

# Exploring the Possibilities of Teaching English through Community Radio in Bangladesh: A Qualitative Survey on “Radio Pollikontho-99.2FM”

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## Abstract

*This research attempts to explore ways of making community radio more functional to teach English language to students living in the rural areas of Bangladesh. Being a powerful media, radios, in particular, community radio has become a great source of learning and entertainment for the marginal people living far away from the mainstream education facilities. Keeping their access in consideration, this community radio is playing a pivotal role to provide different educational lessons to the learners, specifically, English language teaching-learning. Based on the needs on the community, it can enhance the English language skills of the off track learners who missed the opportunity of formal language lessons as well as the regular students. For this purpose, a qualitative survey has been conducted on a BRAC Community Empowerment Programme (CEP) Project, Radio Pollikontho FM 99.2FM. In this study, qualitative data collection tools such as FGD and individual interviews with the different stakeholders currently involved with this radio have been used. Also, for this survey, relevant documents, scripts, recorded programmes have been analyzed in the light of existing literature. All the collected data have been analyzed to formulate effective recommendations for making the radio programme more effective in teaching English. The findings of this research suggested that some critical changes are required in the current programmes. For example, content should be relevant, sentence structure must be simple, pronunciation should be included in the lessons, a prior needs analysis should be conducted to identify the needs of the community and the lesson should be targeted the requirements of the community.*

## 1. Introduction

According to the baseline survey of NCTB (1990) majority of students in Bangladesh do not have the required English language proficiency <sup>[1]</sup>. Even, after taking a number of alternative initiatives like “ELTIP”, “BBC English”, “English in Action” and “English in Schools”, English teaching-learning in Bangladesh has not been able to ensure the desired quality of teaching English for the mainstream students (Hamid & Baldauf 2008; Chowdhury & Le Ha 2008) <sup>[2][3]</sup>. To handle this enormous challenge, a collective effort from teachers, students, educators and policy makers are necessary. However, collaboration with new technology, perhaps, can be a potential resource for both teachers and learners to teach and learn English language more efficiently and with greater sustainable effect. Teaching English through Community Radio is a new addition of the initiatives taken by different donor agencies in Bangladesh.

This paper tries to explore the ways of making “English language teaching” more effective and sustainable through “Community radio” based on the experience of a Bangladeshi radio station.

### 1.1 Background of the Research:

In 2011, Bangladesh government permitted licenses for 14 community radio stations to different development organizations. Among them, “Radio Pollikontho-99.2FM” is one which is run by BRAC, the world renowned development organization of Bangladeshi origin for broadcasting programmes in Moulavi Bazar district of Bangladesh. The BRAC Website (2013) claims that the station is broadcasting within a 17km radius, reaching roughly 400,000 people about raising awareness and consciousness on a variety of social issues, such as, education, agriculture, healthcare, health care, women empowerment etc. Moreover, for teaching English, they are broadcasting two programmes in a week under the programme named “**Basic English Language for Outreach Radio Audience (BELFORA), Bangladesh**” in collaboration with **BNRRC** (Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication) and **The American Centre, Dhaka** and this type of radio programme is the first endeavour of such kind in the history of Bangladesh <sup>[4]</sup>. One of them is for the young students, broadcasted every Friday morning for one hour named “*Khelte Khelte English Shikkha*” ( Learning English Thorough Playing) and another is a 20 minutes programme targeting the adult learners tilted

as “Aao English Hiki” (Come to learn English) which is supported by the American centre, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Both, the programmes have a vast number of listeners with the 769 listeners clubs. Those listener clubs are kinds of voluntary clubs around the coverage area. The members of the clubs sit together to listen those programmes and practice among themselves. The Radio authority provides necessary supports with different types of learning materials etc. Also, a written text of the programme is published on the local daily newspaper on the day of programmes for better understanding of the texts used. BRAC website further claims that those clubs have formed to ensure the community involvement with the radio programmes <sup>[6]</sup>.

### 1.3 Conceptual Frame work:

Al-Hasan, Anandi & Abdul-Maliki (2011) conducted a research on Simli radio in Ghana <sup>[6]</sup>. That particular study followed participatory approaches with in-depth evaluation. Combination of both desk study and field visit technique was used to collect data from the staff of Simli Radio and the listener. Among the specific techniques used to collect data, there were meetings, focus group discussions (FGD), stakeholder interviews, debriefing sessions and observations <sup>[6]</sup>.

## 2. Literature review

According to the Community Radio Installation, Broadcast and Operation Policy (2008) by Ministry of Information of People’s Republic of Bangladesh, in the guidelines part, it states that:

“Community radio is, in effect, a form of public-service broadcasting, which serves a community rather than the whole nation. Community radio is an own resource of a community, which will reflect the outlook and attitude, norms and culture and thought and ideology of the very community people” (p. 1) <sup>[7]</sup>. These suggest that community radio is like famous Abraham Lincoln quote about democracy as mentioned by Akhter (2010) community radio is for the community, of the community and by the community <sup>[10][11][12]</sup>.

Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada (2002) claimed that community radio has less set up and operational costs which can be considered as a media for finding the solutions of local problems and issues after identifying their nature <sup>[13]</sup>.

As in societies of developing countries like Bangladesh, mostly, media is controlled and run by the elite and rich people, Banda (2009) further commented that community radio can be a democratic platform for the commoners in the community <sup>[14]</sup>.

Though, Power & Shrestha (2010) argued that instead of radio, Mobile technology can be more cost effective and penetrative to the Bangladeshi rural society because of the low frequency and poor coverage of the radio, even though, it has proven highly effective in the Sub Saharan-Africa claimed by Hunt (2007) as cited in Power & Shrestha, (2010) <sup>[15]</sup> However, it can be strongly claimed that community radio concept will be a solution to such debate.

## 3. Rationale

In this context, in Bangladesh, community radio can be a resourceful technology for teaching English to the marginalized learners. Moreover, it would not cost them anything and they will learn while being entertained and this community radio would allow them to learn the specific type of English they need for their daily communications.

## 4. Research Methodology

This proposed research work was a qualitative research in its very nature of data collection and analysis. For collecting data from the field level, according to the nature of qualitative research, this work focuses more on collecting qualitative data using mainly two different methods. They were FGD (Focused Group Discussion) and Interview. For the FGD, two different groups of listeners were selected. They were adult listeners and children listeners. Besides, interviews with different groups of stakeholders were conducted. Among the interviewees, there were experts, teachers, planners, organizers and guardians.

Moreover, for document analysis as a part of table work, the relevant printed materials were carefully examined, for example, the scripts of the programs and other relevant research papers. These were crosschecked by the listeners to justify the applicability of all those materials.

## 5. Key Findings

**5.1 Importance of Radio for learning English:** Radio can be a common and easy means of communication for the villagers as they may listen to the programmes whenever they like. They

can listen to radio and perform their household chores together; as a result, it would not make any difficulties for their professional life.

**5.2 Content/Topic:** Listeners liked to have contents related to their personal or social life. Materials must have applicability, in their daily lives, the type of vocabulary and the chunks of language they need to use, should be included in the content. They really did not like the content which is not related to immediate communication needs and too much focused on grammatical rules and patterns. They also emphasized on the pronunciation and sentence construction, so that, they can communicate with their counterparts, if required.

**5.3 Material/Language of the content:** The texts of the programme were too big to handle and most of the sentences were too long to practice. As a result, it was difficult for them to comprehend and use them in their own communication. The text could be divided into simple sentences and presented on two or three consecutive programmes.

For both the programmes, local language of Moulovi Bazar district is used as the language for giving instructions to the students and translating the texts to the students. Though, the programmes for the adults use both Standard Bangla with the dialects and the target language English. This makes the programmes understandable for the common listeners.

These programmes have no evaluation system, so, it is not possible to evaluate the development of the learners after the programmes, however, according to the experts it is a weakness of the programme. They proposed to design an evaluation system.

**5.4 Timing and Duration of the Programme:** Traditionally, in villages of Bangladesh, right after the evening is considered as the high time for studies for the students, so, broadcasting a programme at 7.00pm does not make it convenient for the listeners to listen with other learners. During data collection, it was also revealed that the timing for the children programme was perfect. It is broadcasted every Friday morning and most of the students remain free at their home during that time.

**5.5 Activities:** The activities should be real life oriented like storytelling, jokes, songs and short drama for teaching English through radio. Experts suggested that authentic materials can be a very good way of teaching English. Also, instead of only teaching English traditionally, radio may adapt some classical texts to drama and broadcast them with a particular language focus.

## 6. Recommendations

Firstly, the course designers have to design the course according to the requirement and needs of the community. They should conduct a needs analysis before designing the course. Secondly, the context of the community must be considered in designing the course.

Then, for conducting the course there should be a written script with specific aims and objectives. There should be the pre-designed materials for teaching the children. Having a well designed evaluation system is also mandatory for teaching the language.

Moreover, broadcasting time can be changed and the same programme can be scheduled to broadcast twice or thrice every day. Regarding the duration of the programme, it should be noted that a short span of time will be more effective.

Furthermore, texts should be shorter than the current one. It should also be small and simple sentences at the beginning and gradually the sentences structure could be complex. Commonly used vocabularies along with their synonyms with their usage in different contexts can be a very effective task to be practiced. Materials should be more focused on vocabulary and making sentences with them.

Again, every day the lesson should be focused on a very specific topic. For example, “greetings” “saying good bye” “asking time” asking address” “telling time” etc can be the topic for each lessons.

In addition to, pronunciation of the English words should be given preferences. In particular, for the children, accurate pronunciation should be practiced through this programme. For this, one sentence should be repeated several times.

Finally, a good campaign about this programme is a key for the success of this kind of language teaching. Community people should be included in the teaching learning programme. A school based language club/listeners club can be an effective method for involving the students in the learning process.

## 7. Conclusion

Language learning is a continuous process and in this process community radio can play a crucial role to encourage the community in the learning process. As English is the most demanding language in this current reality, community should come forward and take the lead for including the listeners in the learning process. With entertainment, community radios can offer effective language lessons for the learners who missed the opportunity on the due time. Even, they can involve the current students to learn the language alternatively.

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