



CHALLENGES FACED BY THE LEARNERS TO LEARN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN THE CHOLONBILL (A LOW LYING AREA) OF BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research is to find out the problems and challenges of learning a second language (English) beside their mother tongue among the secondary level students of Cholonbill (a low lying area of Bangladesh) area situated in Rajshahi Division. In this area the learners have to face numerous challenges while learning English such as, economic problems, accommodation problem, infrastructural development, lack of quality teachers, lack of modern equipments and learning aids etc. The paper has an endeavor to help the learners as well the stakeholder how the challenges can be faced despite having some unavoidable problems. To materialize the aims, questionnaire and interview processes are applied so that the problems and potential solution can be reached easily. 20 sets of different queries were set for finding out the actual problems. After reaching out to the stakeholders of English language in water undulated area, different sorts of problems as well as prospectives were identified. All the participants agreed that learners are weak in all areas of skills of the English language. All the findings and analysis helped to find out all learning difficulties and potential solution for this. So this research will pave the way for a new way of learning English as an international language for the secondary learners in the Cholonbil, a vast low and riverine area of Bangladesh.

KEYWORDS: numerous, secondary learners, Cholonbill, potential, riverine

1. INTRODUCTION

Different scholars and different linguists have defined English language learning in their own ways. Some opine that more use of English in the class may enhance the opportunity for better learning. But Tang (2002) holds the different view. In one of his article he states that the use of the mother tongue in the class rather assists to learn the second language. A mother tongue does not promote hindrance in learning of second language. So it can be asserted that the findings will help the teachers in a better way to teach the students along with the mother tongue in the classroom.

Beside the use of language, in the classroom whether be it English or mother tongue some other important issues were addressed by different scholars. Hamid (2011) opined that the main reason for failure of English language learning comes from the proper policy and planning by the state. In the decade of 70s the mother tongue Bangla was more emphasized rather than English. After almost twenty years later the realization came into being. Then the over emphasis was given on English which brought no fruitful result. And several efforts have been made of the enhancement of English language in secondary levels according to the instructions of different scholars. The efforts have been taken along with boosting secondary education. NCTB of Bangladesh has updated their syllabus of secondary level emphasizing on ELT or English Language Teaching. In spite of that, no effective results are achieved; instead the quality of English learning in the Cholonbill area is deteriorating gradually.

Brown (1994) argued that communication in English is better persecuted if : i) pair work and group work are conducted ; ii) real life context is provided; iii) learners are encouraged for meaningful communication ; iv) classroom tasks are provided for actual language use outside of the classroom.

Shirani (1995) another ELT specialist addressed a critical issue. According the scholar ELT language classes at SSC level classes are conducted in a direct method where a huge amount of learners participate. So the pair work, group work, situational dialogue and audio visual aids are hardly possible to conduct. Again teaching materials enough are not available for the purpose. Besides, textbooks are more emphasized for acquiring a better grade in the exam.

Joan Tough observed as “ The fact that the young children learn their first language with such speed and competence must mean that if the process can be better understood, children learn a second language in much the same way as they learn their first language. (Tough, 1984, p.213)

However, the importance of learning English is unavoidable in the context of modern world. The demand of English is on the increase day by day. Its necessity can't be described in word. It is a vital language for numerous reasons. All the sources of information and knowledge are connected with English language in some ways or other. The secondary level may be regarded as the backbone of the student life because any basic knowledge can be instilled into the learners well in this period. So curriculum



dissemination, syllabus design, educational methodology and evaluation system must be prepared in the way that the secondary learners can be benefitted first. To implement all of these the authority must emphasize on the secondary learners especially in case of learning English, the international language.

At a young stage the learners struggle with learning a foreign language beside their mother tongue. English, the foreign language is quite different from their native language. The syntax, morphemes, semantics, pronunciation styles, stress, intonation and grammatical rules are not the same as of their own language. So, all the teenagers have to face difficulty while mastering it. The experience becomes bitter if it is the case of riverine area actually a low lying area where life is more challenging for the people.

Thus the study has the aim to diagnose the learning difficulties at the secondary stage specially learning English in the flood undulated area where basic education is a far cry let alone learning English.

So, the objective of the research is to recommend practical solutions and steps that might improve the situation and encourage the secondary unprivileged learners to learn English as a foreign language. Not only the students but also the teachers, guardians as well as stakeholders can take necessary initiatives to improve and ensure English learning friendly environment.

2. THUS THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH ARE AS FOLLOWS

- i. To identify the various problems of teaching English language to secondary school students in Cholonbill area.
- ii. The ways and means for the development for ELT
- iii. To find out the potential solutions for the problem

3. METHODOLOGY

The researcher used qualitative, quantitative and questionnaire methods of the study. All the information is collected from different books, journals, thesis and internet sources. The study has endeavors to uphold objectives, options and arguments about the methods to alleviate the learning difficulties in the secondary levels in Cholonbill area.

The study was conducted to highlight the English language learning and teaching approaches. The first study was about the learning processes by the secondary students and challenges faced by them and the second study was grounded teaching methods adopted by the teachers.

Then the study conducted the necessary conclusions about learning complexities in the classroom faced by the teachers and materials necessary for them. Thus the study reveals the recommendations with a view to improving the techniques for learning and teaching English as foreign language for SSC level at Cholonbill area.

4. SAMPLE DESIGN

For the qualitative data of male and female learners were selected from secondary level. In this purpose 20 students took part in the survey Dharabarisha High School situated in Cholonbill at the western part of Natore district. 20 sheets of MCQ were supplied to tick the answers from the four alternatives and they were given 40 minutes for task. According to Hartas (2010, p. 261) questionnaires are the most broadly used method for data collection in survey research.

The sample for the parents was a convenience interview was being taken. The participants were asked to answer the multiple choice questions. Through the field survey form, the reasons for English language learning difficulties were connected to the task done among the SSC level students at Dharabarisha High School, their assigned teachers and other important information about English language learning complexities were investigated. For more clarifications an interview was conducted with other learners, parents, guardians and secondary English teachers. The learners were supplied with a form for filling it up about their learning complexities. The teachers were also asked to collect data about the real picture about the English learning complexities.

While collecting data and information, the researcher finds out the following problems in the area:

While researching the findings of the study reveal some serious issues which play a pivotal role as the constraints for the development of English learning in the Cholonbill area in the secondary levels. The factors for poor performances in English language learning can be divided into four main groups: i) the authority of the ministry of education ii) the quality of the teachers who teach English in the secondary levels iii) the learners and iv) the guardians who patronize the students. In detail the problematic issues are as follows:

i. Poor Communication specially during rainy season

In the Cholonbill area the communication systems are up to the mark. During the rainy season when the flood comes most of the roads in the area go under water which acts as hindrance to attend the school for the students. They somehow reach their destination by a small boat or *dingi* a small wooden boat or on banana boats. As the life existence becomes challenging learning English, a foreign language becomes a far cry. Though there may have some roads on high land, they become muddy and slippery. Consequently the students as well the teacher cannot go to school easily.

Steps: The authority should construct more and more brick built and high roads so that the student and teachers can use for their better communication.



ii. Economic Constraints

Bangladesh is a developing country. So, most of the people specially the rural people are poverty stricken. Their economy is completely dependent on agriculture. Most of them are poor and illiterate and their incomes come from the agricultural products. Very often floods visit area and destroy the economy, lands, and houses and claim many of their lives. They become totally unemployed and get poverty stricken. The students drop out their school and try to support their family.

Steps

The government and other conscious people should come forward to help the people. As they are farmers they should be provided with proper knowledge about modern ways of cultivation. They should be given loan on easy condition. When natural disaster occurs they should be given financial support.

iii. Traditional Method of Teaching

While teaching in the classroom the teachers use the traditional grammar translation method instead of communicative method. The teachers emphasize on only grammar which makes classes uninteresting. The learners only cram the rules. They do not get skilled about all areas of a language; listening, speaking, reading and writing. Thus they remain unskilled in English language.

Steps

The teachers should not be confined only to traditional method rather they should modern ways of teaching in the classes.

iv. Shortage of language learning club

To learn any language there should have opportunity and privileges for practicing with the copartner. Only so much practicing enhances the skill of a language. To acquire fluency while speaking practice is a must. So if there is debating club in a school the learners debate in English and they can improve their learning of English.

Steps: The authority should set up a debating club in every school under the supervision of English teachers.

v. Lack of skilled English Teacher

A skilled teacher is inevitable for a good learning outcome because he can make the learning process very much interesting and effective also. But it is a matter of great regret that the academic institutions suffer most due to the lack of skilled and well trained English teachers. There are many reasons behind it. The recruiting systems are not fair in the context of Bangladesh because there are many questions of corruption. As usually the meritorious student do not come to this profession their privileges are not up to the mark. The teachers do not get proper training as well. They do not have strong knowledge on grammar, vocabulary, communication i.e. four skills of a language.

Steps: The recruitment of the teachers should be fair and sound and facilities such as salary, accommodation, award etc for the secondary should be upgraded so that meritorious students may be attracted by the profession. Apart from this, special training about ELT i.e. English Language Teaching should be conducted for the English teachers by which they might be familiar with modern ways of teaching English.

vi. Lack of Modern equipments

Teachers as well students should be familiar with IDET (Instructional Design and Educational Technology). It is the age of technology and every aspect of our lives are influenced by technology. Our educational sectors are not exception from this. But the scenario is quite different in Cholonbill area because most of the people are farmers and they are poor too. Most of the institutions do not have computer lab and there is no multimedia projectors in the classrooms either. The teachers cannot conduct virtual or online classes which clearly evident in COVID-19 Pandemic. Though the authority instructed to take online classes, the teachers and the learners do not have modern equipments such as laptop, smart phones or other devices. The guardians do not have enough money to buy data and network connection is too poor in the area.

Steps:

The authority and the stakeholders should come forward to mitigate the problems. The teachers should be trained enough about how to use the multimedia projectors. Learning about ICT should be more emphasized in the textbook.

vii. Low infrastructure

Infrastructural developments are very slow in the area in respect of both academic institutions and road communications. The school buildings are not well constructed so the accommodation problems are very acute. A large number of students get crowded in a small classroom which impedes a good language classes. Some buildings are dilapidated which needs to be repaired. Besides, roads are low and so when floods come the get immersed into water. Very often it is seen that the schools are under water for a long time getting classes suspended.



Steps

Roads that connect the schools should be well constructed so they cannot go under water or destroyed. School buildings should be well constructed and equipped with modern facilities like electricity, Wi-Fi connection and other opportunities for the teachers and students.

viii. Cultural Practice

Culturally the people of the locality are backdated. They do not cherish the modern and updated ideas. Rather, they are very much superstitious and blinded by religious beliefs. Sometimes learning English is thought to be the against the provision of religion. People are prone to admit their children in the religious institutions instead of the main stream of education.

Steps: People should be motivated about modern ways of thinking and life style. They should also be informed about the significance of learning in the context of the modern world.

5. STATISTICAL DESIGN

i. Questionnaire:

According to Rubin & Rubin (1995), “Coding is the process of grouping interviewees’ responses into categories that bring together the similar ideas, concepts, or themes you have discovered”. (p.238). Accordingly, different types of responses of interviews were coded. To do this the researcher marked the answer in the form of a, b, c, d option that was chosen by the participants. This process helped researcher to collect new information about the complexities in secondary level about learning English. Participants of the secondary level expressed their opinion about the challenges emphasizing the geographical problem in Cholonbill area. Their guardians also opted different views how the English learning was affected and hampered by different obstacles.

For this purpose total 20 students participated in the test among them twenty male and female students. Questionnaire was provided to the students in the classroom activities at Dharabarisha High School. There were 4 MCQ and they were asked to choose one of them. They were allowed 30 minutes to complete the set. At the time of scrutiny it was found that most of the student selected the option ‘a’ and the total number was 139. Then the second highest total was of ‘b’ and it was 119. And the lowest option was ‘d’ and it was only 58. In this process the difficulties and challenges were investigated English Language Learning in Cholonbill area.

ii. Interview

Forty people took participation in the interview process and questionnaire process. The number of the students was as follows: 20 learners of SSC level, 8 teachers who took English classes in the secondary level, and 12 guardians. The teachers and guardians gave answers according to their own ways. Most of them argued that students were weak in all the areas of skills i.e. listening, reading, writing and speaking skills. They are also weak in the basic rules of grammar as they do not get the proper guidance of a skilled teacher. When asked about the questions, many of the students answered that they failed to make out the meaning of the questions as it was written in English. They also opined that their teachers are not also expert in English grammar and other areas of knowledge.

6. GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Cholonbill is a low lying and flood affecting prone area which is situated at the central position of four districts namely Natore, Sirajgonj, Pabna and Bogura of Rajshahi division. Many rivers, canal and lakes flow through the area. It is about 250 km away from Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh.

7. RESULTS

The study was able to find out that the teaching of English in secondary schools in the Cholonbill area are facing many kinds of problems and due to the problems the quality of teaching and learning English in the area is worsening day by day. It is also observed that overcrowded classes are a big problem for the teachers to conduct the classes because it creates problem while pair work or group work. It also becomes problematic for giving feedback for each student.

The secondary students complained that most of the times the teachers use their mother language in the English classes. As a result they cannot improve their listening skills. Their classmates are not interested to speak English with their co-partner too. They feel very shy and hesitated while speaking. Consequently they cannot develop their speaking skill. Besides, they live in a low lying and flood prone area which affects their student life causing them poverty stricken.

Apart from this it was also found that meritorious students face various sorts of problems. Early marriage for the girls is a very common incident in the Cholonbill area. As the parents and guardians are very poor, they do not want to continue the study with their daughters. Rather they think that they get relieved as soon as they get their daughters married off. Along with early marriage, abduction, eve teasing, acid throwing is very frequent here. Very often for religious superstition sometimes parents do not allow their issues to go to schools.

Again many students drop out for poverty. When there is big flood, most of the people become jobless. Their agricultural fields go under water and for finding a source of income the students leave their home and go elsewhere for an income source. In this way their dreams for study are nipped in the bud.



Thus due to poverty, lack of skilled English language teachers, lack of multi-media project, modern technology, communication problem, natural disaster, flood, rains, recruitment of unskilled teachers in unfair ways, are mostly responsible for the failure of the desired English learning development in the Cholonbill area.

So the above mentioned problems create constraints for English language learning in the area. The data was collected only from few institutions from Dharabarisha High School, Kochugari High School and others as the time was very short but there were hundreds of secondary institutions where English language is still being taught and learned simultaneously. The expenditure for the research was funded by the researcher himself, no funding opportunity for the study was provided. But by being enthusiastic and feeling an urge to find out the real scenario about the English learning process as an international language the researcher explored the project in Cholonbill, the birth place of the researcher.

8. SUGGESTIONS

The following recommendations should be maintained for improving the learning and teaching English in the area:

- i. Meritorious students should be recruited as secondary teachers.
- ii. Proper training should be provided with the secondary English teachers.
- iii. Mid day meals might be started for poor students.
- iv. New teaching methods convenient for the students should be introduced.
- v. English grammar should be emphasized.
- vi. Awareness should be increased among the guardians.
- vii. Financial help for the poor students should be given
- viii. Modern electronic device should be provided among the schools.

9. CONCLUSION

The common people of Cholonbill are mostly illiterate. They do not know about the rules and grammar of their own language. Consequently, Cholonbill is not coming with a better result for learning the international language for several reasons. The government and local authority are trying to recruit new skilled teachers and developing infrastructure in the area but they are not coming to fruitful.

10. AREA OF FURTHER RESEARCH

Further study can be taken on the basis of genders who are lagging behind more; male students or female students and the reasons why meritorious students are coming into the profession as teachers.

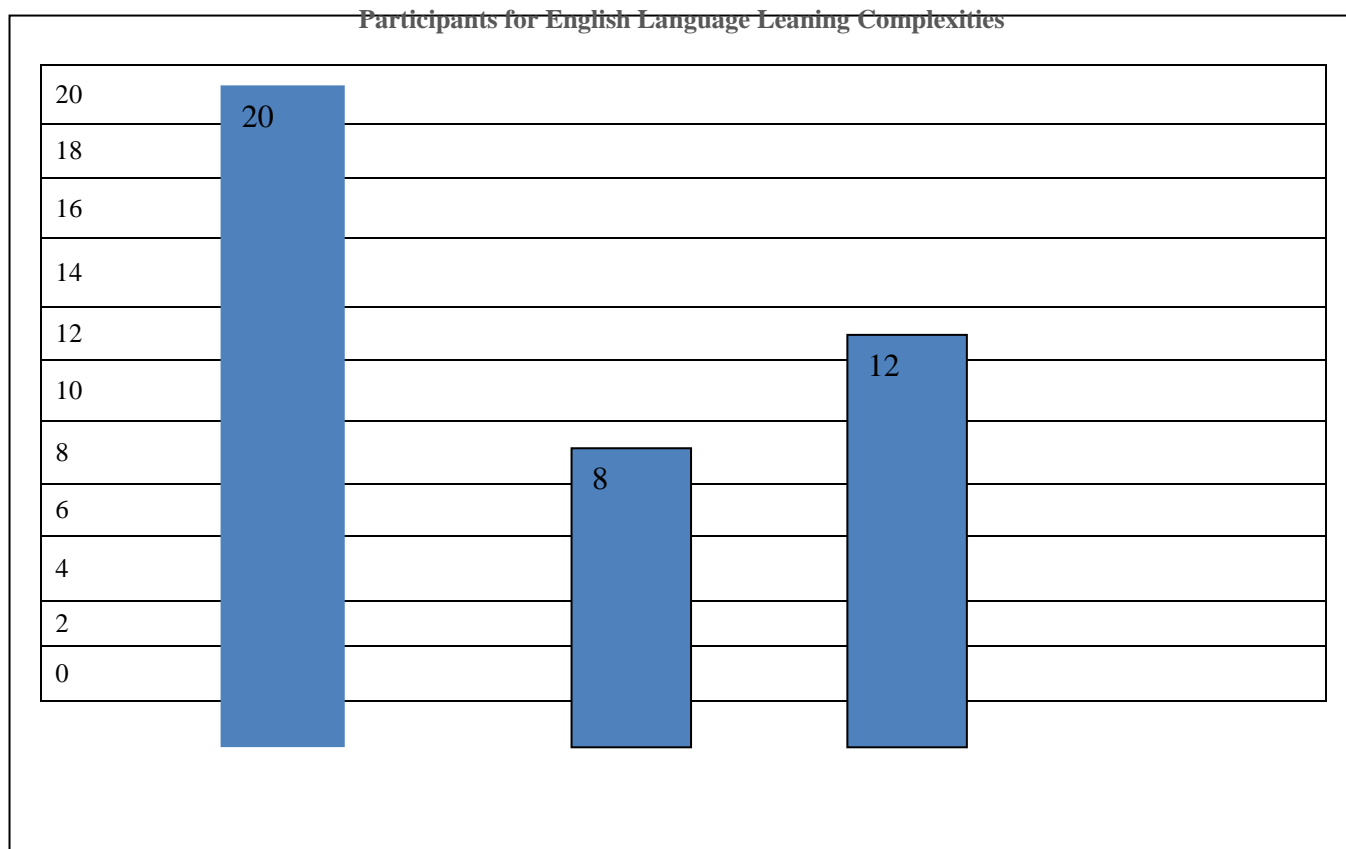
11. FIGURES, TABLES AND REFERENCES

i. Questionnaire table

Question No:	a	b	c	d
01	7	6	3	4
02	5	6	4	5
03	3	7	0	10
04	8	7	2	3
05	6	5	5	4
06	8	4	4	4
07	9	7	3	1
08	1	8	8	3
09	7	7	4	2
10	9	7	4	0
11	7	5	6	2
12	13	3	2	2
13	10	5	2	3
14	4	9	6	1
15	2	3	10	5
16	4	9	6	1
17	9	5	4	2
18	12	3	5	0
19	10	5	3	2
20	5	8	3	4
Total	139	119	84	58



ii. Interview Table



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