they had certain preferences for teaching style and education management. Therefore they were able to give their opinions about expectations, course contents, teaching methodology and education management.

Findings and discussions

All the students (100 %) said that they had some expectations regarding their language courses. I tried to find out the nature about their expectations which covered the following areas:

Expectation related to content of the course

The students mentioned that they expected to learn the following skills/ contents from their English language courses: reading, writing, speaking, listening, pronunciation, grammar, note taking, presentation skills for job market.

Four English language skills

Among the participants, 38 students (85%) were aware about four receptive and productive skills, viz. reading, listening, writing and speaking. They expressed the opinion that these skills should be focused properly in the classroom. They had the expectation that after the completion of English language courses, they would be proficient in reading, writing, speaking and listening in English language but they found out later that they still had lacking in the four language skills.

Pronunciation

A great number of students showed their concern about their pronunciation. As they were brought up in an EFL context, they did not know correct pronunciation of many words and often pronounced words incorrectly. Forty-four students (97%) said that they had never seen the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols until they started their B.A. honors in English. As IPA symbols are standardized representations of phonetic sounds, most of the dictionaries use them to show the pronunciation of

words and knowing these symbols help students understand the correct pronunciation of words. They opined that pronunciation is the most neglected area in schools and colleges. They shared that even the language courses at the university did not focus properly on pronunciation. They expected it to be taught and practiced more in the language courses.

Grammar

All the students (100%) said that grammar was taught seriously in their language courses in schools, colleges and universities. They expected to know grammar well and they felt satisfied regarding the grammar practices in their courses.

Note taking

Knowing proper note taking strategy is important for students at higher studies. Twenty participants (44.44%) expected to learn it from their language courses.

Presentation skills for job market

Students expected to learn a good presentation skill so that they could do well in their professional life later. Forty students (89%) said that a course entitled Public Speaking helped them develop the presentation skills.

Teaching-learning style

Students also added that they had certain expectations regarding teaching- learning styles adopted in the classroom. They expected to have an eclectic approach as teaching methodology, group work, friendly environment in the classroom, bilingual education, humor in the classroom and teaching of grammar before teaching of literary courses.

Eclectic approach

The students showed their preference for an eclectic approach rather than any specific approach. All the participants agreed that they preferred a blend of Grammar Translation Method (GTM), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT). As English is foreign language to them, they did not feel comfortable to the communicative activities and tasks from the very beginning of the course. They wanted their teacher to give some lecture on the content first and then instruct them to do the activities.

Group work

Thirty-five students (78%) preferred group work besides individual tasks. They asserted that they collaborated with others and the pressure of the work seemed less to them while working in groups.

Friendly environment in the classroom

Forty-four students (98%) said that they expected the classroom environment to be friendly so that they could learn without any fear of being ridiculed. The teachers were expected to play the role of facilitators.

Bilingual education

Bilingual education is the use of mother tongue besides the target language when the students do not understand the content in a classroom. Thirty-four students (75%) said that bilingual education helped them to understand the content of the course. The teacher generally used mother tongue when the students found it difficult to understand a topic in the classroom.

Humor in classroom

A serious classroom environment seemed boring to the students. All of them expected

a classroom environment where they could enjoy learning language. Therefore, they all preferred humorous comments by both the teachers and students.

Teaching of grammar before teaching of literary courses

As student of English literature and language, 36 respondents (80%) expected the language courses to be taught before the beginning of any literary courses. They commented that development of language can help in literature courses. Different reading and writing strategies help to read literary books and write responses to literary questions. Therefore, language courses should be taught before literary courses.

Education management

Regarding the education management, students said they expected quick feedback and result from their teachers. Thirty-four students (75%) said that they wanted the answer scripts to be checked and given as immediately as possible so that they could work on the scripts. Quick feedback helped them understand their errors and mistakes well. They also got enough time to correct and learn for the errors and mistakes made.

There were several factors which influenced students to think about the course content, teaching and learning style and education management. When students were asked about the factors that led them towards such expectations, they pointed out the following factors.

Professional need

The students' language learning goals were related to their professional need. Thirty-two students (70%) thought that a sound knowledge of English language would help them get a better job in a developing

country like Bangladesh. Therefore they really needed to be well in reading, writing, speaking, listening and pronunciation of English.

Background on the use of methodology

Cultural and social backgrounds were also affecting their expectations. In Bangladesh, Grammar Translation Method was the teaching method in language classroom until Communicative Language Teaching was introduced in the late 1980s (Farida & Sinha, 2013). Therefore, 38 students (85%) had a cultural expectation of teacher centered classroom. Whenever teachers gave communicative activities and tried to make a learner-centered classroom, the students felt at a loss. This was a reason for them to favor lectures in the language classes.

Social expectation

In Bangladesh, English is thought to be a language of power and aristocracy because of its colonial history under British rule. The guardians and students have a belief that they will be more privileged if they know English well. Twenty participants (45%) expressed that their expectations from the language courses are influenced by social expectations.

Personal goal

Only 9 students (20%) said that they did not have any professional goal but had a personal goal of learning English well and therefore they had enrolled in the language courses only to know English well.

Personality

Eleven students (25%) expressed the opinion that their expectations were personality driven. Some of them were anxious and goal driven and they had specific expectations from the course. Some said their expectations were based on their personal preference. Those who were

introverts preferred group work as there was a chance of avoiding tasks.

The students also expressed their opinions about the effect of expectations. They mentioned that if their expectations were not fulfilled, the situation led to psychological and behavioral changes, lack of attendance and performance decrement. Sixteen students (36%) were irregular in their English language courses because they did not enjoy their classes. Anxiety, confusion and loss of interest were some of the common psychological and behavioral changes. They finally failed to perform well in the courses. The students suggested that if their expectations were met, these might lead to rise in motivation, greater participation in the classroom activities, higher level of confidence, higher attendance in the classroom and positive learning experience. According to 25 students (56%), when they found that their needs and opinions were considered in the language classes, it made them motivated. They felt motivated to do class works and activities regularly. They felt content about the whole learning experience. All students said that they felt happy when they found similarity between their expectation and reality in the classroom. They enjoyed learning and rarely missed any class. The ultimate result of the situation was a positive learning environment.

Suggestions of students

Based on the language learning experience, all the participants gave some suggestions to improve the educational experience in the tertiary language courses. They said that at the beginning of a language course, the language teachers should briefly discuss about their expectations from the course. The discussion would help the teacher realize the level of the students and the nature of their expectations. They also suggested that teachers need to verbalize their expectation from the students related

to the course and the way they want their students to achieve the goals. Sometimes the expectations of the students might be too high or too low. The teachers need to help students realize the obtainable goals and can suggest students to make their expectations realistic. Similarly, the teachers might also have too high or too low expectations regarding the course. Listening to the voices of the students, the teachers need to adapt their expectations. This will save all from frustrations. The language teachers can design the course content, teaching style, activities and classroom management strategies according to the expectations and needs of the students. This way, both the teachers and the students can then work on achieving the goals of the course.

Conclusion and implication

With the advancement of technology and modernization of teaching and learning, students have developed their preferred way of learning a language. They want their voices to be heard and their expectations to be considered. The students at tertiary level are quite aware of what goes on in the language classroom and they want positive confirmation as a stimulus for better performance. Therefore, the course designers and teachers should consider what they expect from a language class. In an EFL context, it is more important as significant amount of money and efforts are invested to teach and learn English. The present research is significant as it gives an opportunity to know the expectations, needs and perspectives of the tertiary level students from English language classes. However, the research was limited to the participants of only one private university of Bangladesh. Further research can be conducted on the expectations and perspectives of students from a diverse context like age group, social setting, linguistic background, etc. Considering the nature of their expectations, factors behind their expectations and effects of their

expectations will give the concerned people an access to their perspectives. It will also help the curriculum designers and teachers in an EFL context in general and in Bangladesh in particular to rethink about the materials used, teaching methods and activities. The content and teaching style are two major points that need to be considered well. There is a huge discrepancy between what the students expect and what the real scenario is in Bangladesh. Based on the research, course syllabi can be modified to serve students' societal and professional needs. Considering the needs of the students will work as a kind of external motivation for teachers and internal motivation for the students. The whole process can therefore result in an improved educational achievement in the tertiary level education.

About the author

Saifa Haque is currently a lecturer in Department of English, East West University Bangladesh. She holds an M.A. in Applied Linguistics and ELT from University of Dhaka. Previously she worked as a lecturer in Stamford University Bangladesh and as a project coordinator at British Council Bangladesh. Her areas of interest include ELT, materials development and assessment.

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Appendix (Interview Questions)

1. Do you have any expectation from English language courses?
2. What are the skills that you want to learn from an English language course? Why? In which way do you want these skills to be taught?
3. Do you have any disappointments regarding English language courses or educational management of the English language courses?
4. Students study English literature courses besides English language courses in undergraduate level. Do you think English language courses should be taught earlier to English literature courses? Why?
5. What type of teaching methodology do you prefer?
6. What type of classroom environment do you want?
7. Do you prefer the use of mother language in your class in explaining the definitions and concepts of your subject? Or do you want your teachers to speak in English thoroughly?
8. Do you like project works and group activities in the classroom? Why?
9. Do you want a class filled with humor or a serious classroom environment?
10. Why are you studying B.A. (Honors in English)? Do you think graduation in English will cater for your goal?