

Eyeing beyond the boundary of routine teaching-learning

Commentary on

Foreign Language Education for National Development (2022)

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(Eds. Sayeedur Rahman and Mohammed Ansarul Alam)

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Admittedly, the effective learning of any foreign language (FL) is inextricably related to a person's socio-economic development. To judge from a broader perspective, it is a valuable revenue-generating national enterprise which our neighboring countries—India, Sri Lanka, and even Nepal—have successfully proven by exporting a skilled FL-knowing workforce abroad. In our country, FL education has recently become a much-discussed issue besides the usual uproar on the declining standards of English. There are apparent concerns among various quarters regarding our citizens' lack of FL skills and our national failure to utilize such skilled workforce for our socio-economic interests.

Probably keeping this fact in mind, the Institute of Modern Languages (IML) at the University of Dhaka has accomplished a significantly productive, uphill as well, task by publishing a research-oriented book titled 'Foreign Language Education for National Development: Contributions of the Institute of Modern Languages' with an assemblage

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of nine chapters on the prospects, challenges and achievements of FL education at the Dhaka University. Written on the backdrop of Dhaka University, this book reflects the greater national realities whirling around FL education. The list of contributors is enviably rich: AMM Hamidur Rahman, Muhammed Ansarul Alam, Iffat Ara Nasreen Majid, Sayeedur Rahman, Jannatun Naher, Md. Afzal Hossain, Sheuli Fateha, Md. Moniur Uddin, Sharmi Barua, Shishir Bhattacharja, Mizanur Rahman, Bipul Chandra Debnath and Arifa Rahman. Readers would be enriched by the writers' meticulous investigation regarding the utility of learning English, Chinese, Japanese, French, Korean, and Bangla as foreign languages as well as their impact on the individual and collective lives of Bangladeshi learners. And interestingly, the book covers the probable challenges these languages offer in real-life practice. Each of the chapters, in its respective merit, analyses the multifarious prospects of FL education based on qualitative and quantitative findings from stakeholders—eventually focusing on the roles foreign languages play in the workplaces at home and abroad. Let me briefly highlight what each chapter contains.

The first chapter deals with a historical overview and evolution of IML as an FL teaching-learning institute that has played a pivotal role in the initiation of FL education at Dhaka University. IML's establishment paved the way for the emergence of several major FL institutes across the country—under some premier universities as well as independently. The second chapter, quite a crucial one, highlights the contribution of IML towards FL education in line with our Sustainable Developmental Goals (SGDs) which has made foreign languages a key factor for achieving SGDs successfully. The third chapter vividly deals with the BA programs of English, French, Chinese and Japanese languages that IML operates concerning their socio-economic efficacy. Based on research findings obtained from Daniel Stufflebeam's 1960's CIPP evaluation model, the chapter offers crucial suggestions for FL educators, policymakers, researchers and teachers across the country.

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters deal with the Chinese, Korean and Japanese language programs of IML in relation to their socio-economic

contributions toward the country, highlighting their significant roles in reducing unemployment of a formidable number of graduates. The seventh chapter appears somewhat unique in the sense that it discusses how Bangla as an FL has been drawing the attention and interest of foreign learners as part of the globalization trends. The writers vividly demonstrate how Bangla language and Bangla culture possess the lucrative potential to be commodified globally as useful tools in the arena of business, research, higher education and diplomacy. The eighth chapter deals with the successful impact of the French language program in the creation of linguistically and cognitively competent human resources in Bangladesh consequently resulting in increased remittance influx and improved relationships with international stakeholders.

The final chapter of the book is, without dispute, the most crucial one. Narrating the latent role that IML can play in the complex academic landscape of the 21st century, the writer explains how that can be done through the multiple lenses of a recurrently changing global system. Readers will surely agree that taking multidimensional approaches to education through diversity, inclusiveness, digital connectivity, collaboration and networking—in proportion to the values and beliefs related to the globalized world order—is the obvious mode for achieving that goal. The writer rightly argues these strategies can insert genuinely meaningful influence into the FL courses of IML.

In all my earnest expectations, this expansive publication from IML will serve as a valuable document for all learners, instructors and institutions of FL education in Bangladesh. Professor Sayeedur Rahman and Professor Mohammed Ansarul Alam as editors deserve a huge credit for bringing several revered foreign language experts-academics under one umbrella to reveal an in-depth understanding of the existing practices of FL education and subsequently, create a gateway for further deliberations and research on this much-neglected sector of our country's language education.