Linguistic Patterns of the Bengali Language in the School Curriculum at the Higher Secondary Level in West Bengal: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

This research paper examines how the Bengali language is taught and represented within the state's formal education system. West Bengal, being one of India's key states, has two main school-level education boards: the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education and the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education. Bengali, the mother tongue of most students, is a prominent subject in the curriculum, especially at the higher secondary level. However, a critical review of the subject titled Bengali Language and Literature reveals a significant imbalance. While Bengali literature is heavily emphasized- from primary through secondary education- the linguistic components of the language receive little attention.

The study identifies that essential elements of language learning, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, are largely absent from the curriculum, particularly before the higher secondary level. Although the current curriculum at the higher secondary stage includes limited linguistic theory and some technical linguistic topics, their presence is minimal and insufficient for meaningful language acquisition. The spoken form of Bengali and its various dialects, which are crucial for developing comprehensive language skills, are also notably underrepresented in classroom instruction, where the focus remains almost entirely on the written form. This limited focus on linguistic structure results in an incomplete language education for students, who are not provided with the foundational tools necessary for mastering the language fully. The study argues for a more balanced and integrated approach, where both literature and the structural aspects of language are given equal importance. It recommends that instruction in grammar and linguistic theory be introduced from the primary level and sustained through to higher secondary education. By doing so, students would gain not only literary knowledge but also the linguistic competence necessary for effective communication and deeper understanding of their mother tongue.

	The paper ultimately calls for significant curricular reforms that prioritize the inclusion of linguistic principles as an essential component of Bengali language education in West Bengal's school system. ***Keywords:*** *Bengali Language Education, Higher Secondary Level, Linguistic Patterns, School Curriculum, West Bengal Education Policy*

Introduction

Language is the main bridge between an individual and his society. Through language, an individual expresses his thoughts and feelings to the society. In the case of West Bengal, this special medium is the Bengali language. Within the family, within the society, in chatting, or in singing and playing, this Bengali language is the main support for everything. That is why language education is considered a very necessary element in building a strong relationship between an individual or a student and the society. In the education system of West Bengal, the Bengali language can be seen to be active in two ways. Namely, Bengali as the first language: in government schools of West Bengal where the mother tongue of the students is Bengali, Bengali is active in two ways for them; namely, on the one hand, Bengali is a specific subject; on the other hand, Bengali is the medium of learning other subjects. On the other hand, Bengali is active as a second language in Hindi and English medium schools. No matter how Bengali is considered as the first language or second language, if a language cannot be learned in a correct or scientific manner, it has to face various errors in both spoken and written form. Which identifies the deficiency in the language education of that individual or student.

The scientific method of education that can be applied in language education today is to acquire linguistic skills in language education. If a person can acquire proper knowledge in linguistics, then we will see that that person or student will feel much more fluent or comfortable in the use of language, and the language he uses will be used to a large extent appropriately and accurately. The linguistic field is basically organized into four levels, namely phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. No matter what language a person wants to learn, if he can acquire proper skills in these four areas of the language, then he will have acquired sufficient knowledge about that language, which will help that person in using that language accurately. That is why the main objective of this study is to properly review the extent to which Bengali literature or Bengali grammar has been included in the education system of West Bengal, especially in the higher secondary level Bengali curriculum.

In order to make the study properly fruitful, it is essential to analyze the previous studies. Bhattacharya and Jha (2021) show that students of Purulia and its surrounding areas have to engage in an undeclared struggle with the English language to get higher education. As a result, they do not hesitate to say that even if they cannot learn the subject of English properly, they cannot acquire proper skills in their mother tongue or that an unclear obstacle is created in getting mother tongue education. Their finding hints that there is a gap somewhere in the implementation of education in the Bengali language properly, especially in formally learning their words or sentence rules.

Dialect is reflected as a very important issue in language education. Every language has more or less dialects. Similarly, there are five dialects of the Bengali language. There are also phonetic and morphological variations among these dialects. Rahman et al. (2024) show that, even

within Bangladesh, there are several regional forms of the Bengali language that have phonological variations. These variations prove that although they are part of the Bengali language in terms of phonetics, there is a uniqueness among them. If regionalism is completely denied while teaching the Bengali language in the classroom, then language students will not be able to fully integrate themselves in this language learning anywhere. That is, they will fail to connect the language of their daily life with the language of the school.

Language of instruction research adds a policy angle. Khan and Hussain (2021) note that, while the English language spreads us globally, regional mother tongues like Bengali help us to show our local identity in the court of the world. If a student wants to express his/her thoughts very comfortably in school or to express his/her comments with proper reasoning, his/her mother tongue is the biggest medium. However, it is seen that in most cases, they are not able to properly master the standard form of the language due to the constraints of regionalism, and as a result, there are some vague obstacles in expressing their thoughts.

Acquiring comprehensive knowledge of a language's linguistic structure is the most effective approach to overcoming the identified barriers. Proficiency in linguistic components, such as phonetics, morphology, syntax, and semantics, enables individuals to articulate their thoughts with clarity and fluency. Consequently, integrating linguistic topics into the language education curriculum is essential. Based on these considerations, the following research questions can be formulated for investigation in this field:

- How are the core linguistic elements- phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics- represented in the WBCHSE Bengali curriculum for Classes XI and XII?
- In what ways are these linguistic patterns incorporated into the prescribed textbooks and teaching-learning materials for Higher Secondary Bengali?
- What pedagogical approaches are employed in teaching the linguistic structures of Bengali in Higher Secondary classrooms?
- To what extent does the current curriculum support both first-language and second-language learners in developing linguistic competence in Bengali?
- What are the existing gaps, inconsistencies, or limitations in the current Higher Secondary Bengali curriculum, and how can it be improved to promote a linguistically balanced and inclusive education?

Statement of the Problem

Bengali is the primary language of West Bengal's educational system, but if we look at the curriculum from primary to higher secondary (WBCHSE), we will find that phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic elements are not applied in a systematic way. The theoretical discussion of the language has not been very helpful in that regard, despite the fact that the present curriculum mostly consists of literary works or language grammar exercises. Consequently, the language learner's proficiency in the language is lacking.

Students concentrate more on memorizing than on developing efficient language learning abilities when the old, conventional technique of teaching Bengali language and literature is employed at the higher secondary level, as can be shown if the teaching methodology is thoroughly examined. As a result, a language learner, even if he collects language elements, cannot assimilate them properly and often faces various problems in the practical aspects of the language.

This study has analyzed the Bengali language curriculum from primary to higher secondary. At least at the higher secondary level, it is recommended to teach Bengali language in a scientific manner by properly analyzing the linguistic elements of the language along with literary reading and grammar. This will help in the overall development of a language learner's linguistic skills.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify and analyze the representation of core linguistic elements—phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics—in the WBCHSE Bengali curriculum for Classes XI and XII.
2. To examine how these linguistic patterns are incorporated into the prescribed Bengali textbooks and teaching-learning materials.
3. To evaluate the pedagogical approaches used for teaching linguistic structures in Higher Secondary Bengali classrooms.
4. To explore the extent to which the curriculum supports both first-language and second-language learners in developing linguistic competence in Bengali.
5. To identify gaps, inconsistencies, or limitations in the current curriculum and suggest improvements for a linguistically balanced and inclusive language education.

Methodology of the Study

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to critically examine how the linguistic structures of the Bengali language- namely phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics—are represented in the school curriculum at the Higher Secondary level in West Bengal. The research focuses specifically on the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE) syllabus for Classes XI and XII.

Research design

The study employed both content analysis and descriptive analysis methodologies to examine the content of the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE) Bengali curriculum and associated teaching-learning materials for Classes XI and XII. Data were systematically collected through content analysis of selected Bengali textbooks to assess the representation and integration of core linguistic elements, including phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Additionally, classroom observations were conducted to evaluate the pedagogical approaches and classroom dynamics related to the teaching of these linguistic components. Semi-structured interviews with teachers provided qualitative insights into instructional practices and challenges.

Research objectives	Research design
To identify and analyze the representation of core linguistic elements—phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics—in the WBCHSE Bengali curriculum for Classes XI and XII.	Content Analysis
To examine how these linguistic patterns are incorporated into the prescribed Bengali textbooks and teaching-learning materials.	Content Analysis

To evaluate the pedagogical approaches used for teaching linguistic structures in Higher Secondary Bengali classrooms.	Descriptive analysis
To explore the extent to which the curriculum supports both first-language and second-language learners in developing linguistic competence in Bengali.	Content Analysis
To identify gaps, inconsistencies, or limitations in the current curriculum and suggest improvements for a linguistically balanced and inclusive language education.	Content Analysis

Source of data

The study incorporating both primary and secondary data sources to effectively address the research objectives. To analyze the linguistic components—phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics—as well as the pedagogical methods employed in teaching the Bengali language, secondary data were sourced from the official West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE) syllabus, prescribed Bengali textbooks for Classes XI and XII, and relevant official documents. These materials provide a comprehensive foundation for evaluating the curriculum's content and structure. Additionally, primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers to gain insights into the pedagogical approaches used in Higher Secondary Bengali classrooms. This combination of primary and secondary data enables a robust analysis, supporting the researcher in drawing evidence-based conclusions and making informed recommendations to fulfill the study's objectives.

Research Objective	**Source of Data**	**Type of Data**
To identify and analyze the representation of core linguistic elements—phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics—in the WBCHSE Bengali curriculum for Classes XI and XII.	• WBCHSE Syllabus for Classes XI and XII • Curriculum framework documents issued by WBCHSE	Primary
To examine how these linguistic patterns are incorporated into the prescribed Bengali textbooks and teaching-learning materials.	• Bengali textbooks (Class XI and XII) prescribed by WBCHSE	Secondary
To evaluate the pedagogical approaches used for teaching linguistic structures in Higher Secondary Bengali classrooms.	• Classroom observations Interviews with • Bengali language teachers	Primary
To explore the extent to which the curriculum supports both first-language and second-language learners in developing linguistic competence in Bengali.	• Interviews with students and teachers • Language background surveys	Primary
To identify gaps, inconsistencies, or limitations in the current curriculum and suggest improvements for a linguistically balanced and inclusive language education.	• Expert interviews (curriculum developers, language educators) • Academic articles and policy	Primary

	reports	

Data collection

This study adopts a balanced approach, assigning equal weight to primary and secondary data sources to achieve its objectives. As secondary sources, the prescribed Bengali textbooks for Classes XI and XII under the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE) were selected, with all included topics systematically reviewed to analyze the representation of linguistic elements and pedagogical content. For primary sources, data were collected through classroom observations using a structured checklist and semi-structured interviews with language experts and teachers to capture insights into teaching practices and classroom dynamics. To ensure the validity and reliability of findings, data from both primary and secondary sources were cross-verified through triangulation, utilizing the comprehensive WBCHSE syllabus as a reference framework to align and substantiate the analysis.

Data analysis

The data analysis process for this study integrates content analysis and descriptive analysis to systematically evaluate the WBCHSE Bengali curriculum for Classes XI and XII. Secondary data from the prescribed textbooks, and official documents are subjected to content analysis, involving thematic coding to quantify and qualify the representation of linguistic elements (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics) and their integration into teaching materials. Concurrently, primary data from WBCHSE syllabus, classroom observations, captured via structured checklists, and semi-structured interviews with teachers are analyzed using qualitative techniques to identify pedagogical approaches and classroom dynamics. Descriptive analysis complements this by providing narrative summaries of trends and patterns across the data. All findings are triangulated by cross-referencing primary and secondary data with the WBCHSE syllabus to ensure validity and reliability, enabling the identification of gaps, inconsistencies, and opportunities for curriculum improvement, with results synthesized to inform evidence-based recommendations for a linguistically balanced and inclusive language education.

Result and Discussion

How are the core linguistic elements—phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics—represented in the WBCHSE Bengali curriculum for Classes XI and XII?

Based on the information obtained in the said study, it can be said that a small amount of language theory has been included in the syllabus of classes XI and XII under the WBCHSE of West Bengal. However, all the topics that have been included in the syllabus are of a very basic level. From here, students will not be able to understand the language, especially the linguistic structure of the language, very deeply. At this stage, students can understand some technical terms under linguistics. Which should have happened long ago. By reaching this stage, students should have acquired sufficient knowledge about the different dialects of the language and their phonology, morphological differences or variations, sentence structure, and semantic theory, which cannot be seen to be so complete.

In what ways are these linguistic patterns incorporated into the prescribed textbooks and

teaching-learning materials for Higher Secondary Bengali?

The said study shows that the curriculum through which students are learning gives a student a proper idea about the literary works of notable writers of the Bengali language. Along with this, students can gradually acquire sufficient knowledge about various topics of grammar at the primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels. Grammar is the specific rules of a language by which that language is governed. However, it mainly takes place by adopting the written standard form of the language. But language is mainly embodied by its spoken form, which in that sense is not as important at this stage. As a result, even if a student achieves a degree of linguistic proficiency, his practical skills in reality remain incomplete to a large extent.

What pedagogical approaches are employed in teaching the linguistic structures of Bengali in Higher Secondary classrooms?

Based on the information obtained from the said study, it is seen that the old traditional method is mainly being followed in the classroom. Even today, students are trying to master the field of acquiring linguistic skills like other subjects by applying rote learning. Not only that, the teaching method of first learning the definition and then the example, that is, the journey from the specific to the general, is being followed in the classroom. Which is largely old and unscientific. In language learning, a much more fruitful means is the journey from the general to the specific, that is, the journey from the example to the definition, which the student does not have to take the help of rote learning to master. The student can assimilate the subject very easily and clearly.

To what extent does the current curriculum support both first-language and second-language learners in developing linguistic competence in Bengali?

In the WBCHSE curriculum of West Bengal, students have to learn two languages at the higher secondary level. They have their mother tongue as the first language and English as the international language as the second language. There is a specific structure to the two languages. Namely, in the case of English, the subject-verb-object system is followed, while in the case of Bengali, the subject-object-verb system is followed. In addition to the differences in structure, differences can also be seen in the sociolinguistics of the two languages. Which presents the two languages in different ways. If the differences of these languages are highlighted in the classroom and taught to students in a comparative manner, then the linguistic skills of the students will be much faster (Ramprasad, Manohara &UdayKumar, 2023).

What are the existing gaps, inconsistencies, or limitations in the current Higher Secondary Bengali curriculum, and how can it be improved to promote a linguistically balanced and inclusive education?

In the current education system, it can be seen that the information-based teaching method is mainly followed. The use of MCQ questions in the examination system can also be seen in large quantities. As a result, students can collect many more marks even by guessing without knowing it. Or by knowing some information and collecting a large number of numbers, they can identify themselves as being very skilled. But in the field of language learning, the real skill of a student is identified by considering his practical aspect. This practical aspect is reflected in the subjective skill of the student, which is not reflected at all in the current evaluation system. Because it is not possible to properly evaluate the linguistic skill of a person in some MCQ or objective-type

question and answer. For that, on the one hand, the student's writing skill, and on the other hand, the student's ability in verbal use of the language must be evaluated. Which can be observed in the current education system, it goes without saying.

Suggestion of the Research

Based on the findings from the analysis of the WBCHSE Bengali curriculum for Classes XI and XII, the following recommendations are proposed to address the identified issues and enhance the effectiveness of Bengali language education:

Strengthen Linguistic Component Coverage
- Revise the WBCHSE curriculum to increase the importance of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics in language teaching, which will make a language learner proficient in linguistic structure.
- In addition to the greater emphasis on acquisition in the current curriculum, special emphasis should be placed on the practical aspect to judge how much a student has been able to master the topics.

Enhance textbook design
- New textbooks should be prepared with clear explanations of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics as linguistic elements, with examples and exercises.
- In order to increase linguistic skills, digital media should be used as a supplementary material to the textbooks to increase the needs of students.

Adapt modern pedagogical approaches
- In addition to teaching about linguistic structure, practical areas should be prepared for students to test their acquired knowledge.
- Instead of clinging to the old traditional methods like grammar or translation methods, special training should be arranged to make teachers linguistically competent. Because only if a teacher can become competent in general can he provide adequate knowledge to his students.

Support for language 1 & language 2 learners
- The linguistic skills or language acquisition device (LAD) of first language speakers and second language speakers are different. Therefore, the focus of language teaching should be on creating practical language challenges in front of him based on the type of student.
- Instead of informing a student about the linguistic structure of only one language, it will be more effective to teach in a comparative manner by keeping the linguistic structure of two or more languages in front of him.

Address the curriculum gap and promote inclusivity

- To make the curriculum more relevant and inclusive, it is necessary to give place to regional forms, special information, and dialects, in addition to the standard form of the language, in textbooks.
- In addition to the literary works of renowned writers, the literature of regional language writers should also be included in the textbooks, which will stimulate the interest of students.

Conclusion

Language is a fundamental component of daily life, enabling individuals to navigate and sustain their social existence within society. Proficiency in one's mother tongue is essential for effective communication and cultural integration, which can only be achieved through a thorough understanding of its linguistic structure. To this end, this study recommends that the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE) curriculum for Classes XI and XII place significant emphasis on incorporating linguistic components—phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. By prioritizing these elements in the curriculum, students can develop robust linguistic skills in their mother tongue, Bengali, fostering comprehensive language proficiency that supports their holistic personal and academic development.

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