

Studying in the Department of English at Dhaka University: An Analysis of Learners' Motivations, Expectations and Reality

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Abstract

The yearly enrollment of freshmen in universities at undergraduate level in the English Department at Dhaka University requires attention for manifold reasons. This transition from the previous institution involves not only an admixture of expectations and shock on the learners' part due to the exposure to an entirely new academic system but also the very idea of university admission to one particular department (i.e. English with two possible options of majoring in language or literature later in their MA years) comes with its own complex realities. In order to seek a possible answer to this multifaceted issue in relation to the framework of tertiary education in a Bangladeshi context, it is of absolute necessity to examine if gaps exist between what the students of this department from different localities expect and what they face in reality. In order to identify any possible gaps as such, this study surveys the opinions of seventy first-year students from the Department of English, University of Dhaka followed by a focus group discussion of ten final year students. The survey examines their expectations and motivations they had prior to their admission into the department, and also presents their reflection on the changes and congruities in those opinions. The questions include issues of motivation, attitudes, in-class tasks, distribution of courses, contribution of teachers, classroom materials, and the overall learning environment in the department. The findings of the study show a number of possible causes of gaps between student expectations and reality. In order to ensure a smooth transition of the students from higher secondary to tertiary level, these gaps needs to be addressed.

Keywords: Student transition, learner motivation, ELT practices, public universities

1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, graduating from a university in Bangladesh or any other country for that matter, when considered in the context of the present world is of great importance for various reasons. For example, if one intends to secure a good job or aim at building skills in a range of analytical techniques or interpersonal communication skills, it is mandatory for him/her to obtain a graduation degree. Besides, pursuing higher education also requires a graduation degree, even though the purposes of attaining so, eventually, might vary in many aspects from person to person as every individual has his/her own needs and expectations. The Department of English at the University of Dhaka offers a four year-long Bachelor of Arts program to those who qualify for admission through

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admission tests and also obtain the required score in the specific subject, English. This process starts with a transition from higher secondary level to that of the tertiary. As these two correlated yet inherently contrasting phases take place one after the other within a considerably short timeframe, it is very likely that students who undergo this sudden adjustment have certain apprehensions as well as expectations about the university life. The perceptions of the students of this new learning environment can have a significant effect on their future learning outcomes at university (Lizzio, Wilson & Simons, 2002). Therefore, it is important to take note of these in order to develop a clear understanding of that transition and the consequential effects of the transition. The idea of transition is, however, mostly applied ‘uncritically’ in the field of higher education (Gale & Parker, 2014). In order for the transition to be facilitated, it is important to put emphasis on the integration of the students into various aspects of social and academic areas of the university (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie Gauld, 2005).

Simply put, the life of a university student is not as easy as it is commonly believed. Even though most students can navigate the earlier transition phase without experiencing significant drawbacks, 20-30% students might undergo academic and personal issues resulting in the journey as a negative experience (Lowe & Cook, 2003). If the context of Bangladesh is taken into consideration, any student’s enrollment in a university from the previous academic stages indicates a shift of time which demands a serious study for the very nature of its relatively broad and complex apparatuses. As far as the academic environment itself is concerned, the traditional school and college systems in Bangladesh usually function in a way where students tend to live at home and are assessed by centrally administered public examinations, whereas with universities being usually situated in urban areas, a good number of students mainly reside either in residential halls or other variants of lodgings.

Both in the school and college phases students undergo certain academic and socializing processes. As university life involves a transition for them towards a new beginning, they form certain new assumptions in terms of those very same processes. To narrow it down, the already new and therefore, anxious process of university admission accompanied with a presentiment regarding the new academic system becomes all about recognizing the realities of one’s experience against the expectations they used to hold prior to coming to the campus. However, a study by Scanlon, Rowling and Weber (2007) showed that relying on the knowledge of past learning contexts might not always facilitate forming newer learner identities. Hence, it is important to address any possible gaps in order to help the students with their adjustment to the new academic and social environment. A study by Crisp et al. (2009) suggested that students’ successful passage through the process is somewhat dependent on the help from stakeholders including university, family and peers. It also pointed out this transition as a major difficulty for the students and stressed how different induction programs arranged by universities can be of help to the students in terms of priority management, balancing study, work and social life, and so on.

As every academic year begins, newly selected first year undergraduate students come to the campus of Dhaka University with hopes and confusions battling in their mind. As

English major students, on the one hand they expect to extend their outlook and be an integral part of the emerging intelligentsia; on the other hand, the uncertainties and apprehensions of it all cannot be denied altogether. As time goes by, these freshers undergo different episodes and experiences that either confirm or deny their earlier expectations. The major objective of this study, therefore, is to investigate any possible differences between the anticipations/attitudes English students at Dhaka University nurture before coming to the department and the specific realities they face that prove to stand against those previously held beliefs and conceptions.

With a view to looking closely into this “expectation vs. reality” scenario, this study centers around two guiding questions. First, what are some of the common expectations the first year students have before they decide to study at the Department of English? And second, after officially being identified as a student of the department to what extent do they find their projections to match or differ? This study looks into these questions under the criteria of motivational factors, syllabus and tasks, courses to study, teachers and classes, class environment and coping management strategies.

2. Literature Review

The shift from the primary and secondary academic institutions to a tertiary one is a serious concern in the global academic arena. The growing and extensive literatures of the recent times are studying the gaps of student expectations and realities which in time, ultimately determine the kind of strategies students might adopt to cope with a new academic life at university. Briggs (2006), for instance, studied the factors influencing a student's subject choices at six universities in Scotland and found the very selection business one has to go through before choosing the actual subject matter itself to be highly complex and multi-factorial. There were many factors involved across the universities where the study was conducted, but three factors namely academic reputation, distance from home and location topped the list. Likewise, in order to outline the process of ‘being and becoming’, a study conducted by Batchelor (2006) revealed that students get into university programs for multiple reasons, while Zepke, Leach and Prebble (2006) reported how the reasons behind students discontinuing studies altogether can also be complicated. In order to point out the significance of this transition process, Hills (1965) defined this phenomenon as ‘the transfer shock’. Under-preparedness and incompatible choices are the direct consequences of this transfer shock leading students to simply drop out or withdraw (Ozga&Sukhanandan, 1998).

Therefore, it is only logical to assume that the challenges faced by students upon entering into a university are interrelated and manifold. For example, Townsend (1993) pointed out that, students who transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions face numerous challenges including unsympathetic university faculties, competitive nature of the university, and fear of losing face among peers.

In a similar study, Keeley and House (1993) wanted to find out whether ‘transfer shock’ occurs only when the related factors promulgate a shockwave and make it a living practice. Their findings revealed that factors such as class levels, gender, ethnicities, age, and major/minor residence status accentuated the already felt shock on a significant level.

To further evoke the importance of a comparative study between the expectations and realities that students face, numerous other studies have been conducted over the years. Crisp et al. (2009), for example, found out that the gap between the students' prior beliefs and the experiences offered from the universities can be caused by multiple reasons, including unrealistic expectations on the students' part, inadequate/false information provided by the university authorities leading to misunderstanding, and university authority's ignorance of the student expectations. Pithers and Holland (2006) (as cited in Crisp et al. 2009) reported that the mistaken speculations regarding student expectations arise partly because the universities provide information to the students based on the institutions' expectations not the ones the students might have cultured. In the same vein, Skyrme (2007) also pointed out that the transition becomes difficult on account of the discrepancy between students' expectations of the universities and how the universities tend to define the students' role in their premises (as cited in Palmer, O'Kane & Owens, 2009).

The points of difference might include large class size, amount of work, non-academic barriers, staff involved in a variety of non-teaching functions, the frequency and quality contact with faculties, the expertise and teaching techniques of the teachers at explaining subject matters (Cook and Leckey, 1999; McInnis, James, & McNaught, 1995). Therefore, Crisp et al. (2009) insisted that a university should consider and thereby concentrate on the students with great care so it can align its reality with their expectations.

The question that might arise now is why the institutions should care for what the students expect in the first place. The study by Crisp et al. (2009) provided explanations that a student has to undergo different challenges associated with his/her academic, family, social and other responsibilities in order to complete their university studies successfully. Hence, in order to maintain higher retention rate, universities need to take multiple measures and pay close attention to their student expectations to be able to provide better alignment with the reality of their first-year experiences. This alignment can be achieved either by directly addressing student expectations or simply changing some university approaches to aid their immediate and future needs.

Besides, in their Australia-wide survey, McInnis et al. (1995) showed that one way to improve a first year's experience can be through making organized inquiries into student goals, attitudes, habits and perceptions. They also argued that information on students' attitudes and experiences beyond courses and subject evaluation should be routinely collected, analyzed and disseminated within each university.

Similarly, in one of his books, Earwaker (1992) suggested that students are particularly vulnerable at the beginning of their courses and most experienced counselors and student advisors would also likely to agree that during this very first year, students require more support and mentoring. Keeping this in mind, it is necessary for the educators, university authorities, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders to be aware of these expectations of the students in order to provide the best assistance to them.

Therefore, it is only obvious from the growing body of literature that there has been significant amount of work done on students' experiences in relation to tertiary education. In an attempt to accelerate the coping process of the first-year students, many researchers have undertaken numerous research work and investigated the nature of this unique mode of studentship. However, not many have explored the expectations that the first year English students in Bangladesh might have on that matter. This apparently disparate relationship between expectations and realities can be an important area to identify and then, address the practical complexities that the tertiary education system has to confront in Bangladesh. In addition, no study has been conducted beforehand addressing the issue of English major students' expectations and their experiences at the University of Dhaka. This paper, therefore, will attempt to portray an account of those lapses between what students expect and what reality they are offered in the Department of English, University of Dhaka.

3. Methodology

The literature review enumerates the sources (both primary and secondary) that were deemed necessary to address probable breaches between the newcomers' expectations and encounters at the Department of English, University of Dhaka and in addition, draws a generalized layout of the issues that emerged during the whole process. In order to reach substantial end results, amixed method approach was adopted. The department itself was the primary site to conduct this research where seventy participants (all freshmen) responded towards the instruments, namely questionnaires/open-comment spaces that were provided to them with a view to learning about their opinions and observations. Follow up focus-group discussions of ten selected students from the same group of previous interviewees now attending their final year were taken to look further into the issues proceeded from the past survey questionnaire. The discussions left room for the participants to add more to what the survey questions had already required them to answer beforehand.

3.1 Participants

The participants were 70 first year students from the Department of English, University of Dhaka attending the academic year of 2015-16. When the survey questions were provided to them, they had only completed their first semester, giving us an outlook regarding their life at the department that is fresh, unpreserved and mostly opinionative. Both the opinions and facts were considered and assessed from the same participants' perspectives. Later, in order to reevaluate the responses obtained from the initial survey, 10 students from the same group of 70 in their final semester in the Hons. Program were chosen for a follow-up focus-group discussion to make sure that the differences/similarities in their experience can be properly measured against their earlier perceptions.

3.2 Instruments

A paper based student survey was conducted where the questions were designed with a view to looking into what the students originally expected before coming to the university. Afterwards, they were requested to share their experiences against those earlier anticipations. To this end, 13 questions were asked on the category of expectations

along with 13 more added questions to find out to what extent those very expectations were and were not met. The questions were close ended and grouped into different sections related to motivation, attitudes, syllabus and tasks, courses, teachers, routines, and environment. Five-point Likert scale was used to measure responses which were in the form of 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'not sure', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. These responses were then ranked accordingly starting with 5 corresponding to 'strongly agree', 1 'strongly disagree' and 3 to 'not sure'. In reporting the data, 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were combined and reported as 'agreement'. The same was done with 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' and reported as 'disagreement'. The questionnaire used to elicit responses from the participants is mentioned in the Appendix section. As for the qualitative data, a focus-group discussion based on the data gathered from the survey questions was conducted among 10 students.

3.3 Procedure of Collecting Data

At first, the students were instructed to think on the expectations they had before coming to the university, based on which they answered questions designed to determine their basic preconceived notions. Again, after the expectation part, they were asked to answer questions thinking about their experiences they had gathered so far in the university. The data received from the questionnaire survey was coded and analysed using Microsoft Excel. The result is shown in percentage in figure 1(a), 1(b), 2(a), 2(b) 3(a), 3(b), 4(a), 4(b) 5(a), and 5(b). The trend of consistency or inconsistency was indicated after comparing the expectations with the experiences. For the interview segment, the participants were informed about the expectations they held eight semesters ago and asked to reflect on their years to graduation and whether their expectations met in the process. Then they were asked questions individually about motivation, syllabus and tasks, courses, teachers/classes and the teaching/learning environment for further clarification of the earlier responses gathered from survey data. The data was then analysed to find out if the responses were consistent across the participants.

4. Results of Quantitative Data

The questionnaire explored the expectations and experiences of the first year English department students at Dhaka University. The questions elicited a variety of responses from the participants. They introspected about their expectations and then thought about their experiences regarding motivational factors, syllabi and tasks, courses, teachers, and class environment.

4.1 Expectations and Realities about Motivational Factors

Students were asked to decide on whether they chose the department as their best option and if managing a good job worked as their prime motivation. In the experience part they were asked to think if they found the motivation to be practical. The results of the expectations and experiences are shown below in the Figure-1(a) and Figure-1 (b) respectively.

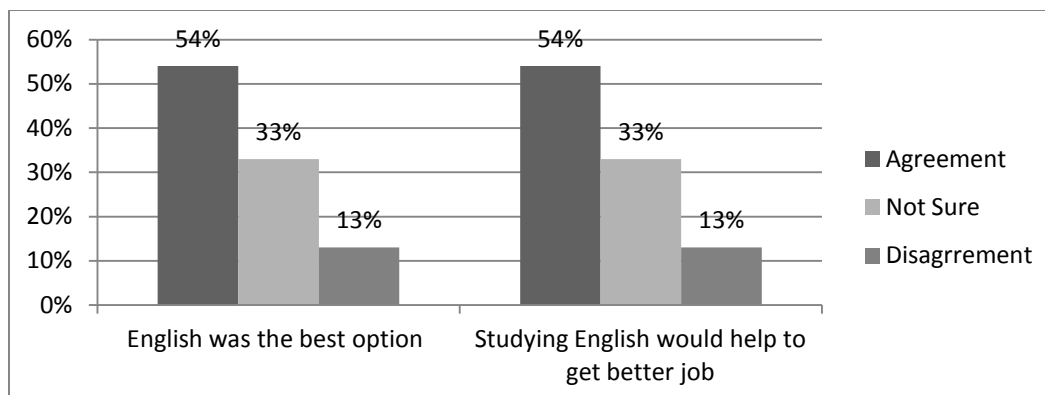


Figure-1(a): Percentage of students' responses on motivational factors

As a motivational factor, 54% students chose to be admitted into English department considering it to be the best choice. Only 13% disagreed that it was the best option and 33% of the students were not sure of their choice. 54% of the students were motivated to choose the department with the expectation that studying at English department would help them get a better opportunity in the job-market. Interestingly, both the motivating factors correspond in the percentage of students' responses.

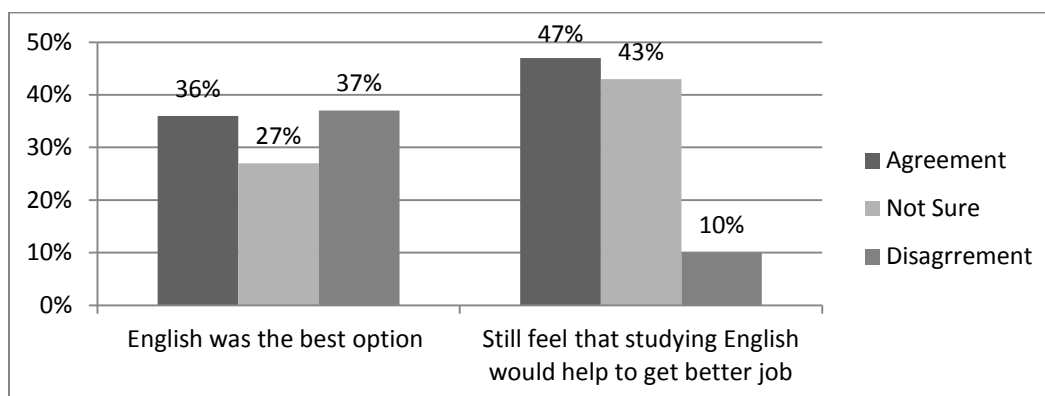


Figure-1(b): Percentage of students' responses against the earlier motivations

From a comparative look at the figures, it seems that the experience of only one semester changed the perceptions of the students about their motivation. Now only 36% students think their choice was right. On the other hand, 37% students disagree to call it as their best choice. As for the other motivating factor about getting a better job, now 47% think it would help them to get a good one. The level of confusion is being highlighted by a clear increase of responses where a considerable rate of 43% students are not sure, which in the earlier case was only 33%.

Thus, the results from the first section reflect the study of Briggs (2006) where he pointed that the reasons behind university enrollment are multi-factorial. In addition, this change in their opinion in the second section might be further indicative of the complexity of the coping process as mentioned by Zepke et al. (2006).

4.2 Expectations and Realities about Tasks

With regards to syllabus and task, students were asked to give their opinion on their ideas of syllabus designs, assignments and seminars. The result found from the questionnaire is shown below in Figure-2(a). After passing a semester in the department, to what extent their expectations were met is shown in the Figure-2(b).

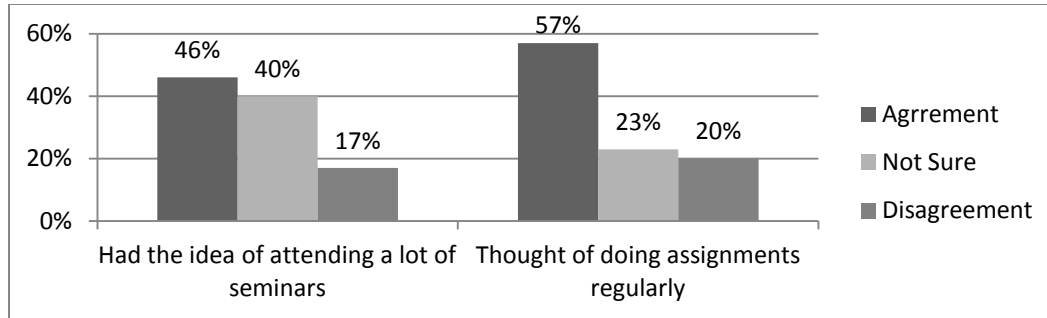


Figure-2(a): Percentage of students' responses about task expectations

About outside-class tasks, 40% students expected to attend seminars and 40% of them were confused whether or not they would or should attend any seminar. 57% of the students expected that they would have to do assignments regularly while 23% of them were not sure of it.

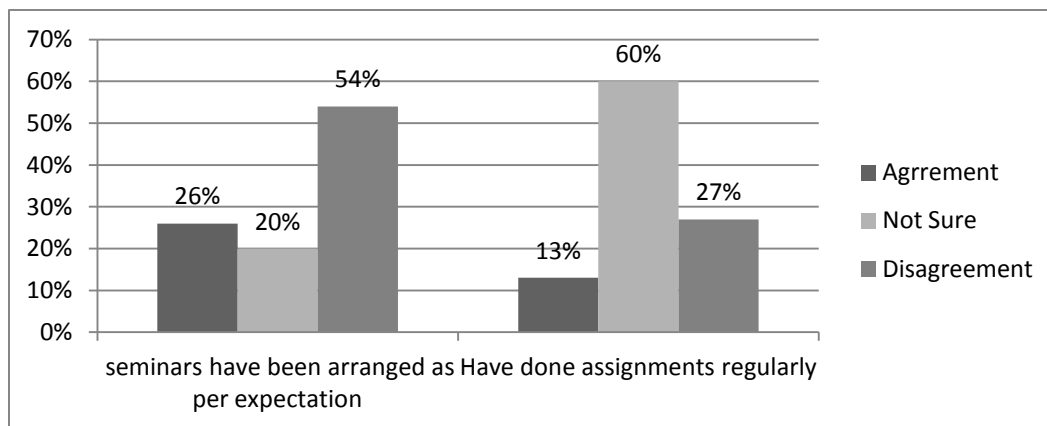


Figure-2(b): Percentage of students' responses on task experience

The experience shows that their expectation was not met as 54% students disagreed on the fact that seminars have been arranged as per expectation. Interestingly enough, this uncertainty rises as 60% students were not sure whether they had to do regular assignments.

4.3 Expectations and Realities about Courses

In terms of courses, students were asked to provide their views on the expectations about the courses. It was specified where they thought that the courses would be comprehensible and interesting. Figure-3(a) shows the results obtained from the expectation questions. Then, the post-experience responses are shown in Figure-3(b).

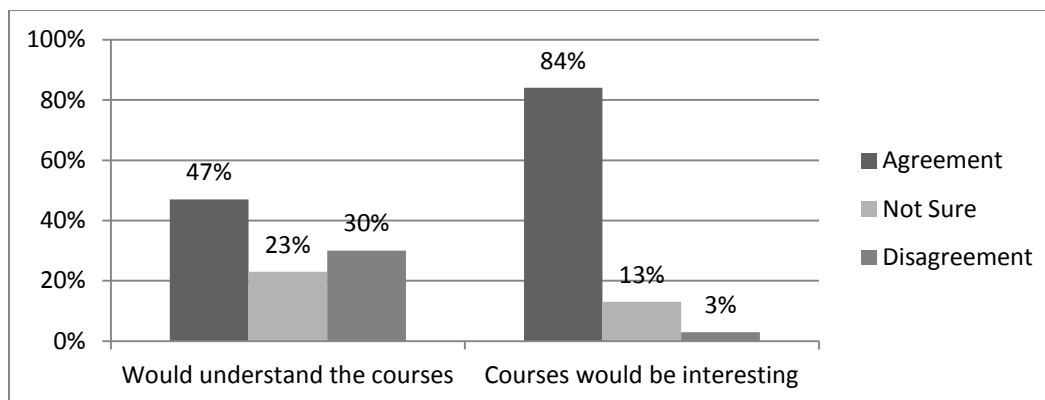


Figure-3(a): Percentage of students' responses on courses expectations

A significant part of the study demonstrates the expectation of the courses in terms of being understandable and interesting. When asked about the comprehensibility of the courses, 47% students agreed that they believed to have understood the lessons, 23% were not sure while 30% students disagreed altogether, implying that they did not understand what was taught in class. Another expectation was that the courses would be interesting. The finding in this regard is noteworthy here since a significant 84% of the students agreed and only 3% disagreed.

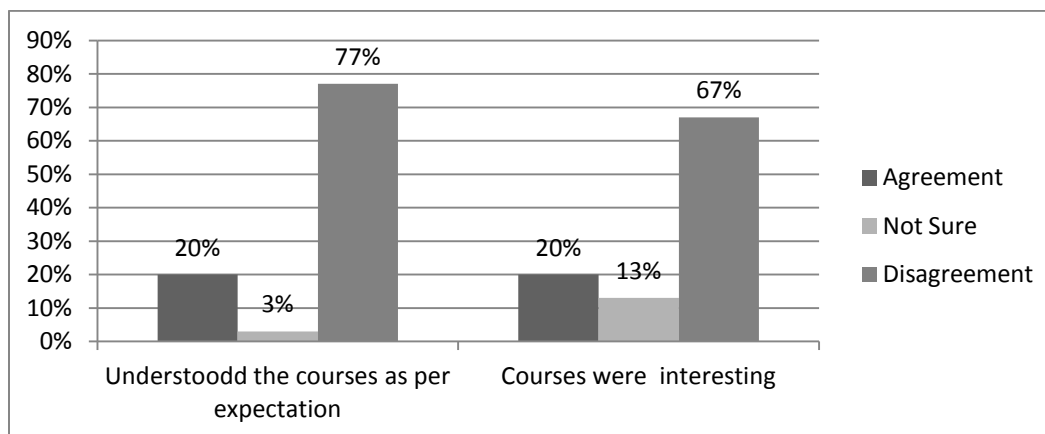


Figure-3(b): Percentage of students' responses on course expectations

After passing a semester, their experience shows that the response goes down to only 20% who understood the courses, while 77% students disagreed on the statement. In a very similar direction, only 20% agreed that the courses were interesting with 67% disagreed. Their experience with the courses marks a denial in the opinion of the participants for those courses themselves being comprehensible and interesting. The results that are found here echo the observation of Earwaker (1992) where he suggested that students are particularly vulnerable at the beginning of their courses, finding it very difficult to adapt to an academic situation that contrasts from the previous ones so strikingly that it takes at least a whole year to familiarize themselves with the very pattern of learning as it is inside and outside classroom activities.

4.4 Expectations and Realities about Teachers and Classes

Enrolling at a university, learners must have held certain expectations regarding the teachers and classes. The specific questions in the questionnaire about teachers concentrated on whether they were supportive enough to offer academic help outside the classroom. Again, students were required to provide their opinions about their perception of understanding the class lectures. Besides, their ideas about the class-size or the number of their classmates were also a matter of concern. Their responses provide us with the results that follow in Figure-4(a) and the results from the experience section are shown in the Figure-4(b).

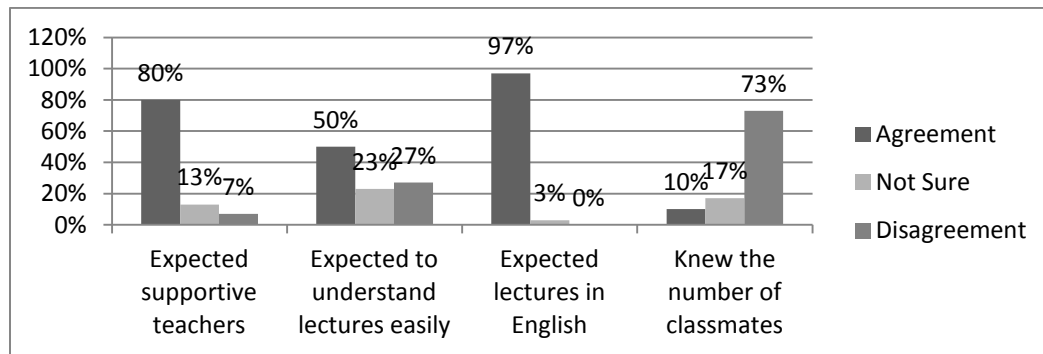


Figure-4(a): Percentage of students' responses on teachers and class expectations

The response shows that students had a very high expectation of the teachers. Before getting into the department 80% of the students expected that the teachers would be very supportive. In response to the question about class lectures, 50% students were of the opinion that they would understand the class lectures easily while 27% disagreed. Almost all of the students expected that the classes would be in English followed by a decent percentage of 97. The rest 3% were not sure. As for the second category, 73% of the participants were not aware of the actual number of their classmates— in other words, their class size — indicating the freshmen being uninformed about the number of the students affecting a classroom environment.

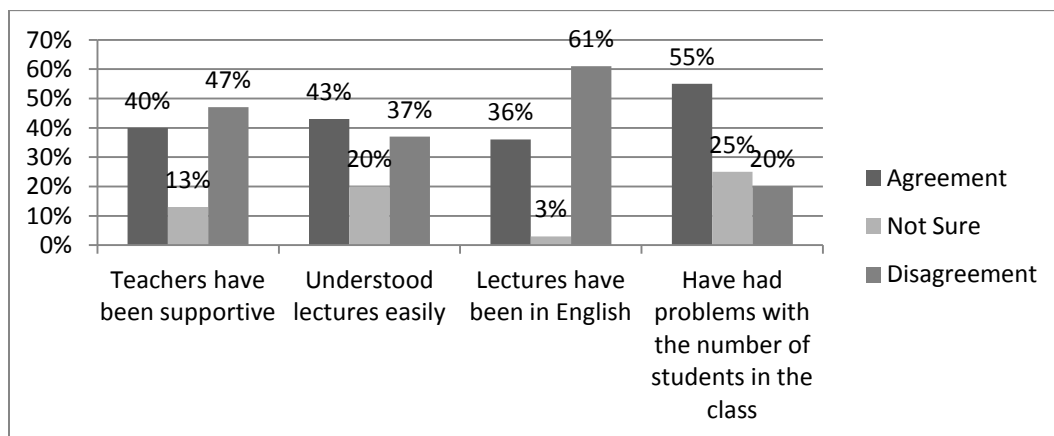


Figure-4(b): Percentage of students' responses on teachers and class experience

The experience section, however, shows that only 40% students agreed on the teachers' being supportive with 47% disagreed. When it came to class lectures, the reality shows that 43% student understood the lectures and 37% did not. Another important issue was the use of English in conducting classes. However, after passing a semester, 67% disagreed that the classes have been fully conducted in English. About the number of the students in the class, 55% of the students reported that they had problems in the class with the number of classmates. Only 20% respondents did not find any problem with the class size.

Here, the results obtained from the particular question on teacher-support call for administrative attention since it validates what Townsend (1993) noted about the teacher-student relationship in a university, reporting that among multiple challenges faced by a novice learner during the transition, unsympathetic faculty members tops the list.

4.5 Expectations and Realities about Environment and Coping Strategies

A certain observation that needs to be reminded in this specific section is that students operate in surroundings where other people are also concerned. In this new setting and environment learners have to cope with the new people they meet. In fact, there is an undeniable impact of the overall environment of the department on its learners. The motivating environment promotes learning and vice versa. In this regard, the learners were asked to give personal opinions about their expectations on these points. The result received from the learners is shown in Figure-5(a) below. To what extent they have been able to cope with their peers has been shown in Figure-5(b).

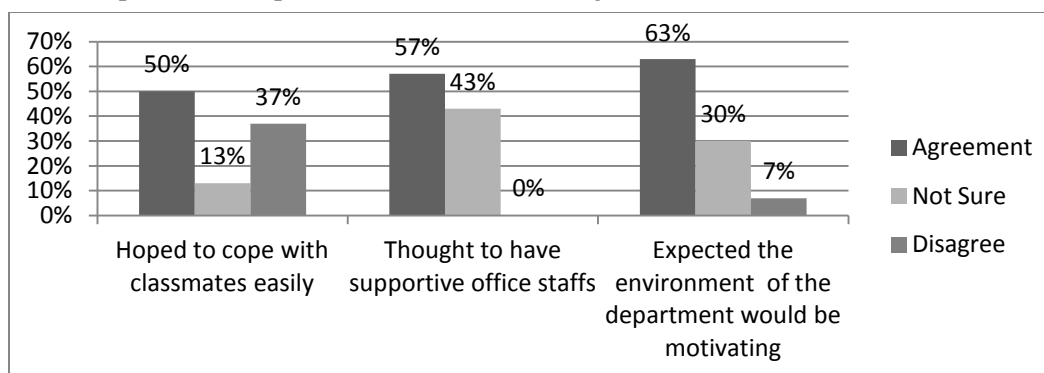


Figure-5(a): Percentage of students' responses on environment and coping expectations

Confirming that they did have some prior anticipations regarding the new setting and environment, 50% of the students said they were able to cope with their peers, while it is important to note that 37% students disagreed on that. The people concerned with the administrative functions such as the departmental office staff are also an inseparable part of their academic life. 57% students expected that they would be cooperative. Regarding the overall environment of the department, 63% students anticipated it to be motivating while 30% of them were in doubt.

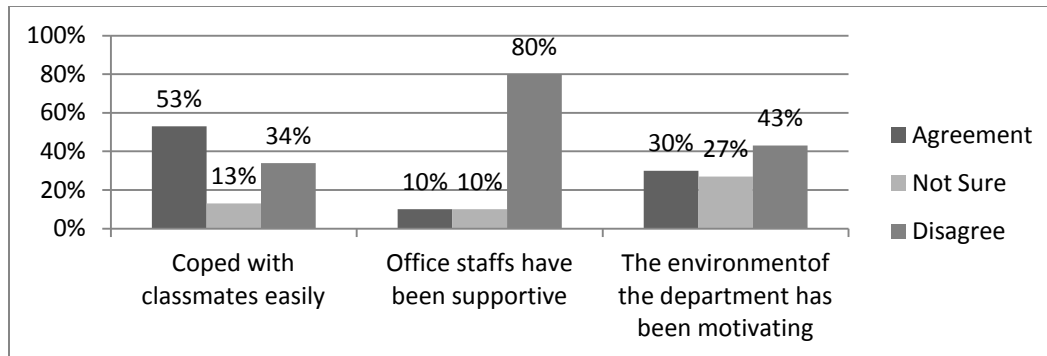


Figure-5(b): Percentage of students' responses on environment and coping experience

Even though the given time is inadequate to reach a concrete conclusive decision, the responses about coping with peers are quite positive as 53% of the students answered in the affirmative. However, 34% students expressed a negative attitude in terms of their mutual adjustment with other classmates. This finding should be duly addressed so that it is possible to ensure coping strategies among students. As for the third segment, even though 43% students were not sure about their expectations regarding the office staff before, a striking 80% did not find the office staff to be supportive after dealing with them. The environment of the department could not please many since a 30% found the environment to be motivating while 43% students disagreed.

5. Results from Qualitative Data

With the purpose of investigating the authenticity and pursuing a better understanding of the end results, certain questions were employed in alignment with the research questions. The responses from these discussions were then analysed by recognising the common grounds which emerged from the responses. Conclusions had been made on the commonly patterned answers, yet the new information that came along has not been overlooked. Recognising the manifold estimates made by the participants that eventually managed to imply beyond the chosen categories, the responses have been summarised below. The participants have been identified as P1, P2, P3.....and P10.

5.1 Question: How would you evaluate your decision of getting admitted into the Department of English? Would you connect your graduation from here with a 'better job' prospect?

There was no general agreement that getting into the Department of English was the best decision whatsoever. 5 out of 10 respondents expressed that the decision was a conscious one while the rest of the participants opined otherwise. One thing that emerged from the negative responses is that students are somehow forced to get into the department by a wide range of different stakeholders including parents, teachers from previous institutions and a mere lack of options. One of the participants even commented, "English was not my first choice. I was forced to get into it. I didn't have any choice left." (P3)

Despite the mixed opinions in respect to the decision they made, almost all the participants readily agreed that graduating from the English department would help them to manage a better job someday; as one of the participants said, "At some sectors I, for

sure, will have extra opportunities, thanks to a certificate from the English department.” (P10)

5.2 Question: What is your evaluation of the seminars arranged by the department?

Most of the participants conveyed a negative attitude towards seminars. They did not find the seminars arranged by the department interesting or effective, either because they were not even privy to the happenings in the department due to a lack of advertisement or because, they were unfamiliar with the very significance of attending public seminars in the first place. One of them mentioned, “The department should have arranged more seminars connected with departmental courses” (P8), implying the necessity to organize and then moderate curriculum integration concepts wherein theory and practice are bridged.

5.3 Can you share your experience regarding the class tasks and assignments?

In response to this question, the respondents came up with very positive feedback for tasks and assignments. They were of the uniformed view that assignments helped improve their writing skills and that the feedbacks they received were also very helpful and encouraging. An opposite view that surfaced along was that not always the tasks and assignments were welcomed by the participants and yet at the same time, the experience was great as it provided them with better and deeper understanding of the related topic. A suggestion was made where the participants expected the tasks and assignments to be linked with relevant presentation topics.

5.4 Question: How would you describe the courses you have studied?

The students were consistent in their assertions that the courses were somewhat interesting which eventually proved to be difficult to comprehend as they approached their senior years. They linked any course being interesting or understandable to the teachers’ ability of delivering lectures as to how they presented those courses to the students. There appeared a general feeling that participants held a special tenderness for literature courses whereas the ELT ones posed more challenges to them. In their opinion, ELT courses are ‘too practical’ leaving ‘less’ room for personal interpretations unlike literature courses.

5.5 Question: What do you have to say about class lectures, teacher support and class size?

Although most respondents expressed an overall positive attitude towards the faculty members’ as being cooperative, a few of them disagreed and pointed to the fact that some of them might prove insensitive towards student needs. One participant particularly mentioned “They promise a lot of things, as in we will support you, but they actually do not mean it” (P9), suggesting all involved to advance and improve the faculty-student relationship in the department.

As for the number of students in each course, all the participants showed grave concern unanimously about the class size. They found it challenging to concentrate in the large classroom where teachers cannot pay undivided attention to all the students. A participant articulated utter dismay by saying, “When we attend those combined classes we cannot fully concentrate on the teacher and it shows when we see it having a direct effect on our very understanding of the lectures”. (P8)

5.6 Question: How would you describe the overall environment of the department including office staff or fellow students?

The respondents were very positive towards the fellow students. Most of them associated their coping mechanisms with the department environment with the fellow students including peers, or senior and junior students. Despite the multifaceted challenges one has to confront on a daily basis in and outside of the department, peer connection proved to be of great support to the students in their coping processes. With regards to the office staff of the department, the participants demonstrated mixed feelings, for in their opinion, some of them are cooperative while some of them are not; as commented one participant, “They like to control us. Authoritative, if you ask me” (P5), recommending a change of attitude both among the students and staff.

6. Discussion

The results received from the questionnaire responses were used to identify the expectations that first year English Department students had before coming to the department. Then again, at the second part of the questionnaire, the experiences of the same first year students were recorded. Finally, the variances between the past and the present modes of expectations and realities were shown through a parallel placement of the two survey answers closely followed by a focus group discussion result. In this section, all these significant differences and their implications will be discussed in detail.

As elaborated in the literature review, students pick different university programs for diverse reasons (Batchelor, 2006; Briggs, 2006). In the same manner, as found after the survey, among the many factors that motivated them to choose English, one was their preconceived notion about it being the ‘best’ subject offered in the Faculty of Arts—with little to no attention paid to the aptitude they might or might not even possess to be able to truly comprehend the nature of the subject itself—intensely focused on the language and the cultures to which it belongs. Another important motivation that influenced their choice was the overtly popularized idea that studying English would get them a better job. In her study Briggs (2006) reported that the myths of public recognition and quick employment after graduation play a substantial role in the choice students consciously make in terms of selecting their individual universities and subjects. Therefore, the chief similarity discerned between the study of Briggs (2006) and the current one is that both reinforce these two abovementioned hypothetical arguments as the prime catalysts that do in fact, affect the practical decisions the students take. However, after passing only one semester in the department their opinions about these motivational factors seemed to change quite drastically. The unprecedented drop of the percentage from 54 to 36 and 54 to 47 of still driven learners evinces some sort of uncertainties among the students in terms of the motivations they used to nurture before. The results from the interviews are also congruent with those of the questionnaire results. The significance of this change in itself does not signal that students were failing, rather shows the after-effect of a slow transition into the unpredictable risky and challenging experiences of simply being a university student, as suggested by Batchelor in his 2006 study on starters and their eventual fall over the time.

Cook and Leckey (1999) mentioned that the actual experiences of being in a university area did change negatively the initial intentions students used to hold in their early years. New institutions pose various stringent academic standards before students even get a chance to expose themselves to the challenges of adjusting to those standards (Keeley and House, 1993; Townsend, 1993).

It was clear that, seminars were not arranged as per the expectation which was confirmed by the interview responses. Next, as another important academic task, 57% of the students expected to complete assignments regularly. A significant number of responses showed that students were not sure initially whether they would have to submit regular assignments or not. This might be an indication of their lack of understanding of the very term 'assignment' itself. But later on, the second survey, along with the interview encapsulates a positive attitude toward assignments, showing their clear understanding of the distribution of credits.

As for the curriculum management, courses are designed and adapted by the academic body assigned by the authority. In this regard, the committee in charge of this selection and modification might make erroneous judgments about the students' needs, and there might be some forced impositions on the students from the institution. It might happen due to the discrepancy between unrealistic expectations on the students' part, inadequate information provided by the university leading to misunderstanding, and university authority's ignorance of the student expectations (Crisp et al. 2009). The results from the current study show that 47% of the students expected that they would understand the courses whereas only 20% of the participants told that they understood the course and 77% of the partakers did not understand the courses properly. Here too, interview results are consistent with the survey findings in terms of the understandability of the courses. Moreover, it is notable that 84% students thought the courses would be interesting while only 20% of them approved. This finding is relatable with the study of McInnis et al.(1995) where they found that barely half the students considered their subjects interesting. In the current study, however, as reflected from the interview responses, learners did develop some interest in the courses as they passed their four years in the department.

As mentioned in the literature review, some of the points of difference between the expectations of the students and those of the institutions emerge in terms of large class size, amount of work, academic/non-academic barriers, frequency and hours of effective contact with teachers, the expertise and strategy of a teacher at explaining subject matters (Cook and Leckey, 1999; McInnis et al.,1995). In order for the teachers and other service providers to offer the best service, these points are important to take into account. In light of these results found, the current study also revealed that students held a very high expectation of the teachers.

A significant 80% of the responses showed that they expected the teachers to be supportive. Half of the participants expected to understand the lectures easily, while almost all of them agreed that class lectures would be delivered in English they will understand and incorporate. However, the results from the second segment indicated signs of no figure differences. At first, just 40% of the respondents found the teachers to be supportive. Secondly, the response in the case of understanding the class lectures also

signaled a desperate fall at 43%. Again, 67% students did not primarily find the class environments considerate enough to use English that suits their level of comprehension, which with their favorite faculty taking the course though, marked a noteworthy decline in the latter survey. Finally, 55% students reported their problems with a large class. Only 20% did not have any problem with the class size, as opposed to the list of answers from the second questioner where the experiences after passing one semester only leads them to believe quite the contrary. The conclusions drawn from the interview responses in these aspects resembled the survey findings as many respondents found the faculty members to be uncooperative and large classes, unmanageable.

The classroom atmosphere is also crucial here because it has significant effects on the overall performance of the students. As beginners find the university setting to be thoroughly new than their earlier institutes, it generates a certain sense of anxiety in them; as per the observations of Earwaker (1992), students are particularly vulnerable at the earlier stages of their courses and therefore during the first year, they require close support and mentoring. This study showed that many of the students were quite uncertain about the coping process with their peers. Although half of the partakers were hopeful of coping with their peers successfully, 37% of them were not very sure. More than half of the respondents hoped that the office staff would be friendly and co-operative. Moreover, the usual environment of the department was expected to be motivating to 63% students. Against this background, the coping process with the peers stood quite positively within the given time. More than half of the respondents reported that they were able to cope up with their peers successfully. Despite that, 34% reported that they were unable to do it after completing the first semester. This finding was further clarified by the interview responses where learners credited not only the peers but also the senior and junior students to their help.

Finally, the disagreement over the office staff being friendly and/or co-operative is also very significant, since an 80% of the respondents said they did not find the office staff to be co-operative. This finding also resembled the interview responses where participants expressed their negative experiences and dissatisfaction with the office staff. The initial reality about the overall environment of the department was not satisfactory either in the surveys. Only 30% of the respondents found the environment motivating, with the rest of them either disagreed or uncertain. Over time, this notion took a bit of positive shift as most of the participants found the environment to be somewhat inspiring and teaching/learning friendly as expected and revealed in the interview data. This finding is significant because the overall environment of the department must have effects on other aspects of their lives as well. Therefore, it is necessary to make sure that the environment and other stakeholders in the department are student friendly in order to ease the irrefutable challenges of studentship at the university.

7. Limitations of the Study

Although this research was undertaken meticulously, there were certain unavoidable limitations. First of all, no specific literature was found addressing these issues of English department students from the University of Dhaka in particular. Besides, on account of the limitations of time and resources, the study included only a small sample for both the

survey and the interview, as a result of which these findings might not be applicable for a larger case study or comprehensive interview. Moreover, the current study comprises issues that require a more focused research attention and spontaneous involvement of all concerned, starting from students/teachers themselves to administrative steps. Finally, it could not also address some very essential aspects of tertiary education including performance and grades, gender role in the transition and so on.

8. Recommendations and Conclusion

This study provided some important insights into the fears/expectations of the students who are new to the university which need to be identified and addressed duly in order to make their transition easy and worthwhile, so the universities can reassess their missions, visions and values with a view to developing and providing required assistance to the ones who intend to explore the territory of tertiary education.

The findings of this study suggest that the majority of the students' earlier motivation and zeal about studying English, or exploring the interdisciplinary dimensions of it somehow lost appeal over time, for the cure of which mutual care and proper counseling should be provided. For initiating a better academic practice, it is highly expected of a department that it would arrange regular seminars, ensure student participation in them, extend and disseminate the findings of the research works conducted by faculty members among learners and so on. The findings also suggested that there were courses/course materials used in classroom that might not be timely or useful at all considering the contemporary context. Revision and addition are, therefore, essential to keep up with the cotemporary challenges and the present needs and sensibilities. In addition, learners also showed negative attitudes towards ELT courses in particular, which is why they should be provided with clearer and comprehensive ideas about course expectations and other requirements they are supposed to fulfill.

In many cases the preconceived ideas and expectations about the graduation level or university in general do not match with the realities at work. Teachers and other stakeholders should be more supportive to the students in this regard, as suggested by the results of this study. This research, therefore, has extended our knowledge of the transitional phases of freshers in the Department of English at the University of Dhaka - issues that we might overlook and underrate as casual or random, but in reality require our further investigations. In order for the stakeholders at different stages of the university to ensure a smooth transition of theses freshmen students, the findings of the research can be taken into consideration.

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Appendix

Gender: Male/Female

Please think of the expectations you had before coming to this department. Put a tick mark (✓) in the statement which you think is true for you.

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		5	4	3	2	1
01.	I chose English department because I thought it was the best option for me					
02.	I thought studying at English department would help me get a better job					
03.	I thought I would have to attend a lot of seminars					
04.	I thought I would be given assignments to submit on a regular basis					
05.	I thought I would easily understand the courses I would study					
06.	I thought courses would be very interesting.					
07.	I thought I would get supportive teachers					
08.	I expected that I would understand the lectures of the teachers easily					
09.	I knew that class lectures would be in English					
10.	I knew of the class size (number of students)					
11.	I thought I would cope with my classmates easily					
12.	I thought I would have very supportive office staffs at the department and other administrative offices of the university					
13.	I expected that the environment of the department would be highly motivating					

Please think of the expectations you have had after coming to this department. Put a tick mark (✓) in the statement which you think is true for you.

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		5	4	3	2	1
01.	I still think choosing English department was the best option for me					
02.	I still think studying at English department would help me get a better job					
03.	Seminars were arranged as per expectation					
04.	I have done assignments on a regular basis					
05.	I understood the courses as per my expectation					
06.	I found courses to be very interesting.					
07.	I found teachers to be supportive					
08.	I understood the lectures of the teachers easily					
09.	I found class lectures were in English					
10.	I had problems with class size					
11.	I coped with my classmates easily					
12.	I found office staffs at the department and other administrative offices of the university to be very supportive					
13.	I found the environment of the department to be very motivating					