

English Teaching and Learning in the Primary Levels in Sirajgonj

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ABSTRACT

Now-a-days, learning English has become a compulsory matter for all educated people. People are learning English today all over the world as it has its global status. Being efficient in four basic skills of English (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) is necessary to achieve success. English is an international language and for this, it differs from our native language. The English learners always face difficulties when they learn it. This study particularly focuses on the English learning and teaching situation in the primary level of Sirajgonj which is a well developed district though it is undergoing changes day by day. The students of the primary schools are facing so many problems in their English learning because of several reasons. Besides, the teachers also do not have sufficient facilities. If the educational system of primary level can be changed, these students may complete their primary education in a better way by the help of the government, teachers as well as guardians.

Keywords: Foreign Language Teaching, English learning, Socio-economic condition.

1. INTRODUCTION:

English is the most important foreign language of our country. As it is a foreign language in our country, the learners may face difficulties when they learn and practice it. English is not our native language. So it differs from the native language Bengali. Because of the importance of its use, English learning has become compulsory, especially for the students up to Higher Secondary Level.. But in case of English teaching and learning, both teachers and students face many problems. In the small districts like Sirajgonj, where all the facilities are not available, it is so much tough to teach and learn proper English. Most of the primary schools, particularly the schools of villages can not provide sufficient knowledge of English. This study will try to shed light on the problems and will give some suggestions which may be useful to improve the system of learning English in the primary schools.

2. ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING AT THE PRIMARY LEVELS:

The government of Bangladesh has taken many effective steps to improve primary education. Bangladesh has made a great progress in increasing enrollment and attendance rates and reducing gender gaps, which stood in the way of primary education in the last decade. But there are still many problems regarding English teaching and learning. There is no substitute to education for developing human resources, and the process starts in the primary schools. The demand of the new millennium is to provide quality education by satisfying the changing needs of the learners and making them real human resources. Then, it is important for the education providers, policy makers as well as the civil society to know whether the schools are providing quality primary education and meeting the needs of the learners. Allwright noted that quality of primary education depends upon multiple factors including educational planning, national curriculum, management, teacher's training, classroom culture, etc. The classroom teaching-learning situation is an important determinant of the expected output from an education system. To improve the quality of education it is, thus, important to understand the classroom teaching-learning situation. The primary school system in Bangladesh is free and predominantly government run. A report of Education Watch made in 2000 declared that the government took over the primary education to ensure a common basis competency to all of the school-aged children irrespective of race, gender, and religion. They designed the curriculum,

published the textbooks, and distributed them to the students free of cost, recruited the school teachers and paid the salary, and constructed and repaired physical facilities such as building, stool, table, Almira, etc.

Some optional issues have been concentrated on to show the accurate condition of the primary schools of Sirajgonj. The issues are discussed below.

2.1 Condition of the classrooms:

Condition of the classroom always plays an important role in teaching-learning process, especially with children. Modern psychology states that little learners love to learn in a less crowded, clean, open and good environment. Therefore, physical and mental facilities should be ensured in all the classrooms for the sake of learners' greater interest.

2.2 Preparation of the lesson plan:

Lesson plan is necessary for all activities and processes in an educative environment for the learners. The main purpose of the lesson plan is to set instructional objective. Usually instructional objectives are very much useful for an effective teaching and testing. It helps teachers to shed light on what students should know at the end of the lesson.

2.3 Teaching staff:

Harmer (2000) noted that a good language teacher maximizes students' talking time and minimized teachers' talking time. Teachers influence the students with their knowledge and experience. So, they play the most important role in the class. For this reason, teachers should be well learned so that their students can gain much knowledge.

2.4 Arrangement of the class and its size:

In the learning process, every little adjustment can bring about a huge change in the overall learning environment and it can be encouraging or deterring to children's learning. So, this study has chosen class size and sitting arrangement issues as investigation points. It helps to determine how the learning achievement of one system could be different from others.

3. ENGLISH LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE GOVERNMENT PRIMARY LEVELS IN SIRAJGONJ:

There are 880 government primary schools in this district. Majority of school going children read in these primary schools. The foremost reason is that the primary education in these schools is free of cost. Most of the people of this district are farmers. They are not so well off that they could spend a lot of money for their children's education. So they prefer the government primary schools. The Government has launched the program that every school going child of primary level will get stipend for their education. This program also encourages the parents to send their children to the school.

In these Primary schools, the government appoints the teachers and they are paid by the government. To increase the facilities of the teachers many steps have been taken. In spite of all these steps the quality of education, especially English teaching and learning is not satisfactory at all. Doing an investigation among the teachers some reasons which are responsible have been pointed out. Teachers have to do many official and unofficial works of the government, such as making voter list, birth registration, as presiding officer in various kinds of elections and so on. These responsibilities hamper the teaching in the schools. The number of the students in every class also creates problems for the teachers. Because of free education the students especially of the villages come to these schools in a large number. The teachers can not teach them properly. To teach the students a standard form of English including Communicative English, the teachers do not find suitable environment because of unusual class size. These schools are governed according to the rule of the government. So the teachers are not answerable to the students. It can be considered as a major problem. Majority of the students of this district go to the government-ruled primary schools for their education. But

they do not get proper knowledge of English. They do not have all the facilities which are needed in learning English at the very beginning of their student life.

Some problems are detected through the study. Students are not aware of the necessity of learning English. So they do not take it seriously in the early period of their student life. In these schools, grammatical aspects and vocabulary are not properly taught. They enter high schools with a weak foundation in grammar and a poor vocabulary. So, they face difficulties in learning English. In the long run, many of the students fail in English. The problems of government primary schools will be cleared through the case of Murad.

Murad is a student of Nukali Primary School of Shahjadpur, a Upazilla of Sirajganj. He reads in class five. He has read several years in a kindergarten school. He has got admission in that primary school. Reading in this school, he has got a different experience. As he is a bright student, he wanted to learn English properly. But he became disappointed when he saw that his teachers were not providing any extra grammar book and any wordbook to enrich his vocabulary. He really felt the necessity of these books. Because he knew that, they were very helpful in learning English. He thought that if they got standard grammar books and word books, they could learn English far better in their primary level.

The guardians of the students are neglect education of primary level of. For this reason, they can't progress well in future. Primary education is the foundation of a student. If the foundation remains weak, the student will face difficulties in every stage of their life. This is much important for English learning, because, a student has to learn the fundamental issues of English from class one to five. If he or she does not do so, he or she has to learn it in the high school. In other words, he or she has to start learning English from the very beginning. And they can't achieve enough knowledge which they should acquire. It affects their future very badly. As English is very much important for its global status, it is needed in every sector of life. There is no other option.

The government primary schools of Sirajgonj show a disappointed picture. The little learners do not get proper knowledge of English. Because of their weak foundation in English they suffer in their higher level of education life.

4. ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING AT THE REGISTERED OR NON-GOVERNMENT PRIMARY LEVELS:

The registered or non-government primary schools are important for the education of the students. The community persons usually set up non-government registered primary schools and the management committee of the school is recognized by the education department, and it is responsible for overall management of the school. The community or a local donor usually donates a plot of land to the school and puts up a structure to accommodate classes.

In Sirajgonj, there are 683 registered schools. In these schools, the standard of education is not so good. In these schools, the teachers do not prepare the lesson plan for an English class. But there are some exceptions, they are rare in number. The teachers do not take the help beyond the textbook when explaining a lesson. Usually, teachers' attention is focused on the good students. It is found that when the teacher asks the learners to read English text, they check their 'note book' written in Bengali. As a result, their pronunciation remains defective. The weaker students, who are unfortunately the majority, remain silent. Teachers overlook this non-participation. The participation of the students in the teaching-learning process is limited in reading the text only; writing words or answering questions from the exercises is the main activity. Moreover, participation is confined mainly to the 'good' students who volunteer to read the text or answer questions. The participation of the learners in the English class is appallingly low as only two or three students try to respond by reading from the textbook. There is a tendency to respond by reading from the textbook though not very spontaneously. There is a tendency to avoid the weaker students; no extra effort is given to them. Sometimes teachers beat them instead of helping them. In response to a question, the teachers argue that if weaker learners are given more attention or asked to study harder they may drop out of school. In classroom, teachers hardly appreciate the students in reading, writing or answering questions.

5. ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING AT NON-FORMAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS:

In a dialogue on the Centre Policy arranged by “The Star-Prothom Alo” on 20-22 August 2011, the speakers have discussed on the non-formal primary schools or NGO-run schools. In Bangladesh, there exist a substantial number of NGO-run non-formal schools, catering mainly to the drop-outs of the government and non-government primary schools. Very few NGOs, however, impart education for the full five-year primary education cycle. Because of this, on completion of their two-to three-year non-formal primary education in NGO-run schools, students normally re-enter into government/non-government primary schools at higher classes.

There are non-government Schools (NGO) and Non-Formal Education Centers (NFE) and many of these are funded by the government. The largest NFE program is the much reputed BRAC program. However, all NFE graduates do not continue on to secondary school. NGO-run schools differ from other non-government private schools. While the private schools operate like private enterprises often guided by commercial interest, NGO schools operate mainly in areas not served either by the government or private schools, essentially to meet the educational needs of vulnerable groups in the society. They usually follow an informal approach to suit the special needs of children from these vulnerable groups. Different NGOs pursue different policies regarding recruitment of teachers. Some prepare a panel of prospective teachers on the basis of a rigorous test and recruit teachers from this panel. Other NGOs recruit teachers rather informally from locally available interested persons.

During the pilot study, it is found that except BRAC, there was no other organization with non-formal primary education program up to grade iv or v; and in Sirajgonj, no other organization is interested in teaching children. Therefore, BRAC schools were included as representative of the non-formal primary education program at Sirajgonj. The teacher tries to follow a lesson plan. The teacher seems to be well organized in every day lesson. Though the NGO-run schools try to teach students properly, their effort is not enough to change or improve the overall education condition of the district.

6. ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING AT EBTEDAYEE MADRASHA:

The performance of the Ebtedayee Madrasah is very poor in this district. As most of the teachers are temporary, (for some it was their first classroom teaching experience) it would have been too much to expect lesson plans or lesson preparation. The authority tries to create an impression that the madrasah is running well, but sometimes it gets puzzled in the classroom. There is no formal or informal evaluation in the classroom. Teachers sometimes give students a few tasks (writing the meaning of few words, and addition) but do not try to identify successful or unsuccessful learners. It is evident that the teachers are not interested in evaluating the lesson. The performance of the students in this madrasah is understandably very poor, especially in English. How can students learn if there is no teaching-learning environment in the class? No written test is given during the observation period although the ‘hired students’ are quite good at writing English. The regular students can not even copy a Bengali and English sentence.

7. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SCHOOLS OF VILLAGES AND URBAN AREAS:

The situation of the primary school is different according to places. The schools which are situated in the district town or main thana are better than those of the villages. The students of the towns or urban places are getting more facilities in their schools, and their performance in English is quite satisfactory. But the students of rural areas do not get proper opportunities to learn better English. In the schools of urban areas, the teachers were comparatively qualified and trained. They try to teach their students better English. The case studies show that the condition of the education of the government primary schools of the villages is really very poor. As most of the people of Sirajgonj are farmers, they are not so aware of the necessity of education. These things are much expensive for them. So, they do not take the education seriously and most of them leave the school after the primary section.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Some recommendations can be made to improve the English teaching and learning situation in the primary schools of Sirajganj. Without taking any effective steps, it is not possible to improve the condition of the students. If these steps are taken, not only the students of Sirajganj but also the students of whole Bangladesh will be benefited.

The suggestions are given as follows:

- The imbalanced ratio of the teacher and student should be made balanced. In order to redress the imbalanced teacher-student ratio, the vacant posts of English teachers have to be filled up as soon as possible. At the same time, new posts should be created for the English teachers.
- Most of the teachers who teach English at primary level, pronounce in a wrong way, as they are not from English language background. They should be trained properly in order to teach the students accurately. Special preference should be given on pronunciation so that the teachers can make practice of correct pronunciation.
- Listening and speaking skills should be emphasized. Because, without efficiency in these skills, it is impossible to gain proficiency in English language. Measures should be taken to test students' speaking and listening ability and the marks obtained hereby will be added to the marks of the final examinations.
- It is of great importance to establish a language laboratory at every primary school, especially rural primary schools. It will enhance students' language proficiency. Teachers should be trained on using language laboratory. A guidebook should be written for helping the teachers of English.
- Teachers of primary schools should be given all the facilities so that meritorious persons become interested to take teaching as a profession in the primary schools. It will be helpful to improve the present condition. Moreover, the teachers of the primary schools should get all the civil facilities so that they can teach the students in the schools more sincerely.
- Tutorials should be taken in every school. Administration and teachers of English should take proper initiatives and frame necessary rules for arranging tutorials regularly. Besides, the marks of these tutorials will have to be added to the final examination.
- Environment is very important in learning English, especially the communicative English. A suitable environment should be created for enriching students' four integrated skills. That is why the co-curricular activities like staging drama, English debate, recitation, dialogue making etc have to be arranged at least once per week.
- The guardians of the learners have the major responsibility to observe their children. They should be more conscious about the necessity of learning Communicative English.
- The foundation of a student's language competency is built up in primary school. Hence, care should be taken in order that they can get proper and effective education at the period. For this reason, qualified teachers should be employed at primary level also. And the primary level teachers of different NGOs must be careful in teaching English to the disadvantaged children and try their best to develop their students' English learning proficiency.
- Teachers have to come forward to make English easy and attractive so that they can remove English phobia from learner's minds through motivation and counseling.

9. CONCLUSION:

Primary education is very much necessary to build up the foundation of a student. But in the education system of Bangladesh, this stage is always neglected. Hopefully government has taken various steps, but these are not sufficient to solve the problems of both the teachers and learners. In this country, primary level of education is suffering from many vital problems. Because of the limitations of the teachers, they can not teach the little learners properly. The environment of the classes should be developed. Government should arrange training for the teachers to make efficient mentors. Government has many things to do. At first, a suitable and effective curriculum could be

made, and then it is necessary, to make the teachers well trained. The students should be more aware to learn English. The guardians have to be more conscious about their children so that they can be well educated.

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